Vision for Conservative Early Childhood Programs: A Journey Guide

Maxine Segal Handelman
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Experimental Edition

United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

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Acknowledgement

Many people worked to make the *Vision for Conservative Early Childhood Programs* a reality. Maxine Segal Handelman, United Synagogue's consultant for early childhood education, brought it into being. Yasher kochem and todah rabbah to Denise Abadi, Linda Adelsohn, Angie Bass, Jackie Binstock, Sherry Bohm, Adrianne Cohen, Debbie Deutsch, Sheri Frohlich, Pam Gorin, Janice Jumbo, Temma Kingsley, Charlotte Muchnick, Marla Osband, Cherene Radis, Shelley Remer, Nechama Retting, Rena Rotenberg, Jordanna Weiss, Linda Weiss, and Shari Young, who spent hours writing, critiquing, and discussing this guide. Many teachers and directors helped shape them through discussions at CAJE, NAEYC, and other local gatherings. This document would not have been possible without the expert editorial eyes of Rabbi Paul Drazen, Wendy Light, and Joanne Palmer, and the incredible support of Rabbi Robert Abramson.

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Transliteration Guide

There is no perfect way to write Hebrew words in English letters. In this guide, we attempted, overall, to be internally consistent. In this guide:

ch = Bach (the composer)
i = the long e
ay = long a
ai = the long i
ei = also serves as the long a

Introduction

How to Use this Vision

Early childhood education is the gateway to Jewish life. Early childhood programs affiliated with Conservative synagogues seek not only to introduce families to the joys of Judaism, but also to bring families into the community of the synagogue and the practices and traditions of Conservative Judaism. Too often this goal is out of reach for members of the early childhood staff, which may consist of a director or teachers who do not have a strong Jewish background. Even educators who have a strong Jewish knowledge-base may not have an understanding of Conservative Judaism. Conveying a sense of Jewish life from a Conservative perspective can be a challenge. When issues arise, the early childhood director may not know the right questions to ask to be able to get answers from the rabbi, who is the synagogue's *mara d'atra* (religious authority). Without guidance, the school may be unable to fulfill the goal of bringing a Conservative Jewish experience to the children and families.

The *Vision for Conservative Early Childhood Programs* seeks to address this challenge. A group of early childhood educators and lay leaders from across the country spent two years seeking, questioning and writing this vision in order to help directors and teachers understand what it means to teach in a Conservative early childhood program. This requires understanding of the Conservative perspective on God and spirituality, ethical behavior, ritual observances, and the place of Jewish learning in early childhood. The guide is designed to help early childhood educators in Conservative settings grapple with daily issues of ritual such as kashrut and wearing kipot, bring Jewish values into the classroom, envision what daily tefillah might look like in a Conservative early childhood classroom, and in general ask the right questions. The journey guide also will help lay leaders and parents understand what a Conservative early childhood program should include.

The *Vision for Conservative Early Childhood Programs* is not an all-or-nothing proposition. Some schools may find the suggestions in this guide overwhelming; other schools may find themselves saying "We do that." Jewish life is a journey, and the path will look different in every community and in every school. It is the authors' hope that the information contained in this guide will serve to inform, enrich, and deepen the Jewish experience of every director, teacher, child, and parent who is touched by a Conservative early childhood school.

In the Vision

The sections in this guide are derived from the vision statement of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism:

> The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism promotes the role of the synagogue in Jewish life in order to motivate Conservative Jews to perform mitzvot encompassing ethical behavior, spirituality, Jewish learning, and ritual observance.

Additional sections have been added to address other concerns specific to early childhood.

Jewish values are a natural part of the early childhood classroom. The **Ethical Behavior** section is comprised of 18 stories that bring Jewish values to life in a format appropriate for young children. Each story has several boxes which highlight all the *mitzvot* (commandments) and *middot* (virtues) in the story and add other information to expand the story or connect it to a classroom experience. Each story concludes with discussion questions intended to enhance each child's comprehension of both the story and the middot, and with suggestions about how to apply the lessons learned to classroom life. As teachers become more aware of the Jewish labels that apply to the values already practiced in the classroom, they can use the stories to introduce or reinforce them.

Among the most basic core values of Conservative Judaism is belief in God. The **God and Spirituality** section addresses formal and informal ways to invite God into the classroom. Suggested *tefillot* (prayers) in Hebrew, English, and transliteration are provided here, along with discussion of other paths to spirituality, how to talk with children about God, and wrestling with God as an adult.

The Conservative early childhood program is the gateway to Jewish life. Jewish study is at the core of the program, for the children, and equally as important, for the parents and the staff. The **Jewish Learning** section provides suggestions to insure that every participant in a Conservative early childhood program is learning something and so is being given a joyful, solid foundation of love for being Jewish.

Rituals are the physical expressions of our Jewish beliefs, and are shaped by *halachah* (Jewish law). Conservative Judaism seeks to meld the traditional with the modern. In the **Ritual Observance** section, many Jewish rituals that are relevant to the early childhood program are explored. Background information is provided, as are pertinent blessings and important considerations and questions to ask about the rituals as they apply to a Conservative early childhood program.

The rabbi is the mara d'atra, the religious authority of his or her community. This means that the rabbi is the ultimate decision maker on questions of religious observance in the early childhood program. Research shows that the clergy's involvement in an early childhood program is a key feature in ensuring its success. The section called **Working with Clergy (and Other Important People)** provides early childhood directors and teachers with suggestions about building successful relationships with the synagogue

clergy and other synagogue professionals, and about supporting the clergy and other professionals in active roles within the early childhood community.

Excellence in a Conservative early childhood program begins when the school's physical environment makes the Jewish life happening within its walls and in its playgrounds visible. The **Jewish Environment** section offers help on how to develop a high-quality Jewish environment, suggesting ways to support the Jewish curriculum through every area of the classroom.

A bibliography and resource list can be found at the conclusion of most sections, and provide further information for those who seek to know more.

For more information, please contact Maxine Handelman at 847-641-9963 or Handelman@uscj.org

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Ethical Behavior

"Justice, justice shall you pursue." צֶדֶק צֶדֶק תִּרְדֹּף
(Deuteronomy 16:20)

Judaism is meaningful only if it affects the way we live our lives. Our tradition teaches that study is meaningful only if it leads to action. Judaism must have a strong voice when we make daily decisions. The Conservative movement has a long and honorable history of concern about social justice for both Jews and non-Jews. The image of an ideal Conservative Jew is someone who uses learned Jewish values to guide behavior. Our movement's teachings should affect the way we live our lives, for if Judaism does not shape our daily decisions and lifestyle, then it is meaningless. Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel is a passionate example of this ideal. Dr. Heschel, a brilliant theologian and vitally important member of the Jewish Theological Seminary from 1946 to the early 70s, was an outspoken political activist, becoming the major Jewish spokesman on the liberal side of a wide range of social and political issues. He joined the march from Selma to Montgomery, walking part of the way arm in arm with Martin Luther King, Jr.

This emphasis on social justice and ethical behavior is reflected in the daily life of the early childhood classroom. *Mitzvot* (commandments) and *middot* (Jewish virtues) are necessary steps on the path to being a *mensch* (a good person). Our task is to acknowledge and label Jewish values, behaviors, and mitzvot in the daily life of the classroom. By infusing the job chart with Jewish values, modeling mitzvot, creating opportunities to be *shutafo shel ha-Kadosh Baruch Hu b'ma-asay bereshit* (partners with God in the creation of a more perfect world) and labeling Jewish behaviors as they occur in the natural life of the classroom, we create a meaningful Judaism. The teachings of Judaism and the Conservative movement affect the way we live our lives.

Our schools are filled with families who come from the entire spectrum of the Jewish world and beyond. Every child's home experience will be different; very few of the children will have home practices that closely match the school community's practice. An aspect of ethical behavior and social justice is the validation of every child's experience. The school and the classroom form a community, guided by the traditions of the synagogue and garnished with rituals specific to each classroom. We all act in certain ways in order to be a part of this community. At school we are a Jewish community and therefore there are certain things that are observed, celebrated, and discussed at length in school. Still, many families practice and celebrate differently, and those practices and behaviors are appropriate in the specific family setting. We acknowledge and validate each child's individual experience while maintaining the school-specific culture in the classrooms.

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How to Use This Section

Jewish values are a natural part of the early childhood classroom all the time. This becomes evident when a child helps another child, cares for a classroom pet, or welcomes a guest to the classroom. As we become aware of some of the key *middot* (values or virtues) and *mitzvot* (commandments), we can label them and make them part of the children's overt experience. This guide will provide the teacher with a starting point by which the middot may be introduced and integrated into classroom life.

The stories in this guide include both *midrashim* (rabbinic stories) and stories from the treasury of our rich tradition. All teachers bring with them their own experiences, level of knowledge, and techniques they have learned for enhancing classroom experiences. These stories are intended to be the spark that ignites the match – so that each teacher may be able to reinforce middot with knowledge and confidence.

As educators, there are times when we plan to introduce a specific theme and times when a teachable moment pops up. To take advantage of both these educational opportunities:

- Familiarize yourself with the stories offered here. When the middah occurs in the classroom or when you want to introduce it, you'll have a tool at your fingertips.
- Read these stories aloud or tell them using props. Jewish culture is built on storytelling.

Each story is enhanced by several boxes that highlight the mitzvot and middot in the story. These boxes are not designed to be read aloud; rather they add other information so the teacher can expand on the story.

Following each story are discussion questions labeled "For class discussion." They are intended to enhance each child's comprehension of both the story and the middot.

- Questions are designed to appeal to a wide age range, so not all questions will be appropriate for every class.
- There are very few yes/no or story comprehension questions. All the questions are designed to stimulate thought-provoking discussion.
- Teachers may use the questions as stepping stones to other related areas that undoubtedly will arise.

The last section, "For class life," suggests ways in which you can apply the lessons learned to your classroom life in ways that are meaningful to the children in your group.

- As always, your input and enthusiasm make the difference. The use of props and costumes, retelling the story, pretend role-playing the story and other activity extensions further enrich the experience for all.
- Many suggestions in this section involve parents' participation, thus spreading the sharing of Jewish values to the entire family.
- Be sure to brainstorm activities and share ideas with other staff members.

This section concludes with a grid which cross-references all the stories and shows all the middot and mitzvot that are highlighted in the stories (beyond the 18 main middot listed in the table of contents).

Rabbi Akiva and the Missing Student: A Story of *Bikur Cholim* (visiting the ill)

This story about Rabbi Akiva is from The Book of Legends: Sefer Ha-Aggadah, *edited by Hayim Bialik and Yehoshua Reznitsky, translated by William G. Braude*

This is a great story for when a child in the class is sick or out with an injury.

Rabbi Akiva was a famous teacher. We learn about him when we read *Pirkei Avot*/Ethics of the Fathers and when we read the Talmud.

Rabbi Akiva was always interested in his students – he cared about their well-being as well as their studies. He knew the names of all his students.

When the teacher calls attendance or sings a naming welcome song and each child is identified by name, that is a tangible demonstration of the interest and concern for each and every child – *Kol Yisrael ah-ray-vim zeh la-zeh* (All Israel is responsible for one another).

Every day when school began, Rabbi Akiva would look around the room to see if all his students were there.

One day, he noticed that a certain student was not in his regular place. Rabbi Akiva asked, "Where is Aaron today?"

All the students shook their heads as if to say, "We don't know."

Rabbi Akiva began his lesson for the day. The next day, again Aaron's seat was empty. Again, Rabbi Akiva asked his students about Aaron. Again, no one knew anything. This went on for several days.

Finally, Rabbi Akiva said, "It is very important that we care about everyone. I am upset that no one knows about Aaron. I am going to see for myself why he is not in school."

The mitzvah of *bikur cholim*, visiting the sick, is very important in Judaism. Visiting the sick can take many forms, calling on the phone, sending a card, even email. It is vital that there be some form of personal involvement, that the sick or injured person is personally contacted.

After school ended, Rabbi Akiva walked to Aaron's house. He knocked on the door. No one answered. "Knock, knock" – and again no answer.

After a few minutes, the door opened. Aaron opened the door. He looked very pale and weak. "Rabbi Akiva, please come in," he said.

"Aaron, you have not been in school for several days, no one knew why you were not there. I decided to come and find out why you were not in school."

"I have been sick and I was in bed," said Aaron.

Rabbi Akiva followed Aaron into the house and sat down. "Aaron, can I get you something to drink or eat?"

"I would like to have a drink of water."

As Aaron drank the water that Rabbi Akiva gave him, Rabbi Akiva began talking.

"In class we are studying about Abraham. We learned how God visited Abraham when Abraham was feeling sick." said Rabbi Akiva.

"It is so nice to hear about what is going on in school. I miss it very much. I hope that I can come back in a few days." said Aaron.

Rabbi Akiva sat with Aaron for a while. "Aaron, it was so good to see you. I will tell all the other students why you were not in school."

"Rabbi Akiva," Aaron said, with a big smile on his face, "your visit made me feel so much better."

As Rabbi Akiva got up to leave, he smiled at Aaron. "It is a mitzvah to visit the sick. When someone visits the sick, the visitor takes away some of the sickness or hurt."

Aaron said, "You are so right, Rabbi Akiva. I know I will be back in school soon."

Aaron smiled and was very happy. Rabbi Akiva smiled and was very happy.

For class discussion:

1. Why was Aaron happy?
2. Why was Rabbi Akiva happy?
3. How does someone take away some of the sickness when they do *bikur cholim* and visit a sick person?
4. What do you think Rabbi Akiva told his students when he went back to school the next day?
5. What are some ways we can help people who may be sick or injured feel better?

For class life:

1. There are many ways to involve children in the mitzvah of bikur cholim. The class can call an absent child on the phone, or make and send cards in the mail.
2. If the class has jobs, one job can be bikur cholim helper. This child is responsible for noticing if all the children are present, and to point out if someone is missing. If a child is missing because she or he is sick, the bikur cholim helper can call the child on the phone.
3. Another Jewish thing to do when someone is sick is say a blessing for healing. If a child or close relative of a child in the class is sick, the children can sing a healing song (for example, Debbie Friedman's *Mishaberach* or Rick Recht's *El Na R'fa Na La*, which is the healing prayer Moses said for his sister Miriam).

The Two Brothers: A Story of *G'milut Chasadim* (acts of loving kindness)

A very long time ago there lived a farmer with two sons. They lived on top of a hill where they grew wheat for many years.

This is a great story when a child goes out of his or her way to help another child, or when kindness is particularly necessary.

When the farmer became very old and died, he left one side of the hill to his elder son, and the other side of the hill to his younger son. As time went on the younger son got married and had children, but his older brother lived alone.

Each year, when the harvest began, the brothers cut the wheat and bundled it into sheaves so they could sell it at the market. They worked very hard each day and were quite tired by sunset. One night, the older brother lay awake in his bed thinking, "My younger brother has such a big family to feed. I live by myself. He needs so much more than I do." So he got out of bed and went to his fields and carried several sheaves of wheat from his side of the hill to a field on his brother's side. He returned home and went to bed happy, knowing he gave his brother some more wheat to sell.

Another value in this story is the value of *mishpacha* (family). Throughout the telling of this story, you can ask the children questions to help them focus of the relationships in this family. (see "For class discussion" for some suggestions)

That very same night, his brother lay awake in his bed on the other side of the hill thinking, "I am so lucky. I have a wonderful family and a good life. My children will help take care of me when I am old. But my brother lives all by himself. Who is there to take care of him?" So he got out of bed and went to his fields and carried several sheaves of wheat from his side of the hill to a field on his brother's side. He returned home and went to bed happy, knowing he gave his brother some more wheat to sell.

Many Jewish values fall into the category of g'milut chasadim. Ahavat habri-yot (loving concern for others) is one such example you can share with your children.

The next morning, the brothers rushed to their fields waiting to see the other brother's surprise. They couldn't understand why the piles of sheaves of wheat were exactly the same as they had been the day before! So that night, the older brother got up again and carried several sheaves of wheat across the top of the hill to his brother's field. The younger brother also got up again and carried several sheaves of wheat across the top of the hill to his brother's field. The next morning they were *very* surprised to see piles of sheaves of wheat exactly the same, as they had been the day before!

On the third night the brothers each got up again and carried wheat across the hill to his brother's field. This time, they went at just the same time and bumped right into each other at the top of the hill! "What are you doing here?" they asked at exactly the same time. They realized they had the same idea and started to laugh and hug each other. From that time on,

they shared the wheat equally each harvest and didn't worry any more, because they knew they would always take care of each other.

A long time later, when King Solomon heard this story, he knew he had found the perfect place to build God's Holy Temple. What place would be better than the exact spot where the brothers met and hugged and knew they could count on each other always?

For class discussion:

1. What are some examples of *g'milut chasadim* (acts of loving kindness) that happen in this story?
2. Do you think these brothers get along?
3. Do you think they help each other with the harvest, or does each brother harvest his side of the hill by himself?
4. Why would the brothers' actions make this spot special enough for King Solomon to build God's Holy Temple?

For class life:

1. Instead of a mitzvah tree or mitzvah notes, consider an opportunity for children to report on acts of g'milut chasadim they do or see their friends do.
2. Find the spot of extraordinary love or kindness in your classroom, and dedicate that as a holy place. If possible, have tefillah in that spot. This can connect children's behaviors concretely with God.
3. Act out this story and other stories of g'milut chasadim, such as *Bagels from Benny* by Aubrey Davis or *Gittel's Hands* by Erica Silverman.
4. When you read books in class, give characters who do acts of g'milut chasadim a mitzvah award or note them as a g'milut chasadim hero with a special sticker on the cover of the book.

This story is also told in a picture book, *One City, Two Brothers* by Chris Smith.

Welcoming Abraham and Sarah: A Story of *Hachnasat Orchim* (hospitality)

It was a hot summer day. Rachel and her brother, Jacob, were sitting on the porch. "There's nothing to do today," said Rachel. "I know," said Jacob, with a big sigh.

This story is great for teaching children the Jewish way to respond to guests in the classroom

Rachel looked up for a moment. "Look, here comes Uncle David and Aunt Hannah."

"They look tired," said Jacob. He jumped up and was about to run toward them when Rachel said, "Look! There are other people with them. I wonder who they are?"

"They look tired too," noticed Jacob.
"And I bet they're all thirsty," Rachel added.
"Hey!" Jacob said, very excited. "Remember the story from the Torah we learned at school last week?"
"Yes!" Rachel jumped up. "Abraham greeted the guests that came to his tent…"
"And Sarah helped make food too!" Jacob finished.
"We can do that!" said Rachel. "I'll get cold water for them to drink." She ran into the house. "Don't forget cups!" called Jacob, as he jumped off the porch and ran toward his uncle and aunt and their friends.

The story of Abraham and the visitors can be found in Genesis 18:1-8. It would be interesting to read the Torah story and compare Abraham and Sarah's actions to those of Jacob and Rachel.

Jacob walked back along side the guests. Uncle David and Aunt Hannah reached the porch just as Rachel came out of the house with cups and a pitcher of water. "Hello, Rachel! We were just introducing Jacob. Please meet our friends, Sarah and Abraham Cohen. They are visiting us and we decided to take a walk to visit with you and your parents." Rachel smiled and said, "Please, come have a seat on the porch." Jacob said, "I'll go tell my parents that you're here," and he rushed into the house. He soon came back onto the porch, his mother and father following close behind, carrying a box of cookies and some oranges.
"Hello David, hello Hannah. How nice of you to visit us. Please have something to eat," said Rachel's mother.
"Rachel and Jacob greeted us so nicely," said Uncle David. "We are quite tired. Our friends Abraham and Sarah are visiting us, and we thought it would be nice to walk over to see you, but we didn't realize just how hot it was today. We finished all the water that we brought along."

To greet someone with a pleasant expression is an important Jewish value called *sayver panim yafot*.

The grownup began to chat, and Jacob whispered to Rachel, "Rachel, isn't it funny that the names of the guests are Abraham and Sarah?" "Yes," Rachel whispered back, "Just like in the story from the Torah. Only this time, Abraham and Sarah are the visitors, and we got to greet them!"

For class discussion:

1. How could Jacob and Rachel tell that the people were thirsty and tired?
2. Is it important that Rachel greeted the guests with a smile? Why or why not?
3. What do you think Jacob did or said when he reached his aunt and uncle and their friends?
4. What are some things that you would do for guests?
5. What happens in your house before guests arrive? How do your mother or father prepare for guests? Why do they do these things?

For class life:

1. Create a plan for greeting guests who come into the classroom. Maybe hachnasat orchim or greeter could be added to the job chart. Should every child be responsible for least smiling at guests?
2. Encourage children to act out the story of Abraham and Sarah in the dramatic play area, perhaps by knocking on the door and announcing, "Hello, I've come to visit you!"
3. Give children some homework: Have them ask their parents how they care for guests in their home. Maybe make a class book of each family's favorite thing to do for guests with photos of children with guests in their homes.

The Chickens That Turned Into Goats: A Story of *Hashavat Avaydah* (returning lost property)

This story from the Talmud (Ta'anit 25a) was adapted by Maxine Handelman from the version in The Family Book of Midrash *by Barbara Diamond Goldin and appeared in* What's Jewish About Butterflies*, A.R.E. Press, 2004.*

This story is great when a child finds something that is not his/hers and returns it to the owner

Once a man named Jacob bought some chickens and was carrying them home in a sack. Jacob was very tired, and even though the chickens were clucking in the bag, he stopped to rest under a tree near a house. Jacob fell into a deep sleep. When he woke up, he saw that it was getting quite late, and he rushed off towards home, completely forgetting the sack of chickens.

Cackle! Cackle! Cackle! The chickens began to squirm and cackle in their bag.

Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, who lived in the house, heard the noise. "Those chickens sound like they are in our yard," he said.

"I'll go see," said Rachel, his wife.

Rachel fetched the sack of chickens and brought them to Rabbi Chanina. "What shall we do with this?" she asked.

"Probably the owner forgot them," Rabbi Chanina said. "We'll care for his chickens until he comes back."

Rabbi Chanina and his wife are doing the mitzvah of *Tza'ar ba'alay cha'yim* (avoiding cruelty to animals).

Rabbi Chanina and Rachel fed the chickens and gave them water. The chickens ran around the yard and in and out of the house.

One day went by. Two. Three. More. Still the owner did not come for his chickens.

The hens began to lay eggs. Rachel showed Rabbi Chanina the eggs. He said, "We mustn't eat any of the eggs. They belong to the owner of the chickens. He'll come back for them."

Even though Rabbi Chanina and Rachel were very poor and were sometimes hungry, they didn't eat any of the eggs. The hens sat on the eggs, and before long, the eggs hatched into active little chicks.

Hens, roosters and chicks filled the yard and the house. Cheep cheep! Cackle cackle!! Cock-a-doodle-doo!

A month went by. Two. Three. More. Still the owner did not come for his chickens.

"We must do something," said Rachel, as she scattered the last of the chicken grain around the yard.

"I know," said Rabbi Chanina. "I know! I'll sell the chickens and buy goats. We won't have to feed the goats. They can graze in the field."

Rabbi Hanina and Rachel also do the mitzvah of tzedakah.

A year went by. Two. Three. More. The goats gave birth to kids, and Rachel milked the goats. With the rich goat's milk, Rachel made cheese. Rabbi Chanina said, "Because these goats do not belong to us, the cheese doesn't belong to us either." He sold the cheese, and they gave the money to poor people.

Then one day, Jacob was walking near Rabbi Chanina's house with a friend when he stopped. "Say, this place reminds me of the place I lost my chickens, so long ago," said Jacob to his friend. "I went looking for them, but I couldn't find the right house or the sack."
Rabbi Chanina heard Jacob and ran out of his yard. "Friend! Wait a minute! What did you say you lost?"
Jacob looked startled, but he answered, "A large sack with two chickens in it."
"Then I have something to show you," said Rabbi Chanina, leading Jacob to the goat shed. "Here are your chickens. Please take them with you."
"But these are goats!" Jacob looked very confused.
Rabbi Chanina laughed. "Your chicken family grew so large that I sold them and bought goats."
"Rabbi Chanina, thank you! You are so kind. I've never met anyone so careful to return lost things," said Jacob. He tied up the goats and led them out of the yard.

Rabbi Chanina worked hard to do the mitzvah of hashavat avaydah!

And that is how Rachel and Rabbi Chanina returned the lost chickens.

For class discussion:

1. Why did Rabbi Chanina and Rachel take such good care of the chickens if the chickens didn't belong to them?
2. Did the chickens really turn into goats?
3. How do you feel when you return something that a friend has lost?

For class life:

1. This is a wonderful story to make into a felt-board, or to tell with puppets, and to have the children act out.
2. Children lose and find things all the time. When a child finds a lost item, besides encouraging him or her to bring it back to the child who lost it, remind him or her that it is an important mitzvah.
3. "Finders keepers, losers weepers" is not a Jewish concept, as this story illustrates. Be sure to share this story if this becomes an issue in the classroom.

This is a classic story. There are versions of this story in *The Family Book of Midrash* by Barbara Diamond Goldin, *What's Jewish About Butterflies* by Maxine Segal Handelman, *Ten Best Jewish Children's Stories* by Chana Sperber, and *A Year of Jewish Stories: 52 Tales for Children and Their Families* by Grace Ragues Maisel, to name a few.

The Spilled Wine: A Story of *Kavod* (Respect)

This is a good story when children show respect for each other, or when you want to encourage them to do so.

Rabbi Akiba Eiger invited many people to his Pesach seder. Young people and old, rich people and poor gathered around the table. Toward the beginning of the seder, one of his guests stumbled and his wine spilled on the beautiful white tablecloth. Everyone at the table stared in horror, first at the dark red stain spreading across the tablecloth, and then at the man who had spilled his wine, whose face was red with embarrassment. Silently everyone turned to look at the rabbi to see what he would do. Would he yell at the man who spilled the wine? Would he send him away from the table?

Rabbi Eiger embodies the virtue *lo lavayesh* (not embarrassing). The rabbis thought this was so important, one said, "A person who publicly shames a neighbor is like someone who has shed blood." (*Baba Metzia* 58b)

The rabbi stood up, bumped the table, and spilled his own wine. "I'm so sorry," he said. "This table is uneven. I forgot to warn you. There is often a problem with things spilling." And then the rabbi went on with the rest of the seder. Because of the rabbi's great show of respect for his guests, the man who spilled his wine stopped feeling embarrassed and greatly enjoyed the rest of his meal.

For class discussion:

1. How would you feel if you were the guest who spilled his wine?
2. Why did the rabbi spill his own wine?
3. Was the table really uneven?

For class life:

1. Read *Chrysanthemum* by Kevin Henkes. Who is showing kavod? Who is not? Look out for examples of kavod (or the absence of kavod) in other books you read.
2. Take care to notice when children or teachers model kavod, especially *lo lavayesh*. Perhaps deposit a marble in a jar for each example of kavod, and have a special celebration when the jar is full.
3. Act out some embarrassing situations (someone falling, dropping something). How many respectful responses can the children come up with?

Akiba Eiger was an eighteenth-century rabbi who was known for his hospitality. His story can be found in the haggadah *A Different Night*. Thank you to Nechama Retting and Tobey Greenberg for pointing out this story and some of the discussion and class life suggestions.

Dima ben Netina and the Ruby: A Story of *Kibbud Av v' Em* (honoring father and mother)

This is a great story when it's time to do something special for parents.

One summer morning, Dima ben Netina was working in his jewelry store. As he worked he whistled happily but very softly, because he did not want to wake his father, who had fallen fast asleep on a large chest-like box in a corner of the store.

Just before noon, three rabbis entered the shop.

"Welcome," said Dima. "Would you like to see a silver ring? Or perhaps a lovely diamond?"

These rabbis want to do the mitzvah of *hiddur mitzvah* – doing a mitzvah (in this case adorning a Torah) in a beautiful way.

"Thank you," said one of the rabbis, "but we are here on far more important business. We have heard that you own the largest and most magnificent ruby in the land. We wish to buy it for the crown of our Torah. We are willing to give you three hundred gold coins."

Dima looked at the chest in the corner of the store, and then he looked back at his customers. "I am sorry," he said, "but that is impossible."

"All right, then," said the rabbi. "We will give you four hundred."

Dima ben Netina only smiled sadly, and shook his head.

At this his customers began to frown. "I see that you are a man who likes to bargain," said the rabbi, "so we will offer you five hundred, but we will go no higher."

"I cannot sell it," said the jeweler.

Then the rabbis began to whisper angrily among themselves. "This jeweler wants too much money for the ruby," they muttered. "He wants an outrageous price. Let us offer him six hundred and let's hope that is enough."

When Dima refused to sell the ruby for six hundred, the rabbis grew furious, and began to shout at him.

"You are trying to rob us!" they cried. "How can we pay more than six hundred?"

Just about that time, Dima's father awoke from his nap. He got up from the chest where he was resting, and walked towards the front of the store. "What is the trouble?" He mumbled sleepily.

Dima ben Netina began to smile. He went over to the chest, took out the ruby, and gave it to the rabbis. "Now you may have it," he said. "I would not disturb my father in order to get the jewel and the price is only three hundred gold pieces, since that is a fair price and it was your first offer."

Jewish law is filled with guidelines on fair business dealings. The basic guideline, which Dima ben Netina follows, is "When you sell ... or buy [property] from your neighbor, do not wrong one another" (Leviticus 25:14).

Smiling happily, the rabbis paid the jeweler, and went back to their house of study to tell the story of Dima ben Netina – who respected his father so much that we would not wake him no matter how much money he was offered.

This respect is called *kibbud av v'em* and is the fifth of the Ten Commandments.

For class discussion:

1. Why didn't Dima want to sell the ruby?
2. Why was Dima so concerned with doing the mitzvah of kibbud av v'em?
3. How do you think the rabbis felt toward Dima for honoring his father?
4. How can we be respectful to our own parents?

For class life:

1. Ask children to bring in pictures of their parents or other family members it is important to respect. Make a collage with comments from the children about ways they help their parents.
2. Sing Doug Cotler's "Thank You God" (on "It's So Amazing"), especially the lines, "Thank you for my mom and thank you for my dad…."

A version of this story appears in *The Key Under the Pillow* by Leah Shollar, Hachai Publishing, 2004.

Made with Love: A Story of *Ma'achil R'ay-vim* (feeding the hungry)

This story, written by Maxine Handelman, is based on a United Way Success Story about senior volunteers at the Heritage Jewish Community Center in Overland Park, KS, and appeared in What's Jewish About Butterflies*, A.R.E. Press, 2004.*

This is a great story when preparing to do a food drive at school.

Helen knows it's Tuesday when she walks into her Jewish community center because she can smell the fruity scents of jelly and the peanuty odors of peanut butter. *Helen's* white stick goes tap tap tap as she makes her way into the room. "Hello, Joe!" Helen says to a man who is spreading grape jelly onto a slice of whole wheat bread. "Good morning, Sylvia," Helen says to a woman smearing peanut butter onto a slice of white bread. Helen taps her stick until she comes to the end of the table. She sits down and feels around on the table. She finds plastic gloves, sandwich bags, and an already growing pile of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Helen can't see with her eyes, but using her nose and her fingers to guide the way, she gently takes each sandwich and puts it in a bag.

Having a disability, like being blind, does not exempt you from doing mitzvot and giving tzedakah.

Every Tuesday, Helen joins her friends at the JCC. Every Tuesday, they make 500 peanut butter & jelly sandwiches for hungry people in their town. They use eight huge jars of peanut butter, six large cans of jelly, and 50 loaves of bread! Each person has his or her own job. Some people like to spread the jelly; others prefer to shmear the peanut butter. It is hard for Helen to see if she's getting the right amount of jelly on the bread, but she has an important job just the same: putting the sandwiches in the bags.

Helen bags the finished sandwiches and chats with her friends Marian, Stan, and Shirley as they all work together to make the sandwiches. Marian's job is the jelly, Stan's is the peanut butter and Shirley cuts the sandwiches before giving them to Helen to bag. Suddenly Helen stops, bag in one hand and sandwich in the other. Her nose twitches. "Stan, are you feeling okay? There's barely any peanut butter on this sandwich." "Oh Helen, you have a very powerful nose! My jar is almost empty, but I was feeling too lazy to get up and get another." The friends all laugh, and Helen says, "We'll wait." Stan gets up and saunters over to the supply shelf, where he gets a four pound jar of peanut butter.

After a long while, Helen hears the sounds of spreading and chatting fade away, and she can tell that the tables are being cleaned up. As she leaves the JCC that day, over the tap tap tap of her white stick she hears the sounds of vans, carrying 500 peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to hungry people all over the city. Helen smiles to herself and goes home to make herself some lunch – a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, of course!

For class discussion:

1. Which job would you want in the sandwich making?
2. Why do Helen and her friends come every week to make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches? Talk with your children about tzedakah, the importance of helping others, and the ability of each person to help.
3. What is the difference between *ma'achil r'ay-vim* (feeding the hungry) and *tzedakah* (righteousness/charity)? Why is it important to do both?

For class life:

1. Find a homeless shelter or soup kitchen in your town that would appreciate the donation of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and set up an assembly line in your classroom. Invite the parents to help with supplying the ingredients, making the sandwiches, and delivering them to hungry people.
2. What happens to leftover snack or lunch items in your classroom? Can it be used for ma'achil r'ay-vim?
3. Encourage parents to get in on this mitzvah by stocking granola bars or McDonald's gift certificates in their cars to hand out when they see people asking for money at the side of the road.

Aaron and the fighting friends: A Story of Being a Rodeph Shalom *(***Pursuer of** ***Peace)***

by Nechama Retting and Tobey Greenberg, based on Avot d'Rabbi Natan 12:3. Used with permission.

A long time ago, there was a boy named Aaron. He had two siblings, a brother named Moses and a sister named Miriam. Aaron was very kind, and he loved peace. He also believed that everyone should try to get along and be kind to each other. Every day when he walked through the village he greeted everyone he saw. He would say "Boker tov! Good morning! How are you today?" to everyone, even the birds and the animals. Everyone loved Aaron.

This is a great story to use when children are sharing or after settling an argument. Rodeph Shalom is also a good job to include on a job chart.

Once, when Aaron was out walking, he saw two people, who he knew were friends, having an argument, screaming at each other. He saw the anger in both men's eyes as they stormed off. Aaron felt sad. He hated to see people angry. Aaron waited a few days to see if the friends could work out their problem. When he saw that nothing changed, he decided that he had to do something! Aaron went up to the first man, who was named Shmuel, and said, "Shmuel, your friend David told me that he is so sorry about what happened. He is so sad that you are not friends anymore."

Aaron is doing the mitzvah of *hava-at shalom bayn adam l'chaveiro* (making peace between others).

"Really?" asked Shmuel. "I am so happy to hear that! I miss my friend David."

Then Aaron went to see the second man, David, and said, "David, your friend Shmuel is so sorry about what happened. He misses you and your friendship."

"Really?" asked David. "I really miss Shmuel too. I think I will go see him right away!"

The friends meet each other in the street and hugged each other. They were so happy to be able to work out their disagreement and especially happy to be friends again!

One of the greatest acts of *chesed* (kindness) is helping to end strife.

For class discussion:

1. How did Aaron get the two friends to make up?
2. Do you think the friends would have made up if Aaron didn't help them? What else might have happened?
3. How could you help two friends if they were fighting?

For class life:

1. Revisit this story when you see an argument occurring in your classroom. Ask for volunteers to be a rodeph shalom and help the arguers work it out.
2. Consider making rodeph shalom a job if you have a job chart, so all the children get a chance to practice this skill.
3. Act out this story. Check in with the actors about how their characters feel at different parts of the story. Talk about why being a pursuer of peace is such a good thing.

Missing the Game: A Story of *Samayach B'Chelko* (contentment with your lot)
This story is inspired by **Fancy Nancy: Bonjour Butterfly** *by Jane O'Connor, because Jewish values are often found in secular children's books.*

This story is helpful when children want other children's things or experiences, when you hear in the classroom, "I'm jealous of you because you have that [fill in the blank]."

Once there was a girl named Maddie. One day, her best friend Eloise invited her to go to a baseball game. The Cubs were playing, and Maddie loved the Cubs. The game was on a Sunday in a couple of weeks. Maddie ran to her dad and jumped up and down. "Can I go? Can I go?" "Yes," said her dad, "you can go see the Cubs play." Maddie and Eloise couldn't wait. They practiced pitching and hitting the ball, and they dreamed about the peanuts and the kosher hot dogs at Wrigley Field. The week before the game, Maddie's mom said, "Next weekend we are going to Philadelphia for your cousin Brittany's bat mitzvah." "Next weekend I'm going to see the Cubs with Eloise!" said Maddie. "Oh no!" said her mom. "Is that next weekend? I'm sorry, but we're all going to Philadelphia." "No!" yelled Maddie. "It's not fair!" Maddie stamped off to her room and slammed the door. Maddie's mom knocked quietly at the door, and when Maddie didn't answer, she walked in. "Maddie, a Cubs game is very special. But there are many games all summer long. Brittany will only become bat mitzvah once in her life. And your cousins in Philadelphia are some of your favorite people. Grandma and grandpa will be there too."

It was true – Maddie loved her Philadelphia cousins, but she wasn't ready to stop being mad. All that week, Maddie moped around the house. She made faces at her sister, and answered questions only by grunting. She felt miserable. She tried on the dress her mother bought her for the bat mitzvah. It was beautiful and the skirt twirled all the way out when she spun around, but it didn't make her feel any better. On the airplane, her sister let her have the window seat, but Maddie was still too mad to enjoy the view as the city got smaller and smaller while they lifted into the sky.

At the hotel, Grandma and Grandpa were just down the hall, and Grandma brought Maddie a poodle that she had knitted around a little bottle just for her. Maddie smelled the fancy lotions in the bathroom, and her spirits lifted a little bit. That night, at Shabbat dinner with the whole family, Maddie ran and played with her cousins, who she hadn't seen in a long time. The next day, Maddie's family was called up to open the aron hakodesh at the beginning of the Torah service, and Maddie got to open the big doors with her sister. When Brittany chanted from the Torah, Maddie's mother leaned over and whispered in Maddie's ear, "Some day you can do this too!" and Maddie squirmed with pleasure and anticipation.

Aron hakodesh is the holy ark, where the Torahs are kept.

That night, when the sun disappeared from the sky, there was a big party. The music was loud and everyone danced. Brittany even invited Maddie to come and dance in the circle with her and her friends. Maddie whirled and twirled until she could barely breathe. When the song ended, Maddie went and found her mother. "I'm really glad to be here. I'm sorry I was such a grump about the Cubs game." Maddie's mother hugged her for a long time. Maddie went back to the dancing, and she won a T-shirt that said, "I danced at Brittany's bat mitzvah!" Maddie took the shirt to her mother and said, "Can I give this shirt to Eloise?" "Sure, but why?" her mother asked. Maddie smiled and said, "So she won't be too sad that she didn't get to be here."

Maddie is a mensch and a good friend by the end of the story.

For class discussion:

1. When she found out she couldn't go to the baseball game, how did Maddie feel?
2. How did Maddie feel at the bat mitzvah, when she began to appreciate what she had?
3. Why did Maddie's mom hug her for a long time when she apologized at the party?

For class life:

1. *Samayach b'chelko* – being content with your lot – is a lesson many people never learn. Young children are predisposed to want whatever is most attractive at that moment (which often is something someone else is finding attractive at that moment). This story can help children begin to learn this value. When an argument over a toy begins, use this story to encourage children to find happiness in another choice.
2. In the book *Ten Good Rules*, Susan Remick Topek translates the tenth commandment, which literally is "Do not covet," as "Be happy with what you have." When you spot children enjoying something in which they are involved, point out they are following the tenth commandment.
3. Look for examples of samayach b'chelko, or characters who are unhappy because they are not happy with what they have, in secular children's books. Besides *Fancy Nancy: Bonjour Butterfly*, another good example is *Rainbow Fish* by Marcus Pfister.

The King's Lesson: A Story of *Sayver Panim Yafot* (cheerful attitude)
This story is adapted from a version in Stories from Our Living Past *by Francine Prose, Behrman House, 1974.*

This story is useful when children are smiling and happy, especially after an incident when a child was sad or angry.

One night, an important man came to visit King Solomon, the wise king of Israel. The king served the man a fancy meal. But King Solomon was tired, and he was in a bad mood because he couldn't find a book he had been reading. He hardly spoke to his guest, didn't smile, and yawned loudly. After dinner, the king's guest frowned. "I hope we can talk tomorrow," he said. "Of course," nodded Solomon, and went off to his royal bedroom to sleep.

But the next morning, when King Solomon woke up, he was no longer in his room, or in his palace. He looked around and saw that he was lying in the gutter of the marketplace! His royal pajamas were gone, and he was wearing dirty, torn rags. His beard was matted and his hands and feet were filthy. Before long he noticed that he was very hungry, and his stomach kept rumbling.

Near dinner time, a rich shop owner was hurrying through the marketplace. This shop owner rarely noticed beggars, but he saw that there was something about this beggar, something different. He didn't act like the other beggars the store owner was used to seeing. The store owner looked closely, and suddenly he recognized the beggar as King Solomon!

"Your Majesty!" he cried. "What could have happened that you are sitting here like a beggar?"

"I don't know," sighed Solomon. "Maybe I am being taught a lesson, although I'm not sure what that lesson could be."

The store owner does the mitzvah of *hachnasat orchim* (hospitality).

"Well then," smiled the store owner. "Tonight it would be my honor to have you as my guest."

King Solomon eagerly followed the store owner to his mansion. As soon as they entered the dining hall, servants brought in platters of meat, pitchers of wine, and bowls of delicious fruits and vegetables.

"My only regret," said the store owner, as he piled food on his plate, "is that this feast is so small compared to the wonderful feasts you used to give. Aren't you sad, my poor king, to think you will never give such wonderful feasts again? It is so terrible that now you will be poor and homeless the rest of your life!" The store owner went on and on like this until Solomon's throat was so choked with tears that he could hardly swallow. "I'm not so hungry after all," he murmured, and left the store owner's house.

The next morning King Solomon woke up in the gutter again, dirtier than before. By evening he was very very hungry. He met an old man, walking slowly with a sack of onions on his back. This man was an onion seller, and even though he was poor, he brought a beggar home with him from the marketplace every night to share his dinner. He led the king to a small hut, where he served him a bowl of thin onion soup. Then the onion seller asked Solomon his name.

Reluctantly Solomon told his story. But, unlike the store owner, the onion seller broke into a broad smile. "You need not worry!" he said. "You know yourself that God has promised that King David's descendents will always rule our kingdom. Surely you will be king again – it is only a matter of time!"

It doesn't require that you be rich to offer *hachnasat orchim* with a *sayver panim yafot.*

Smiling happily, the king drank his soup and thanked his host. "I am sorry there is not more good food for you," said the poor onion seller. "I can only afford what I bring home from my stall in the marketplace."

King Solomon smiled again. "I can't thank you enough," he said, "for you have taught me more than you know. I think I understand now. Two nights ago, an angel came to my palace disguised as an important man. I treated him coldly, so God put me on the streets to learn this lesson: the meal served with sorrow and bitterness tastes as bitter as ashes. But a meal served with kindness and joy, as you have served me, tastes sweeter than the finest foods on earth!"

This story is similar to "The Secret Ingredient" (in *A Year of Jewish Stories)*, in which the food is much better when it is seasoned with the spice of Shabbat.

For class discussion:

1. What did King Solomon have to remember about hospitality?
2. What seasoning made the onion seller's soup taste so good?
3. Is it is harder to do things with a sayver panim yafot?

For class life:

1. Experiment with spending time with friends who have a sayver panim yafot or some who do not. What does it feel like to build in the block corner with someone with a grumpy face? To eat snack with someone with a sayver panim yafot?
2. Science tells us that forming a smile actually can make us feel happier. Remind each other of this.
3. Invite the rabbi or another class to join you for snack. Be sure to discuss how you will fill the room with cheerfulness when your guests are there.

Could It Be Any Worse? A Story of *Shalom Ba'yit* (peace in the home)

This classic story is great to use when children need encouragement sharing toys or respecting each others' block structures.

Abba and Ima lived with their large family in a small house on a small farm. There were so many people in the house! There were two children playing and two more children singing. There were two children running and two more children jumping. There were two children banging drums and two more children tooting horns. One day Abba turned to Ima and shouted loudly, "My head hurts from all the noise in this house! I can't think one thought because it is so loud." Ima tried to think of a solution to this problem. She thought and thought and then said to Abba, "Let's go speak with the rabbi. Maybe he will have an answer!"

The rabbi is the *mara d'atra* – the final religious authority. When you ask a rabbi, you have to abide by his or her answer.

Later in the day, they went to see the rabbi. The rabbi looked at them and said, "Oy, what is wrong? You both don't look well! Are you feeling ill?" Ima said, "Well, rabbi, truthfully, we are just plain tired! We have a wonderful family and we love them very much, but so many people in one little house is just too much." The rabbi listened and said to them, "I know what you should do. Go to your barn and bring your rooster into the house." Abba was surprised. "Are you sure that's what you want us to do?" The rabbi nodded his head.

So Abba and Ima went back to their farm and brought their rooster into the house. "COCK-A-DOODLE-DOO! COCK-A-DOODLE-DOO!" went the rooster. The children just played and sang more loudly. They just ran and jumped more loudly and they banged the drum and tooted their horns more loudly. Abba put his hands over his ears and shouted, "Could it be any worse?"

The next day they went back to see the rabbi. "Rabbi, it isn't any quieter in our house!" Ima said. "Don't worry," said the rabbi. "Tonight I want you to bring your cow into the house." Ima didn't think this was a good idea, but the rabbi insisted.

So Abba and Ima went back to their farm and brought their cow into the house. MOO! MOO! went the cow. The rooster went COCK-A-DOODLE-DOO! The children just played and sang more loudly. They just ran and jumped more loudly and they banged the drum and tooted their horns more loudly. Abba put his hands over his ears and shouted, "Could it be any worse?"

The rabbi is doing the mitzvah of *ha-vah-at shalom ben adam v'cha-ver-ro* – bringing peace between people. How can the children in class do this mitzvah?

The next day they went back to see the rabbi. "Rabbi, it isn't any quieter!" Abba said. "Don't worry," said the rabbi. "Tonight I want you to bring your billy goat into the house." Abba didn't think this was a good idea, but the rabbi insisted.

So Abba and Ima went back to their farm and brought their billy goat into the house. MAA! MAA ! went the billy goat. MOO! MOO! went the cow. COCK-A-DOODLE-DOO! COCK-A-DOODLE-DOO! went the rooster. The children just played and sang more loudly. They just ran and jumped more loudly and they banged the drum and tooted their horns more loudly. Abba put his hands over his ears and shouted, "Could it be any worse?"

The next day they ran to the rabbi's house. "Rabbi," they said, "We are sorry, but your advice isn't helping us at all! Our house is noisier than before! You must help us!"

The rabbi told Abba and Ima to go home and take the rooster, the cow and the billy goat out of the house and put them back into the barn. Abba and Ima ran back to their house and did exactly what the rabbi told them to do. Do you know what happened? There were two children playing and two children singing. There were two children running and two children jumping. There were two children banging drums and two children tooting horns. Abba turned to Ima and said, "Isn't it wonderful? Everyone is busy doing something they enjoy, and it is so quiet!"

True Shalom ba'yit can come from being happy with what you have.

For class discussion:

1. Why did Abba and Ima think the rabbi could help them?
2. Could you think of a way to help Abba and Ima?
3. Why did bringing in the animals to the house help Abba and Ima think the house was quiet?
4. What questions would you like to ask a rabbi?

For class life:

1. Be sure when you tell this story, children have plenty of opportunity to make the noises of the animals and children in the family.
2. Discuss ways children keep shalom ba'yit in their homes. How do they make or keep shalom ba'yit in the classroom?
3. Include a *rodeph shalom* – a peace keeper - on the job board. That job it is to help friends work out disagreements and create shalom ba'yit in the class.
4. Acknowledge peaceful times in the classroom, not just quiet times but also times when children are working together especially well.

The Power of the Tongue: A Story of *Shmirat HaLashon* (guarding your tongue)

A classic story with roots in Torah and midrash, based on a version in The Classic Tales *by Ellen Frankel and retold by Maxine Handelman. This story appeared in* What's Jewish About Butterflies*, A.R.E. Press, 2004.*

This story is useful when there are issues with name-calling, or to encourage children to use their words instead of hitting.

Once the king of Persia was very ill. His doctors announced that his only hope to get better would be to drink the milk of a lioness. But who could get the milk of a lioness? Even the king's most courageous hunters were too afraid to try to milk a lioness.

With Benaiah's help, King Solomon is doing the mitzvah of bikur cholim, helping his sick friend.

So the king of Persia went to his friend, King Solomon, to ask for help. King Solomon turned to his most faithful helper, Benaiah ben Yehoyada, and asked him to go and collect milk from a lioness. Benaiah said, "For you, King Solomon, I will do it!"

Benaiah took some meat with him into the mountains. He soon came upon a cave where a lioness was nursing her cubs. On the first day Benaiah threw a little meat to the lioness, but stayed far outside the cave. The next day he threw her some more meat, and moved a little bit closer. Each day, Benaiah threw some meat to the lioness and moved a little bit closer. By the tenth day, the lioness was so used to him, and so well fed, that she let Benaiah come and play with her cubs. She even let him take some of her milk, which he stored carefully in a glass jar.

Benaiah took the jar full of milk and rushed back to King Solomon. King Solomon was very pleased. He sent Benaiah and the jar of milk on to see the king of Persia. It was a journey of several days, and one night while Benaiah slept, all the parts of his body began to argue about who was most important.

The legs said, "We are the most important, for if we had not walked up the mountain to the lioness's den, Benaiah would not have been able to get the milk."

The hands said, "But if we hadn't milked the lioness, Benaiah would have no milk to bring to the king of Persia."

The eyes argued, "If we had not shown Benaiah the way, he never would have found the lioness's den in the first place."

The mind said, "If I had not taught Benaiah how to befriend the lioness, he never would have been able to get close enough to get the milk."

Then the tongue spoke up, "No, you are all wrong! I am more important than all of you put together, for without speech, nothing is possible."

All the other parts of the body laughed at the tongue and said, “Who do you think you are? You are not important at all!”

The tongue replied, “Soon you will all agree that I have more power than any of you.” The parts of the body were still arguing over who was the most important the next morning as Benaiah went to give the milk to the king of Persia. The legs walked proudly, the hands carried the jar securely, the eyes made sure Benaiah did not trip. As Benaiah approached the king, the tongue suddenly took over and said, “Here is the dog’s milk you wanted.”

“What?” said the king. “Dog’s milk?! Are you making fun of me?” And he had Benaiah thrown in jail.

All the parts of the body quivered with fear. “Now do you see,” said the tongue, “that I am the most important part of the body?”

“Yes, yes!” cried all the other parts of the body. “You are the most important.” The tongue spoke up to the guards in the jail. “Excuse me, but I made a mistake before. I have in my jar the milk of a lioness.” The guards brought Benaiah to the king, Benaiah explained the mistake, and the king drank the milk of the lioness. In a few days his sickness was gone and he was cured.

Benaiah returned to King Solomon and told him the entire story. Solomon wrote about the power of the tongue in his book of Proverbs, so everyone would remember the importance of each word we say.

This is the quote that this story is based on: “Death and life are in the power of the tongue.” (Proverbs 18:21)

For class discussion:

1. Would Benaiah have been able to get the milk with only his tongue, or did he need the partnership of all his body parts?
2. Why is the tongue, and what we say, so important?

For class life:

1. The rabbis provide many guidelines for how we should speak to each other, including warnings against *lashon ha-rah* (bad or harmful speech). Try to go for an hour in your class without anyone saying anything hurtful to anyone else. If you can do an hour, try a whole day!
2. Try reading other books about the importance of what we say, such as *A Sack Full of Feathers* by Debby Waldman, *Chicken Soup by Heart* by Esther Hershenhorn and *The Hardest Word* by Jacqueline Jules.

Partners: A Story of *Shutafo shel HaKadosh Baruch Hu* (Being partners with God)
Written by Marc Gellman
In *Does God Have a Big Toe?* (HarperTrophy 1993)
Used with permission of the author

This story is a great complement when discussing creation.

Before there was anything, there was God, a few angels, and a huge swirling glob of rocks and water with no place to go. The angels asked God, "Why don't you clean up this mess?"

Even the act of cleaning the room becomes a God-like thing to do. The teacher can point out to children that organizing is a form of creating.

So God collected rocks from the huge swirling glob and put them together in clumps and said, "Some of these clumps of rocks will be planets, and some will be stars, and some of these rocks will be…just rocks."

Then God collected water from the huge swirling glob and put it together in pools of water and said, "Some of these pools of water will be oceans, and some will become clouds, and some of this water will be…just water."

Then the angels said, "Well God, it's neater now, but is it finished?" And God answered…"Nope!"

On some of the rocks God placed growing things, and creeping things, and things that only God knows what they are, and when God had done all this, the angels asked God, "Is the world finished now?" And God answered: "Nope!"

This story is also a great example of *tikkun olam* (repair of the world).

God made a man and a woman from some of the water and dust and said to them, "I am tired now. Please finish up the world for me…really it's almost done." But the man and woman said, "We can't finish the world alone! You have the plans and we are too little."

"You are big enough," God answered them. "But I agree to this. If you keep trying to finish the world, I will be your partner."

The man and the woman asked, "What's a partner?" and God answered, "A partner is someone you work with on a big thing that neither of you can do alone. If you have a partner, it means that you can never give up, because your partner is depending on you. On the days you think I am not doing enough and on the days I think you are not doing enough, even on those days we are still partners and we must not stop trying to finish the world. That's the deal." And they all agreed to that deal.

As in many stories, such as *The Gigantic Turnip* by Aleksei Tolstoy or *King Solomon and the Bee* by Dalia Hardof Renberg, the smaller character – the child – is in a position to help the larger, older, higher authority figure. Children seeing themselves as partners with God gives them a great deal of power and responsibility.

Then the angels asked God, “Is the world finished yet?” and God answered, “I don’t know. Go ask my partners.”

For class discussion:

1. Why couldn’t God finish creating the world alone?
2. What are some things that are easier or more fun to do with a partner?
3. What are some ways that we are partners with God? How do you help God take care of the world?
4. Do you think the world ever will be finished? What would a finished world look like?

For class life:

1. Engage the children in activities – for example, painting a picture, cleaning the room, or dancing – and present separate opportunities to do the activities alone and with partners. Discuss with the children how the activities felt when they did them alone as compared to when they did them with a partner.
2. Instead of a mitzvah tree or mitzvah notes, consider an opportunity for children to report on how they are partners with God.
3. Make a chart of things the children do to take care of the school, their pets, their home, their families, and so on.
4. Act out the story “The Turnip” and discuss with the children how everyone has the potential to help change the world.

While Standing on One Foot: A Story of *Talmud Torah* (Jewish study)

This is a great story for before you tell a Bible story or begin to study a Jewish holiday.

A very, very long time ago, in Jerusalem, lived two great rabbis named Hillel and Shammai. They spent their days teaching students the Torah and its laws. Like all teachers, they had different ways of teaching their students. Hillel was very patient and Shammai was very strict.

One day a stranger came to Shammai's school. This man was not Jewish, but he had a question he wanted to ask the rabbi. Shammai was teaching a lesson and was annoyed when the man interrupted him. "Can't you see that I am in the middle of teaching this lesson to my students?" he said. The man apologized, but said that he was traveling through Jerusalem and did not have much time. He wanted Shammai to teach him the meaning of the whole Torah while he stood on one foot! Shammai was shocked and told the man it was impossible to learn all the laws and wisdom of the Torah while standing on one foot. "Silly man," he yelled. "Torah is much too important to learn so quickly in such a foolish way! Go away!"

The stranger went to see Hillel, and he asked the same thing. "I am only here in Jerusalem for a very short time," he said. "Could you teach me all the laws and wisdom of your Torah while I stand here on one foot?"

This is actually Hillel's Golden Rule, from Talmud, *Shabbat* 31a, even though it is often quoted as, "Do unto others as you would have them do to you."

Hillel was very surprised at the man's request. He thought about it for a minute and said to the man, "I never have been asked to do something like this. I have spent my whole life trying to understand the laws and wisdom of the Torah. But if I were to explain it while you stand on one foot this is what I would say: What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah, the rest is the explanation. Now go and study."

The man was so happy with Hillel's simple answer that he decided to stay and learn more.

For class discussion:

1. How do you like to learn? Do you prefer a teacher who is patient or a teacher who is strict?
2. Do you think Rabbi Hillel gave the man a good answer? Why or why not?
3. What do you think is important in the Torah?
4. Why would the man want to learn more from Rabbi Hillel?

For class life:

1. Invoke Hillel's Golden Rule when there is strife in the classroom. For example: "Jonah, I can see that Sarah does not like to be pushed. Do you like to be pushed? No? Do you remember Hillel's Golden Rule from the Torah? Hillel reminds you that you don't like to be pushed, so you should not push your friends. Let's find a better way for you to tell Sarah that you think it is your turn to ride the bike."

Impatient Abraham: A Story of *Teshuvah* (repentance)

Abraham was well known for his many middot *(good virtues), especially* hachnasat orchim*, welcoming strangers and guests. Abraham welcomed everyone to his tent – young or old, rich or poor, friend or stranger. It didn't matter who they were, Abraham always greeted them warmly and offered a cold drink and a cool place to rest. Abraham was also very gracious about doing teshuvah and saying he was sorry when he did something wrong. Abraham learned that important lesson from God, and this is the story.*

When children argue or hurt each other's feelings, instead of forcing a meaningless "I'm sorry," this story can help teach a deeper meaning of teshuvah.

Early one evening while Abraham was sitting in his tent, a weary old traveler passed by. In his usual friendly manner, Abraham ran to greet him and offer him a cold drink and a place to sit. The man refused, saying he preferred to sleep outside. Abraham pleaded with him to change his mind until finally the traveler relented and came inside. Sarah hurried to bring him cool water and cake, which the man ate hungrily. When they were finished with their meal Abraham offered up a simple prayer thanking God. The old man watched him curiously.

This story of Abraham's hachanasat orchim (hospitality) can be found in Genesis 18:1-8

"What is this Adonai you speak of?" the weary man asked Abraham. "I have not heard of this god in my travels." Abraham explained that this was the one true God, the creator of heaven and Earth, impossible to see but seeing all. The old man shook his head and said, "I know only the gods of my youth. I am too old to believe in invisible gods." Abraham became upset, and said, "When the sun goes down at night, who do you think watches over the earth? There is only one true power behind all things and that is the one true God – Adonai!" Again the man sadly shook his head and told Abraham that he was too old to believe in such things. He only knew the gods of his youth. Now Abraham was very angry, and he told the man to leave his tent if he could not believe in the one true God.

When Abraham was living, most people believed in lots of gods – a sun god, a rain god, a healing god, and so on. Abraham was the first one to believe in the one God, creator of everything.

Just then, God came and asked Abraham where the old man who came to shelter under his tent had gone. Abraham told God that he sent him away because he did not believe in God. God became angry with Abraham and said, "All these years I have been patient with this old man. I have fed him and clothed him, and I have not minded that he does not pray to me." Abraham felt so bad for his impatience with the old man, he ran to find him and apologize. He begged the man to forgive him for his inhospitality, and to come back to the tent with him. The old man forgave Abraham, and

Teachers and other adults also make mistakes and find themselves needing to do teshuvah. Remember to be a good role model and to apologize when appropriate.

they returned to Abraham's tent together. The next morning, after the man left to continue his travels, God spoke to Abraham again. "Now you understand me better, Abraham. In the future, no matter what mistakes your children may commit, I will never lose my patience with them entirely."

Abraham learned that night about having patience and doing teshuvah.

For class discussion:

1. Why was Abraham angry with the old man?
2. Why *wasn't* God angry with the old man?
3. How did Abraham feel after going after the man and asking for forgiveness?
4. Have you ever really wanted someone not to be angry with you? What did you do?

For class life:

1. Never tell a child to "say you're sorry." They never are. Instead, help a child to do teshuvah for real. Ask the offending child to say to the offended child, "Are you okay? What can I do to make you feel better?" Then help the offending child do what it takes to fix the situation.
2. There are many opportunities during the course of a day to teach empathy in an early childhood classroom. Pointing out how the other child might feel when he or she is left out of a game, or a toy is taken away, sometimes is enough. Saying, "our friend _____ is (sad, mad, frustrated) because _____" and then being silent allows children to think critically and feel for themselves rather than doing it to please the teacher.
3. A friendship circle bulletin board can be effective in teaching teshuvah. Create a space on a board for people shapes. Every time two children fight about a toy, space, or play and they work it out together and say sorry because they mean it, they go get two people shapes and place them on the board (they could even color them, or write their names, or glue on magazine pictures). Slowly a circle is completed. A teacher can add to the circle when he/she sees a child do teshuvah as well. When the circle is complete have a little celebration in honor of being a shalom ba'yit class.
4. "Talking Chairs" are a good way for children (older threes and fours) to work out their problems. Place two chairs facing each other in a quiet place in the room so children can talk and tell each other their feelings. In the beginning a teacher will have to help out, but soon the children will go to the chairs on their own to work out their problems.

Stone Soup: A Story of *Tikkun Olam* (repairing the world)
A version by Maxine Handelman

This is a great story to inspire the children to work together to make the world a better place.

Once upon a time on a Friday morning, two weary travelers wandered into town. The taller of the two, Mendel, carried a large pot. The smaller man, Joshua, held a large stone. With a loud clang, Mendel sat the pot down in the center of the village square. The people in this village did not like strangers. Usually strangers wanted something, and the villagers did not have very much, and they did not like to share. Even so, the villagers paused to see what these strange men were doing with their pot. Joshua filled the pot with water from the well in the village square. Then Mendel and Joshua worked together to move the heavy pot onto the fire in the village square. As the people watched, Joshua dropped his stone into the pot with a big splash. One of the villagers became curious and asked the strangers, "What are you doing?"

"Why, we are making stone soup," said Mendel, patting his stomach with a satisfied grin.

The people watched as the water in the pot began to bubble. "Yup," said Joshua. "This soup, flavored by our wonderful stone, will be just delicious." He waited a moment and then added, "Of course, it would be even tastier with some carrots or onions, but it will be just fine the way it is."

"I have a few carrots," offered a woman. "I have an onion," added a man. They ran to their houses, and soon came back with the carrots and onion, and threw them in the pot. "Ah, yes," said Mendel. "This will be a fine soup. But it's too bad we have no potatoes." "I have some!" a man called. Soon potatoes were cooking up in the soup. Joshua sniffed the pot, and said, "Oh Mendel, it's too bad we are all out of salt. What this soup would taste like with a little salt, and maybe a bay leaf!" In no time, a woman ran to her house and came back with salt. Another woman came running to the pot with several spices and a bay leaf. Mendel looked at the bubbling soup and said slowly, "Can you imagine if we only had a chicken in this soup? What a feast that would be!" The crowd was silent, then a man called, "I have one chicken." He ran to his chicken coop and soon came back with a chicken for the soup.

What other ingredients might the children in class think to add to the soup?

By now delicious smells were wafting from the pot, and the sun was beginning to get low in the sky. Joshua said to Mendel, "Shabbat will soon be here. We have this wonderful soup, more than enough to share with friends. It is too bad we have no candles, no wine, no challah. Wouldn't that be a wonderful Shabbat?"

In no time, a table was set up in the village square, with a tablecloth, candles, wine, and two beautiful challot. Mendel sniffed the pot and declared loudly, "Our soup is ready!" Looking around at the villagers, he said, "Friends, won't you please join us for Shabbat? We have wonderful soup to share."

As the sun began to set, blessing were said over that candles, kiddush was recited, the blessing was said over the challot and pieces passed around to everyone. Bowls and spoons were brought from every home, and the villagers drew together around the table and ate the stone soup, until the pot was emptied. One man from the village said to Mendel, "How incredible to think you can make such wonderful soup just from a stone. Our village has not had such a gathering in a very long time. Thank you for making our village a better place to be."

Mendel smiled at the man and looked around the crowd. "Who has the stone in their bowl?" he called. A young girl said, "I do!" Mendel said to her, "Mazal tov. Now you can start the next pot of stone soup." The girl called out, "Stone soup next Shabbat! Everyone is invited!" and the villagers all cheered.

For class discussion:

1. How did the stone soup make the world a better place?
2. Did Mendel and Joshua ever ask the people to contribute things to the soup?

For class life:

1. Another version of this Jewish story can be found in a picture book, *Bone Button Borscht* by Aubrey Davis.
2. "Tikkun Olam is really about learning a lesson that changes you so you then can help to repair the world" (Nechama Retting, personal communication). Look for examples of tikkun olam in both secular and Jewish books, such as *Milo and the Magical Stones* by Marcus Pfister; *A Thread of Kindness* by Leah Shollar; *One City, Two Brothers* by Chris Smith; *The Way Meat Loves Salt* by Nina Jaffe; *Because Brian Hugged His Mother* by David Rice; *Wanda's Roses* by Pat Brisson; and definitely *Bagels From Benny* by Aubrey Davis.
3. Discover some of the ways your class can work together to make the world a better place, by visiting people in a retirement home, recycling, planting a garden or picking up trash from the playground (and a million more ways, of course!).

Rabbi Zusya and the Birds Who Wouldn't Sing: A Story of *Tza'ar Ba'alay Cha'yim* (avoiding cruelty to animals)

A version of this story is available in a beautifully illustrated book by Miriam Aroner and Shelly O. Haas, The Kingdom of the Singing Birds, *published by Kar-Ben.*

This is a good story to use when you talk about how to treat the class pets, or when you put a bug outside instead of stepping on it.

A long time ago in a faraway village there lived a kind rabbi named Rabbi Zusya.

Rabbi Zusya was always interested in the world around him. He spent lots of time just watching and observing nature. He loved to listen to the birds singing, watch the flowers blooming, and look at the cows grazing in the meadows.

He also would ask lots of questions. Why do flowers bloom in the spring? Where does the sun go at night? The more questions he asked, the more he learned. Rabbi Zusya became very wise. As time went on, people throughout his village would come and ask him questions, and Rabbi Zusya always had good advice for them.

Rabbi Zusya (zus-ya) became a *Cha-cham* – a wise man. He embodies the Jewish value of *talmud Torah* (study), since he is always learning.

Now, in Rabbi Zusya's country there was a new king. The king had many, many birds that his father, grandfather, and great grandfather had collected over the years. There were robins, blue jays, hummingbirds, parrots, parakeets, and oh so many others. But there was a problem: The birds did not sing!

The king was very sad that the birds did not sing. He called in his advisors for help. The advisors thought and thought. They suggested that maybe the birds needed better food. So the king searched all over for the tastiest berries and the freshest grains. But it did not help. The birds ate all the good food, but still they did not sing. The advisors then suggested building a bigger and better cage. So the king sent for some of the most famous craftspeople and they made a beautiful cage out of gold and silver. The birds seemed to like the cage, but still they did not sing. Well, thought the king, what else can I do? One of his advisors had heard about Rabbi Zusya and suggested that the king bring him to the palace.

Rabbi Zusya was a little nervous about going there. He had never been so far away from home. But he knew it was important and he hoped he would be able to help the king. During the long journey, Rabbi Zusya noticed very many wonderful things. He saw mountains and rivers and all sorts of different creatures, both small and large.

When he finally reached the palace, he saw it was more beautiful than he ever could have imagined. Everything was so big and bright. And then he saw the magnificent cage with all the different birds – crows, eagles, orioles, and doves. The birds were beautiful, but not one bird was singing. Not a peep or a chirp!

The king asked Rabbi Zusya, "What can I do to make the birds sing?" Rabbi Zusya thought about the birds he had seen on his journey. He thought he knew the answer to the king's question, but Rabbi Zusya wasn't sure the king was going to like his advice. He was even a bit nervous about telling him – but he did. Rabbi Zusya told the king, "Let the birds go free."

This also shows the value of *derech eretz* (good manners). Rabbi Zusya does not want to offend or anger the king.

The king did not want to do this. "If I let the birds go free, they might all fly away," he worried. Rabbi Zusya said, "Yes, that might happen." The king thought for a few minutes. Then he opened the cage just a little bit. A few birds flew out and they started to sing! The king opened the cage a little more and a few more birds flew out and they started to sing as well. The king opened the cage all the way. All the birds flew out. There was the most beautiful singing throughout the palace. Some birds did decide to fly away but others decided to stay. Birds from throughout the kingdom began to come to the palace to sing. They knew this was a place birds could be free.

The king was so happy! He gave Rabbi Zusya a special reward of lots of money for helping him. When Rabbi Zusya went back to his tiny village, he used the reward to help the poor people in his village. As time went on, Rabbi Zusya and the king remained friends. Each time Rabbi Zusya went to visit the king, he made sure he went a different way so that he could see new sights and learn new things on each journey.

For class discussion:

1. Who does tza'ar ba'alay cha'yim in this story? What do they do?
2. Why did asking questions help Rabbi Zusya become wise?
3. How might have Rabbi Zusya found answers to all his questions?
4. What had Rabbi Zusya seen with the birds on his journey that made him think the king should let his birds go free?
5. What do you think happened other times when Rabbi Zusya went to visit the king?

For class life:

1. Jewish law tells us it is a mitzvah to feed our animals before we feed ourselves. That is an important part of tza'ar ba'alay cha'yim. Make sure children feed the classroom pet before snack each day.
2. Act out this story – the king can have as many birds as you have children in the class!
3. Encourage children to ask lots of questions. Help them find answers from adults, other children, books, and the internet.
4. When you travel outside the classroom (whether you go down the hall, outside in the neighborhood, or beyond), encourage children to ask about things they see. Create a system for recording the children's observations so you can come back to them later (like a clipboard or small notebook).

The Holy Miser – a story of Tzedakah (righteousness, charity)

Adapted from the story of the same name by Rabbi Edward Feinstein, in *Capturing the Moon: Classic and Modern Jewish Tales*, Behrman House, 2008. Used with permission of the author.

A great story to tell to reinforce the weekly giving of tzedakah, or to kick off a food or clothing drive.

They called him Reb Moishe the Miser. Reb Moishe the Miser was the richest man in the town. But he was also the meanest. When a beggar approached him and asked for a few pennies for food, Reb Moishe just grumbled and turned away. He turned away when the schoolmaster asked him to help the poor children of the town. When the leaders of the synagogue asked him for money to repair the shul's leaking roof, Reb Moishe simply shook his head. He even refused when the rabbi himself asked him to support the town's poor. Reb Moishe turned away from everyone who asked him to give tzedakah. He turned away from everyone's pleas for help. He turned away from doing anything for anyone.

So when Reb Moishe died – on a Monday – and the town was called to attend his funeral, everyone turned away.

Only the rabbi and the undertaker went to bury Reb Moishe. The undertaker prepared the grave. The rabbi said a few words of prayer. And together they buried Reb Moishe. No one cried for him. When the rabbi and the undertaker finished burying Reb Moishe, they, too, turned away.

This man is doing the mitzvah of *bikur cholim* (caring for the sick)

That's when the strange things started happening. When the rabbi returned to his home, he found a poor man waiting for him.

"Rabbi, ten years ago, my wife got sick and I left my job to stay at home and care for her. When my savings ran out, I went to Reb Moishe the Miser to ask for help. He just groaned and turned away. But after that, every Monday morning I found a small bag filled with coins on my doorstep – enough money to pay for food and medicine. Every Monday morning for the past ten years – until this morning. This morning – no bag and no coins. Rabbi, I wonder if you could help me."

The rabbi listened to the story. Then he opened his purse and gave the man the coins he needed. The next day the schoolmaster came to see the rabbi.

"Rabbi, for the past twelve years, every Tuesday morning when I arrived at the school house, there would be a bag waiting for me. Every bag contained a surprise. Sometimes it contained a coat for a child whose family was too poor to afford a new coat for the winter. Sometimes there was a new book for a child who loved to read. Sometimes there was a treat for every student. Rabbi, I don't know who left that bag every Tuesday, but somehow that person knew exactly what I needed every week, and that's what he left. But this morning – no bag and no surprise.

On Wednesday it was a poor widow, who had found a bagful of coal for her furnace every Wednesday throughout the winter for the past fifteen years. But not this Wednesday.

On Thursday it was the baker, who had found a purse filled with coins and a list of people to whom he was to deliver a Shabbat challah – every Thursday for twenty years. But not this Thursday.

Can the children figure out who is giving all the secret tzedakah?

And on Friday the *shammes*, the caretaker of the synagogue, reported that every Friday for as long as he could remember there had been wine for Kiddush, candles for Shabbat, and food for any poor person who might spend Shabbat in the synagogue. Those items had just appeared by magic – but not this Friday.

By the time Shabbat arrived, the rabbi had figured it out. He stood during the Shabbat prayers and announced that the entire community must accompany him to the cemetery at the end of Shabbat to offer an apology to Reb Moishe the Miser, who had been quietly caring for the sick, the hungry, the poor – for every needy person in town – for all these years.

As Shabbat ended, the entire town gathered at the grave of Reb Moishe the Miser. The rabbi spoke about holiness. He said, "As God is holy, we must try to be holy. How can we, human beings, be just like God? Just as God comforted Abraham, we can comfort the sick. Just as God fed Israel in the desert, we must feed the hungry. Just as God buried his friend Moshe, the holy prophet, we must bury our friend Reb Moishe the Holy Miser."

God comforts Abraham in Genesis 18:1.
God fed the Israelites manna in Exodus 16.
God buried Moses in Deuteronomy 34:6

That night the rabbi awoke to find his bedroom filled with light. Right there before him was the shining likeness of Reb Moishe. The rabbi fell to his knees and pleaded, "Reb Moishe, I beg you, forgive us. We did not know all that you had done!"

Reb Moishe smiled a sweet smile. It was the first time the rabbi had ever seen Reb Moishe smile. "Of course you did not know," he said. "I didn't want you to know. I did what I did in secret so no one would feel that they had to pay me back. All that I did gave me so much joy. I need you to do one favor for me: Go to my home, and look under my bed. There you will find a box filled with all my money. Use it to carry on my work – for the poor families, the widows, the children, the synagogue. Use all the money to bring happiness and light to this town."

"Certainly, Reb Moishe," the rabbi replied, "I will do as you ask." And then the rabbi grew bolder. "May I ask you a question, Reb Moishe?" And without waiting for a response, he proceeded: "What is it like there, in the other world? What is heaven like?"

"What is heaven like? It's paradise! God's paradise. It's almost perfect."

"Almost perfect?" questioned the rabbi. "What's missing from God's paradise?"

"In heaven God cares for every soul. So there is no one for me to take care of, no one to help. If only I could care for another soul – that would make it perfect!"

For class discussion:

1. As you read this story, engage the children in discussion to insure they know what a miser is. Help them figure out who the mysterious tzedakah giver is before the rabbi does.
2. Does Reb Moishe only do tzedakah by giving money? How else did he give tzedakah?
3. How did Reb Moishe know what each person needed?
4. Reb Moishe really liked taking care of other people. How have you taken care of another person?

For class life:

1. Create a tzedakah project in your classroom in which children can be as generous as they can possibly be. Be as concrete as possible. Instead of money, collect cans of food. Or if you collect money, go to the grocery store and buy food for a specific place.
2. Remember, tzedakah is not only about putting pennies in the pushke. Create tzedakah, justice, with actions as well.

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Values by story – grid 1	**Rabbi Akiva and the Missing Student**	**The Two Brothers**	**Welcoming Abraham and Sarah**	**The Chickens that Turned into Goats**	**The Spilled Wine**	**Dima ben Netina and the Ruby**	**Made with Love**	**Aaron and the fighting friends**	**Missing the Game**
Bikur cholim (visiting the sick)	**X**								
G'milut chasadim (acts of loving kindness)		**X**						**x**	
Hachnasat orchim (hospitality)			**X**						
Hashavat avaydah (returning lost property)				**X**					
Kavod (respect)					**X**				
Kibbud av v'em (honoring parents)						**X**			
Ma'achil r'ay-vim (feeding the hungry)							**X**		
Rodeph shalom (pursuer of peace)								**X**	
Samayach b'chelko (contentment with your lot)									**X**
Sayver panim yafot (cheerful attitude)	**x**		**x**					**x**	
Shalom ba'yit (peace in the home)									
Shmirat HaLashon (guarding your tongue)									
Shutafo shel HaKadosh Baruch Hu (being partners w/ God)									
Talmud Torah (Jewish study)									
Teshuvah (repentance)									
Tikkun olam (repair of the world)									
Tza'ar ba'aly cha'yim (avoiding cruelty to animals)				**x**					
Tzedakah (justice/charity)				**x**					

Values by story – grid 1 continued	Rabbi Akiva and the Missing Student	The Two Brothers	Welcoming Abraham and Sarah	The Chickens that Turned into Goats	The Spilled Wine	Dima ben Netina and the Ruby	Made with Love	Aaron and the fighting friends	Missing the Game
Ahavat ha-bri-yot (loving concern for others)		X						X	
Derech eretz (good manners)									X
Ha-vah-at shalom ben adam v'cha-ver-ro (bringing peace between people)								X	
Hiddur mitzvah (beautifying a mitzvah)						X			
Kol Yisrael ah-ray-vim zeh la-zeh (all Israel is responsible for one another)	X						X		
Lo lavayesh (not embarrassing)					X				
Mishpacha (family)		X							

Values by story – grid 2	The King's Lesson	Could it be Any Worse?	The Power of the Tongue	Partners	While Standing on One Foot	Impatient Abraham	Stone Soup	R. Zusya & birds who wouldn't sing	The Holy Miser
Bikur cholim (visiting the sick)			X						X
G'milut chasadim (acts of loving kindness)									X
Hachnasat orchim (hospitality)	X	X				X			
Hashavat avaydah (returning lost property)									
Kavod (respect)									
Kibbud av v'em (honoring parents)									
Ma'achil r'ay-vim (feeding the hungry)									X
Rodeph shalom (pursuer of peace)									
Samayach b'chelko (contentment with your lot)									
Sayver panim yafot (cheerful attitude)	X								
Shalom ba'yit (peace in the home)		X							
Shmirat HaLashon (guarding your tongue)			X						

Values by story – grid 2 continued	**The King's Lesson**	**Could it be Any Worse?**	**The Power of the Tongue**	**Partners**	**While Standing on One Foot**	**Impatient Abraham**	**Stone Soup**	**R. Zusya & birds who wouldn't sing**	**The Holy Miser**
Shutafo shel HaKadosh Baruch Hu (being partners w/ God)				**X**					**x**
Talmud Torah (Jewish study)					**X**			**x**	
Teshuvah (repentance)						**X**			**x**
Tikkun olam (repair of the world)				**x**			**X**		**x**
Tza'ar ba'aly cha'yim (avoiding cruelty to animals)								**X**	
Tzedakah (justice/charity)									**X**
Ahavat ha-bri-yot (loving concern for others)									**x**
Derech eretz (good manners)								**x**	
Ha-vah-at shalom ben adam v'cha-ver-ro (bringing peace between people)		**X**							
Hiddur mitzvah (beautifying a mitzvah)									
Kol Yisrael ah-ray-vim zeh la-zeh (all Israel is responsible for one another)									**x**
Lo lavayesh (not embarrassing)									**x**
Mishpacha (family)									

God and Spirituality

Among the most basic core values of Conservative Judaism is belief in God. The quality of spirituality may be understood as feeling the presence of God in our everyday lives.

"Conservative Judaism affirms the critical importance of belief in God but does not specify all the particulars of that belief" (*Emet Ve-Emunah*, p. 18). There are various views of God that are represented in Conservative Jewish thought. Two main views are the belief that a supreme supernatural being exists and has the power to command and control the world through that supernatural being's will. Those who hold this view "affirm our faith in God as Creator and Governor of the Universe. His power called the world into being; His wisdom and goodness guide its destiny." Of all creation, only people are created in God's image and endowed with free will (*Emet Ve-Emunah,* pp. 14-15). Another view sees God as present when we look for meaning in the world, when we work for morality, justice, and future redemption. Adherents to this view do not ask "where is God" but rather "when is God."

It is important to wrestle with your own understanding and concept of God. Each person forms his or her own theology or understanding of God. It is essential to continually compare your own theology to traditional views of God. Ismar Schorsch, chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary from 1987 to 2006, tells us that "Conservative Judaism is very much part of that ancient Jewish quest for comprehensive understanding of God." There are no answers. There is only the journey.

"The Conservative Movement recognizes, as did the Rabbinic tradition, that 'The Torah speaks in the language of human beings.'…All God-talk is a metaphor, the usage of speech to approximate a reality that cannot be fully described," we are told in *Willing, Learning and Striving*, the study guide to *Emet V'Emunah*. No human being can know God fully. We focus on what God does rather than on what God is.

Judaism provides us with opportunities to experience God's presence. There are many vehicles for expressing our spirituality, including music, art, movement, dance, relationships, major life events, and of course prayer.

Tefillah

Tefillah, or prayer, includes acknowledgement of God's role in our lives, praise of God, thanksgiving, and expressions of ideals for both the Jewish people and the world (*Emet Ve-Emunah,* p.49). The Jewish tradition establishes a structure, called *keva,* for the times, content, and order of prayer, thus enabling us to pray together as a community. The ideal prayer experience goes beyond *keva* and calls upon us to pray with *kavanah* (intention and feeling). The *siddurim* (prayer books) of the Conservative community embody a balance between old and new, keva and kavanah. One goal of prayer is to infuse us with a sense of God's holiness. This helps us to reflect on our own behavior as well as on our interactions with other people. We Jews strive to make our experience of prayer beautiful

(*hiddur mitzvah*). Tefillah can enable us to express our feelings and hopes. Much of the significance of prayer lies in its ability to give voice to our yearnings and aspirations, to refine our natures, and to create a strong link to God.

According to Jewish law, our obligation to pray can be fulfilled in any language. Conservative Jews, like Jews throughout the centuries, pray largely in Hebrew. Hebrew is *lashon hakodesh* – the holy tongue. Hebrew envelops us in the vital spirit of Jewish prayer. An important part of this spirit is the music and melodies that accompany the prayers. The Conservative movement embraces traditional melodies but also enhances Jewish liturgy and the experience of worship through new prayers in both Hebrew and the vernacular, and through the use of new melodies. Someone who learns the siddur and its music develops an emotional attachment to the very sounds and rhythms of the words and music.

The Conservative movement also teaches that there are prayers and special *brachot* (blessings) that are to be said in a variety of circumstances, both inside and outside the synagogue. In this way, prayer expands our awareness of God beyond limited times and places, and imparts a sacred dimension to our daily lives.

God and Spirituality
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Preparing Yourself for Wrestling with God – For Adults

In order to let God into the classroom, teachers must be at least somewhat comfortable talking and thinking about God. This is certainly not to say that teachers must know what (or when) God is. If that were the case, very few people would consider themselves qualified to teach about God. Rabbi David Wolpe, the rabbi at Sinai Temple in Los Angeles and the author of *Teaching Your Children About God*, assures us that when it comes to talking about God and making meaning of our lives, we often can give what we don't have. In fact, it is not our task as adults to transmit to children an exact copy of our faith and idea of God. Rather, it is our task to use our own faith – beliefs, questions, ideas, and even doubts – to help children develop their own faith. It is our responsibility to help children develop their own ideas of God in a way that is valuable and true both to the traditions we hold and to what we know about the world.

> Rosalind (age 4): Why is God perfect and we're not perfect?
> Cherene (teacher): Oh wow, these are really great questions. You know, sometimes I don't even know the answers to these questions.

To help children, we do have to have some sense of our own faith, our spirituality, our idea of God. Before we can really hear and deal with children's questions about God, we have to have asked our own questions about God and to have sought out some answers. We don't necessarily have to have *found* the answers, but we must be looking. Our forefather Jacob wrestles with a man, possibly an angel, in the Torah (Genesis 32:25-31) and is renamed Israel, which means "wrestles with God." Jews are God-wrestlers. Doubt is part of the equation. Yet Rabbi Daniel Gordis (1999) warns us about sharing too many of our doubts with young children. In every aspect of life, it is our duty to assure children that they are living in a good, secure, safe world. The same guidelines apply to helping children think about God. Though we should never lie to children, it is not dishonest to help children grow up believing that God is loving and caring and treasures every human being, including them.

Never be afraid to tell a child "I don't know." It's okay, in fact important, for children to know that grown-ups don't have all the answers about God (or most anything else in life). Rather than make up an answer to a child's question, which will only cause the child to mistrust or to have to unlearn later, tell a child, "I don't know. What do you think? I wonder about that too." Then *listen* to the child's answer, and ask questions to help the child expand on his or her own ideas of God.

Our job as teachers is to allow children the space and safety to explore God.

Preparing yourself for talking with children about God

Dr. Saul Wachs (1998) notes that there are 105 names for God in the Jewish tradition, driving home the point that try as we might, it is impossible for us to pinpoint the essence of God. Wachs suggests two metaphors of God that are especially useful with young

children. The first is God as a wise leader, a leader who arranged the world so that everything we need is here. This allows the children a sense of security. This metaphor of God encourages children to appreciate the gift of life that they have been given, and to look for evidence of God's work in the world around them. Wachs also suggests the metaphor of God as *friend*. Not just any friend, but the friend who never gives up on you. Thinking of God as a listener, as someone who understands, can be extremely comforting to any child who sometimes feels as if the people in his or her life are not listening.

The list of names referred to by Dr. Wachs includes names such as *Adon Olam* (Eternal Master); *Avinu Malkaynu* (Our Father, our King); *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* (The Holy One Blessed be He); *Oseh Shalom* (Creator of Peace); and *Shechinah* (the feminine aspects of God). More commonly we use such names as God, Adonai, and Elohim. It is always important to use God's name with respect. Some people chose to use the actual names, such as Adonai and Elohim, only in prayer, and substitutes, such as Hashem (literally the Name) in more casual discussions, although this is not typical in Conservative settings. As a school, decide what name or names you are going to use for God. When all the staff uses one name for God, it can be less confusing for children and families. Older children – the 4- and 5-year-olds – can understand that God has different names because God is special to us in different ways.

A Conservative *teshuvah* (an answer based on Jewish law) clarifies the Conservative stance on the written name of God. In a loosely bound document such as this guide, the name of God printed in English or transliteration (Hebrew words written in English letters) is written out and not considered sacred. When God's name appears in Hebrew, it is printed in a changed form, either as a ה' indicating "the Name" or with a dash separating the aleph and the lamed, no longer forming the sacred name of God. Thus, the pages of this guide may be recycled. They do not have to be buried, as is the *halachah* (Jewish law) for paper containing the sacred names of God.

A note about God and gender language: We believe that God has no gender, yet the English and Hebrew languages both lack respectful ways to address a being without gender. As a staff, you must make a decision. Will you refer to God as He? Will you avoid pronouns in reference to God (as in text above)? Will you sometimes use He and sometimes use She? In the introduction to the most recent version of *Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals*, the Conservative movement siddur, the editors chose to remove terms such as "Lord," "Father," and "King." While the editors continue to use He in this siddur, they did so only when they felt it was the only choice consistent with the literary and traditional criteria they had established.

When children ask about God, they usually have their own theories. First listen to their theories and then reflect the questions back to them. "Tell me what you think about God." Be confident when you have a conversation about God. It is all right to say that you do not know and that you also have many questions and do not have all the answers. Consult the *Tanach* (Hebrew Bible) with the children. Invite the rabbi to join your class when you have a discussion about God, or go with the children to visit the rabbi and bring a list of

their questions. Do not avoid the conversations or the use of God's name, because that sends a very strong message that God is a taboo subject in the classroom.

Ask the children what God means to them. Why is God special to them? As Conservative Jews, we have a relationship with God, and we have made an agreement with God to study the Torah, do mitzvot, and be good people.

Words and concepts to use with children when talking about God:

- God is always.
- God is always there for us. (Just as the *ner tamid* [eternal light] is always on – so too God is always there for us)
- *B'tzelem Elohim* – "God created human beings in the divine image" (Genesis 1:27). We are unique and special because we are created in the image of God.
- God is the commander. God commands people to do mitzvot.
- When we do mitzvot and make good choices we are doing what God asks of us, or doing the work of God, or demonstrating that we are made in God's image.
- God is invisible and eternal. Define these words with children and explore how they apply to God.
- Just as you feel love you can feel God. Can you see love? Can you see God? Can you feel love? Can you feel God?
- Some people believe…
- I wonder how God…
- We can thank God for…

Children are born with a sense of wonder about the world. Unless they are actively stifled, children take extreme pleasure in exploring, in asking questions, in discovering the "whys" of their world. Robert Coles, a professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and the author of *The Spiritual Life of Children*, writes, "Boys and girls are attuned to the heart of spirituality and have a natural ability to look inward in search of meaning and purpose…. Children pursue their questions while drawing pictures, stories and poems, while indulging in the exploration of this wondrously enchanting planet." He further notes that all children need a spiritual life that is validated by their parents and other significant adults. Even preschool children are aware of the gift of life and are busy trying to understand it and figure out what they should do with it.

To this end, children ask lots of questions. Rabbi Wolpe points out that very young children ask questions about God's beginnings: Was God born? What does God look like? Does God have a body? As children get older, they turn their focus more toward what God *does*. Does God speak to people? Why does God make bad things happen? Gordis notes that when children ask about God, they often are not seeking information about God. Instead, children use God as one way to make sense of their world, a way to construct a world that makes sense, a world that is loving and not cruel. Wolpe writes that a child asking about why bad things happen should be responded to with comfort, and that we should respect the seriousness of the question. Still, an honest answer is that there are things we simply do not know.

Preparing the Children for Talking with God

In order for children to be able to talk about God and explore their own relationships with God, there must be a sense of a presence of God in the school and especially in the classroom. Talk about God among the staff. As a staff, go on a field trip around the school to look for evidence of God. Look at the sanctuary – the *ner tamid* (eternal light), Torah scrolls, kipot, siddurim, Tanachim, mezuzot - these all are ritual objects that make a place *kadosh* (sacred or holy) and indicate the presence of God. See if you can find one person helping another, or a tzedakah box, or beautiful flowers growing on the school or synagogue grounds. These all indicate the presence of God as well.

Take the children on a walk around the school. Draw the children's attention to all of this – that these are all reminders of God. For example, seeing the mezuzah can be a reminder of God when children arrive and leave. When they think of God they remember they must make good choices and do mitzvot. When the children need to become more focused, ask them to pause, look at the mezuzah, and remember to make good choices.

There are many ways to connect children to God:

- Tell stories from the Torah and/or midrashim (Rabbinic stories).
- Singing and praying.
- Jewish rituals can be spiritual and set a mood. Talk with children about why we do such things as light candles for Shabbat or holidays, blow the shofar, or say blessings when we wash our hands before eating.
- Shabbat is much more meaningful, with potential for connections to God, when we take time to set the atmosphere.
    - Connect creation to each Shabbat celebration
    - Include resting and reflecting on what God created.
    - Create a sense of calm
    - Change the environment to reflect Shabbat – set up a special table, invite Shabbat guests, bring in ritual objects and flowers.
    - Bake challah with the children every week – embrace the tactile experience, the feel and the smell and the taste of the challah.
    - Sing a song such as "Shiviti." Invite the children to lie on the rug and close their eyes as you sing *Shiviti Adonai knegdi tamid* – I put God in front of me all of the time.
- Include Modeh Ani and the Shema in morning circle times. This invites children to say thank you to God for waking us up and returning our souls to us.
- Celebrate and notice small and big events – she'hecheyanu moments – when a tooth falls out, when a child masters a skill, when a child celebrates a birthday, and so on. – say She'hecheyanu
- Talk about God when you are outside. Look at the beautiful world that God created. You can make the ordinary holy by being aware, being present in the moment, and bringing the children's attention to the wonder of nature. There are formal blessings that acknowledge many things, both beautiful and awesome, in nature. Or you can just say "Thank you, God, for…."

- Celebrate and acknowledge life-cycle events – birth, *brit* (ritual circumcision), baby-naming, bar or bat mitzvah, weddings, funerals.
- Do mitzvot – call a school friend who is sick, visit seniors in retirement homes to celebrate Jewish holidays with them. Give tzedakah – visit food pantries. Take care of the earth – plant trees. Be connected to the community. Keep the connection to God – we are doing what God asks of us. How does it make you feel when you do these things? How does it make the recipients feel?
- Shirley Newman teaches about "discovering God's secrets" (Wachs, 1998). She suggests having children collect leaves that at first glance seem to be exactly the same. As the children examine the leaves, they will discover that no leaf is identical to any other leaf. Then show the children a sheet of postage stamps or a stack of matching postcards. When they look closely, the children will discover that these human-made things all are identical. The children have just discovered one of God's secrets – a special ability unique to God. When people make things with machines, they all come out the same. When God makes things in nature, not one is the same. The question then becomes, "Why did God do that?"
- When children ask where God is, or how we know God exists if we can't see God, take a glass of water and some sugar. Let the children taste the plain water. Put the sugar in the water and let the children stir it until all the sugar dissolves and they can no longer see it, and then let them taste the sugar water. Can they tell that the sugar is in the water, even though they can't see it? It is just the same with God. We can find evidence of God in the world even if we can't see God.

The easiest, and also the hardest, way to help children explore their questions about God is to make God-talk a regular, normal part of the classroom. Rabbi Gordis tells us that God-talk is *not* teaching our children anything factual. "Rather, God-talk is about making our children comfortable with the word 'God' as a part of their regular vocabulary." If teachers refer to God in a comfortable, regular manner – "Let's thank God before we eat our snack." "Why do you think God made the animals talk differently than we do?" "Did God build this table? How did God help build this table?" – then the children will know then that it is safe for them to talk about God and to explore their own understandings of God.

Teacher and Children: *Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad* - Listen Oh Israel the Lord our God the Lord is One.
3½-year-old child: When is God turning 2?

God and Spirituality Concepts

A child's relationship to God will change drastically with age. Although most children do not start asking questions about God until they are around 4, there are many ways to infuse the classroom with God concepts from the earliest age. Following is a list of appropriate God-concepts for every age. Each age group is built on the previous one. For each age group there is a list of concepts the teacher should understand in order to create an atmosphere in which children can build connections to God and their own spiritual selves. There also is a list of concepts about God that children of that age understand.

Infants to 24-month-olds

What the teacher needs to understand:

1. Wonder is a part of every day.
2. Blessings and God-talk are a part of every day.
3. Jewish ritual objects are a part of every day.
4. Rituals and routines, from the mundane to the sacred, are a part of every day.
5. Children's quality relationships with parents and caregivers provide a foundation for a relationship with God.
6. Just as Adam and Eve named the animals in the Torah, so too do children begin speaking and connecting to their world by naming things and people.
7. Just as God commands through *mitzvot* (commandments), the act of commanding appears in early speech patterns, as children command in order to act within their world.

What the child understands:

1. I can make things happen in my world by my words and actions.
2. I am surrounded by people who love me and care for me.
3. I explore my world.

Two-year-olds

What the teacher needs to understand:

1. Wonder is a part of every day.
2. Blessings and God-talk are a part of every day.
3. Jewish ritual objects are a part of every day.
4. Prayer and blessings are a way to talk to God.
5. Children's quality relationships with parents and caregivers provide a foundation for a relationship with God.

What the child understands:

1. We discover and appreciate things in nature.
2. We try to be *kadosh* (holy) like God. "Holy" is special the way God is special.
3. When we treat other people with love and *chesed* (kindness), we are being like God.

Three-year-olds

What the teacher needs to understand:

1. Wonder is encouraged and fostered with exploratory questions.
2. Blessings and God-talk are a part of every day. Just as we teach children to say please and thank you, we can teach that blessings to God are our way to say thank you to God.
3. Jewish ritual objects and Jewish rituals and life cycle events, such as birth and death, are opportunities to talk about God.
4. Prayer and blessings are a way to talk to God.

What the child understands:

1. We discover and appreciate things in nature.
2. We try to be kadosh like God.
3. When we treat other people with love and chesed, we are being like God.
4. Each and every person is created b'tzelem Elohim.

5. We are thankful for God's gifts.
6. God created the world, and on Shabbat God rests and so do we.

Four to five-year-olds

What the teacher needs to understand:

1. Wonder is encouraged and fostered with exploratory questions.
2. Blessings and God-talk are a part of every day.
3. Jewish ritual objects and Jewish rituals and life cycle events, such as birth and death, are opportunities to talk about God.
4. Prayer and blessings are a way to talk to God.
5. Shabbat and holidays provide different opportunities to experience God.

Cherene (teacher): Do you think God cares for us?
Rosalind (age 4): Yeah.
Seth(age 4): Every day and every…
Shira (age 4): that's why we got the mezuzah.
Seth: Every day and every night and every when and wherever you are He is watching you, and even if you are playing, even if you are making war, He watches you everywhere.
Rosalind: God wants us to pray because He wants us to be safe and stand up for ourselves and we have to know what to do when we grow up and our mommies and daddies die.
C: Hmm, wow, you thought about that a lot, I can hear.

What the child understands:

1. We can talk to God with prayers that other people wrote or with prayers that we make up in our own hearts, and with our own words.
2. We try to be kadosh like God.
3. When we treat other people with love and chesed, we are being like God.
4. Each and every person is created b'tzelem Elohim.
5. We treat every person with respect and compassion because each person is created b'tzelem Elohim.
6. We are thankful for God's gifts.
7. Blessings are a way of saying thank you to God.
8. The way that we prepare our food and the types of food we eat connects us to God.
9. God created the world, and on Shabbat God rests and so do we.
10. We are partners with God, so we help protect the earth.
11. We can learn about God from the Torah, the siddur, and Jewish stories.
12. No one knows everything about God, so we each have to keep asking and sharing our ideas.
13. We can explore our understandings of God and our relationship with God with grown-ups, including our parents, teachers and rabbis.
14. God has many names.
15. We cannot see God, but we can see evidence of God all around us, in other people, in nature, and in ourselves.
16. God is always.

Tefillot – Formal Ways to Invite God into the Classroom

Jewish prayer, *tefillah*, is a combination of *keva* – the written prayers – and *kavanah* – the intention and spirit that we put into our prayer experience. Here are suggestions for tefillah in early childhood programs for the keva of the tefillah. It is up to the teacher to add movement, music, discussion and other whole-body experiences to create the kavanah and deepen children's understanding, enjoyment, and connection to tefillah.

As we all know, children have different attention spans as they grow. It is appropriate to add more tefillot to children's routines as they get older. Creating a scaffold of tefillot to be built upon each year will give your school-wide tefillot a clear sense of development. The tefillot lists presented here include many options, so each school may decide which tefillot they wish to include. Of course, this is not an exhaustive list. A school may certainly decide to include selections from the liturgy that are not included here.

It should be noted that ending the school week with tefillot for the coming of Shabbat, as well as celebrating havdalah on Monday mornings, are wonderful ways to invite God into your school. Some Shabbat tefillot are listed below. Friday night blessings and havdalah are more fully presented in the Ritual Observance section of the vision.

- **Potential Daily or Circle-time Tefillot**

God is a part of daily life. It is important to begin the day with gratitude.

Saying Modeh Ani and Shema connects us to Jews all over the world. Closing our eyes while we say the first line of Shema helps us focus even more on our connection to God.

Modeh Ani

Modeh ani l'fa-ne-cha, melech chai v'ka-yam, she-he-che-zar-ta, bi nish-ma-ti, b'chem-la, ra-ba emu-na-te-cha.	מוֹדֶה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ, מֶלֶךְ חַי וְקַיָּם, שֶׁהֶחֱזַרְתָּ בִּי נִשְׁמָתִי בְּחֶמְלָה, רַבָּה אֱמוּנָתֶךָ.

I thank You, living, enduring Ruler, for You have returned my soul within me in kindness, great is Your faithfulness.

Mah Tovu

Ma tovu, oha'lecha Ya'akov Mish-k'no-techa Yisrael.	מַה טֹּבוּ אׇהָלֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב, מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל.

How lovely are your tents, O Jacob
Your dwelling places, O Israel.

- **Morning Brachot**

The rabbis tell us to say 100 blessings a day. In the daily liturgy, there is a list of blessings thanking God for many aspects of our lives, physically and spiritually. Following is one of these blessings. Children can be encouraged to add their own blessings as well.

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, she-asani b'tzal-mo.	בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁעָשַׂנִי בְּצַלְמוֹ.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, for creating us in Your image.

Shema

Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai echad.	שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל, ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ, ה' אֶחָד.

Listen, Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai is One

Oseh Shalom

Oseh shalom bimromav, hu ya'aseh shalom aleinu, v'al kol Yisrael, v'imru amen.	עֹשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם בִּמְרוֹמָיו, הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ, וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן.

Creator of peace in the universe, grant peace to us and to all of Israel. And we say, Amen.

Torah Service

On Mondays and Thursday, Jews all over the world read Torah. During the week, we read part of the *parashah* (Torah portion) that will be read the following Shabbat morning. In your school, you may decide to have a Torah service on a Monday or Thursday, or you may make it part of the school's pre-Shabbat celebration on Fridays.

Ki Mitzion

Ki mi'tzion teitzei Torah, u'd'var Adonai mirushalayim.	כִּי מִצִּיּוֹן תֵּצֵא תוֹרָה, וּדְבַר ה' מִירוּשָׁלָיִם.

The Torah shall spread from Zion to the whole world.

Torah Tziva Lanu Moshe

Torah, Torah Torah (2x) Torah tziva lanu Moshe. Torah, Torah, Torah (2x) Torah tziva lanu Moshe. Torah, Torah, Torah tay-nu Torah tziva lanu Moshe. (2x) Morasha k'hilat ya'akov. (3x) Torah tziva lanu Moshe.	תּוֹרָה צִוָּה לָנוּ מֹשֶׁה, מוֹרָשָׁה קְהִלַּת יַעֲקֹב.

Moses commanded us the Torah, the inheritance of the community of Yaakov.

V'zot haTorah

V'zot ha-Torah, asher sam Moshe, lif-nay b'nay Yisrael, al pi Adonai, b'yad Moshe.	וְזֹאת הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר שָׂם מֹשֶׁה לִפְנֵי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, עַל פִּי ה׳ בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה.

This is the Torah of Moses, set before the Children of Israel. The Torah is given by God through the hand of Moses.

Eitz Chayim Hi

Eitz cha'yim hi lamachazikim ba, v'tom'checha m'ushar. D'ra-che-ha darchay no'am, v'chol n'tivoteha shalom. Hashivaynu Adonai aylecha v'nashuva, chadesh yamaynu k'kedem.	עֵץ חַיִּים הִיא לַמַּחֲזִיקִים בָּהּ, וְתֹמְכֶיהָ מְאֻשָּׁר. דְּרָכֶיהָ דַרְכֵי נֹעַם, וְכָל נְתִיבוֹתֶיהָ שָׁלוֹם. הֲשִׁיבֵנוּ ה׳ אֵלֶיךָ וְנָשׁוּבָה, חַדֵּשׁ יָמֵינוּ כְּקֶדֶם.

It is a tree of life for those who hold fast to it, and all its supporters are happy. (x2)
Shalom, Shalom. (x2)

Shabbat Tefillot

Fridays are an important time for preparing for Shabbat. It is an ideal time for the entire school to gather to celebrate together. Adding parts of the Kabbalat Shabbat service to the daily tefillot in this celebration exposes children, some of whom do not go to services routinely, to some of the liturgy.

Shalom Aleichem

Shalom Aleichem is often sung at the beginning of the Friday night Shabbat meal. Due to the repetition, it is an ideal song to sing with young children.

שָׁלוֹם עֲלֵיכֶם, מַלְאֲכֵי הַשָּׁרֵת, מַלְאֲכֵי עֶלְיוֹן,
מִמֶּלֶךְ מַלְכֵי הַמְּלָכִים, הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא.
בּוֹאֲכֶם לְשָׁלוֹם, מַלְאֲכֵי הַשָּׁלוֹם, מַלְאֲכֵי עֶלְיוֹן,
מִמֶּלֶךְ מַלְכֵי הַמְּלָכִים, הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא.
בָּרְכוּנִי לְשָׁלוֹם, מַלְאֲכֵי הַשָּׁלוֹם, מַלְאֲכֵי עֶלְיוֹן,
מִמֶּלֶךְ מַלְכֵי הַמְּלָכִים, הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא.
צֵאתְכֶם לְשָׁלוֹם, מַלְאֲכֵי הַשָּׁלוֹם, מַלְאֲכֵי עֶלְיוֹן,
מִמֶּלֶךְ מַלְכֵי הַמְּלָכִים, הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא

Shalom aleichem, ma-l'chay ha-sha-reit, ma-l'chay elyon,
mi-melech, ma-l'chay ham-lachim, ha-kadosh baruch hu.
Bo-a-chem l'shalom, ma-l'chay ha-shalom, ma-l'chay elyon,
mi-melech, ma-l'chay ham-lachim, ha-kadosh baruch hu.
Bar-chu-ni l'shalom, ma-l'chay ha-shalom, ma-l'chay elyon,
mi-melech, ma-l'chay ham-lachim, ha-kadosh baruch hu.
Tzeit-chem l'shalom, ma-l'chay ha-shalom, ma-l'chay elyon,
mi-melech, ma-l'chay ham-lachim, ha-kadosh baruch hu.

Peace unto you, O ministering angels, messengers of the Most High,
the supreme Ruler of all rulers, the Holy One, blessed is God.
Enter in peace, O messengers of peace, messengers of the Most High,
the supreme Ruler of all rulers, the Holy One, blessed is God.
Bless me with peace, O messengers of peace, messengers of the Most High,
the supreme Ruler of all rulers, the Holy One, blessed is God.
Depart in peace, O messengers of peace, messengers of the Most High,
the supreme Ruler of all rulers, the Holy One, blessed is God.

Lecha Dodi

In Lecha Dodi, we welcome in the Shabbat Bride. The first two and last two verses are included here. We stand and face the door for the last verse, and when we sing "bo'i challah, bo'i challah," we bow as if we are greeting the Shabbat Bride herself.

לְכָה דוֹדִי לִקְרַאת כַּלָּה, פְּנֵי שַׁבָּת נְקַבְּלָה.
שָׁמוֹר וְזָכוֹר בְּדִבּוּר אֶחָד, הִשְׁמִיעָנוּ אֵל הַמְיֻחָד, ה' אֶחָד וּשְׁמוֹ אֶחָד, לְשֵׁם וּלְתִפְאֶרֶת וְלִתְהִלָּה. לכה
לִקְרַאת שַׁבָּת לְכוּ וְנֵלְכָה, כִּי הִיא מְקוֹר הַבְּרָכָה,
מֵרֹאשׁ מִקֶּדֶם נְסוּכָה, סוֹף מַעֲשֶׂה בְּמַחֲשָׁבָה תְּחִלָּה.
לכה
יָמִין וּשְׂמאל תִּפְרוֹצִי, וְאֶת ה' תַּעֲרִיצִי, עַל יַד אִישׁ בֶּן פַּרְצִי, וְנִשְׂמְחָה וְנָגִילָה. לכה
בּוֹאִי בְשָׁלוֹם עֲטֶרֶת בַּעְלָהּ, גַּם בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְצָהֳלָה, תּוֹךְ אֱמוּנֵי עַם סְגֻלָּה, בּוֹאִי כַלָּה, בּוֹאִי כַלָּה. לכה

Lecha dodi likrat kallah, p'nay shabbat n'kab-la.
Shamor v'zachor b'dibur echad, hish-mi-anu Eyl
ha-m'yuchad, Adonai echad ush'mo echad, l'shaym ul'tiferet
v'lit-hila.
Lecha dodi…
Likrat shabbat l'chu v'neyl-cha, ki hi m'kor ha-b'racha,
May-rosh mi-kedem n'su-cha, sof ma-aseh b'mach-shava
techila.
Lecha dodi…
Yamin u-s'mol tif-rotzi, v'et Adonai ta-aritzi,
Al yad ish ben partzi, v'nism'cha v'nagila.
Lecha dodi…
Bo'i v'shalom ateret ba-la, gam b'simcha uv-tzahola,
Toch emunay am s'gula, bo'i challah, bo'i challah.
Lecha dodi…

Come, my beloved, to greet the Bride, Let us welcome in Shabbat!

A day to remember, a day to keep
If we listen closely, silent and deep.
We each call God by a different name
But One God, just the same.

Come, let us go to greet Shabbat,
which is the source of blessing.
From the start, from long ago she was chosen,
last made but first planned.

In every way may you prosper and grow;
Reverence for God may you ever know.
May you see the redemption that God will bring;
Songs of thanksgiving to God may you sing.

Come in peace, like a beautiful bride
Into the palace of time, we'll go inside
With joy and love and sweet song,
Come in Shabbat, here we belong.

Barchu

Barchu et Adonai ha-m'vorach.
Baruch Adonai ha-m'vorach l'olam va'ed.

בָּרְכוּ אֶת ה' הַמְבֹרָךְ.
בָּרוּךְ ה' הַמְבֹרָךְ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.

Bless Adonai, Source of all blessing!
Blessed is Adonai, Source of all blessing, now and forever.

Shema

Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai echad.
Baruch shem k'vod mal-chuto l'olam va-ed.

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל, ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ, ה' אֶחָד.
בָּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.

Listen, Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai is One.
Blessed be God's name forever and ever.

V'ahavta et Adonai Elohecha
b'chol l'vav'cha, uv'chol
nafsh'cha, uv'chol m'odecha.
V'hayu had'varim ha-eileh
Asher anochi m'tzav'cha
hayom al l'vavecha.
V'shinantam l'vanecha
v'dibarta bam b'shivt'cha
b'veitecha, uv'lecht'cha
vaderech, uv'shochb'cha uv'kumecha.
Uk'shartam l'ot al yadecha,
v'hayu l'totafot bayn einecha.
Uch'tavtam al mezuzot beitecha
uvish'arecha.

וְאָהַבְתָּ אֵת ה' אֱ-לֹהֶיךָ, בְּכָל
לְבָבְךָ, וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ, וּבְכָל מְאֹדֶךָ.
וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה, אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי
מְצַוְּךָ הַיּוֹם, עַל לְבָבֶךָ. וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם
לְבָנֶיךָ, וְדִבַּרְתָּ בָּם, בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתֶךָ,
וּבְלֶכְתְּךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ, וּבְשָׁכְבְּךָ, וּבְקוּמֶךָ.
וּקְשַׁרְתָּם לְאוֹת עַל יָדֶךָ, וְהָיוּ
לְטֹטָפֹת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ. וּכְתַבְתָּם עַל
מְזוּזוֹת בֵּיתֶךָ וּבִשְׁעָרֶיךָ.

You shall love Adonai your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might. All these commandments that I give you this day, you shall teach them to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you go out, when you go to bed at night and when you wake up in the morning. Tie them as a sign upon your hand, and keep them in front of your eyes. Write them on your doorposts so you remember my commandments when you come and go.

Mi Chamocha

Mi chamocha ba-eilim, Adonai?
Mi kamocha, ne-dar bakodesh,
nora t'hilot, osei feleh?

מִי כָמֹכָה בָּאֵלִם ה׳,
מִי כָּמֹכָה נֶאְדָּר בַּקֹּדֶשׁ,
נוֹרָא תְהִלֹּת, עֹשֵׂה פֶלֶא.

Who is like you, Adonai, among other gods?
Who is like you, glorious in holiness,
awesome in praises, doing miracles?

Oseh Shalom

Oseh shalom bimromav, hu
ya'aseh shalom aleinu, v'al kol
Yisrael, v'imru amen.

עֹשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם בִּמְרוֹמָיו, הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה
שָׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ, וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל,
וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן.

Creator of peace in the universe, grant peace to us and to all of Israel. And we say, Amen.

Adon Olam

Only the first verse of Adon Olam is included here.

אֲדוֹן עוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר מָלַךְ, בְּטֶרֶם כָּל יְצִיר נִבְרָא.
לְעֵת נַעֲשָׂה בְחֶפְצוֹ כֹל, אֲזַי מֶלֶךְ שְׁמוֹ נִקְרָא.

Adon olam asher malach, b'terem kol y'tzir niv-ra.
L'eit na-asa v'cheftzo kol, azai meleh sh'mo nikra.

Eternal Lord who reigned before anything was created.
When all was made by his will, God was acknowledged as Ruler.

Informal Ways to Invite God into the Classroom

Through each day, and over the course of the year, the Jewish early childhood educator can create an environment that nurtures and supports the growth of Jewish identity and spirituality of children and their parents. Children express their ideas and theories about the world around them using many different languages, including art, painting, dancing, and singing. They use those same languages when they express their spirituality and their ideas about God.

By helping the children develop healthy relationships with one another and at the same time develop a growing concept of God, the teacher can informally invite God into the classroom as a part of everyday life. Some ways to accomplish this include:

- Greetings – greet each child with a warm "boker tov" or hearty "shalom!" each morning, and use Hebrew instead of English names, to set the tone for the day.

- Mezuzah - You can model the *minhag* (custom) of reaching out and touching or kissing the mezuzah, as a real connection to God and to our belief in God's presence in our lives.

- Sacred space – Use Jewish books, pictures, and ritual objects to create a sense of sacred space within the classroom. As children interact with Jewish stories and objects, these ideas and items become a part of their everyday world. Their experiences can be documented with photos and a brief dictation or description, which makes the sacredness of the classroom life visible to all and allows the children to reflect and expand on their own experiences.

- Classroom jobs and daily routines – Jewish values abound in the activities already going on in the early childhood classroom. Through their everyday routines and jobs, children can learn *mitzvo*t (commandments) and *middot* (virtues) – taking care of pets *(tza'ar ba'aly cha'yim)*, watering plants *(tikkun olam),* being careful of wasting supplies *(ba'al tash-chit),* sharing food *(ma'achil r'ay-vim),* welcoming guests *(hachnasat orchim),* returning lost articles *(hashavat avaydah)* and so on. Stories about Jewish values can be found in the Ethical Behavior section of the vision.

- Making the ordinary holy – when we wash our hands before snack and learn and recite the blessing *al netilat yada'yim*, we connect the everyday act to God. Similarly, blessings recited appropriately before lunch, when we eat a new food or see a rainbow, or in thankfulness for a special event all elevate ordinary times to holy moments in the children's lives. Even when there is not an official blessing, or we do not know what it is, we can bring God into any moment by offering a prayer of the heart *(bracha she'b'lev)* such as, "Isn't it wonderful that God brought you such a good friend!"

- Talk with the children. Discuss how the class might create a sacred space where they can talk to God. How do we talk to God? Quietly or noisily? Happily or sadly? With all of our bodies? With our hands? With our minds? With our hearts? Be receptive to all of the children's answers, and seek to expand and extend their feelings and understandings.

- Seize the teachable moment. Use the children's personal experiences as they are shared with their classmates to create sacred space in the classroom. Some examples might be:
    - the birth of a sibling or a cousin
    - a bar or bat mitzvah a child in the class has attended
    - the marriage of a close relative or friend
    - the miracles of nature and the cycle of the year (first snowfall, first flower in spring, a rainbow, and so on)
    - the sad events that may be part of a young child's experiences, such as the death of someone close to them or the loss of a beloved pet

  Each of these happy or sad events calls for a Jewish response and provides the opportunity, under the wise and sensitive guidance of the teacher, to create sacred space within the classroom.

- Hiddur mitzvah – Hiddur mitzvah is a way children can express their creativity and spirituality. The Hebrew word *mitzvah* means commandment and *hiddur* means to make beautiful. Thus, the concept of hiddur mitzvah can be viewed as a directive to make commandments and their fulfillment beautiful. Jewish ritual objects required in mitzvot should be as aesthetically pleasing as possible in order to glorify God and the commandments. If children create these pieces themselves, using beautiful materials and their own designs, this too infuses the ritual with added meaning and ownership.

- Music and movement - It is clear that music stirs the soul. When the children listen to Jewish and other beautiful music, play instruments, sing, and dance, their whole bodies and beings express their feelings and spirituality. Using sign language while saying prayers such as the Shema or Modeh Ani also engages the whole body, so that the spiritual can be expressed in a sensory manner.

- Focus – You can explain the custom of shutting our eyes when we say the Shema or bless the candles as we light them in a way that helps the children connect to God. We close our eyes so that we are not distracted by things happening around us and we can think more clearly of God as we sing the prayers.

Children are spiritual beings, and God has a fundamental place in the Conservative Jewish early childhood classroom. Working together formally and informally, both teachers and children can grow their relationships with God, allowing these relationships to become integral parts of their lives.

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Jewish Learning

חֲנֹךְ לַנַּעַר עַל־פִּי דַרְכּוֹ
גַּם כִּי־יַזְקִין לֹא־יָסוּר מִמֶּנָּה

Raise up a child in the way he should go,
Even when he is old he will not depart from it.

Proverbs 22:6

Lifelong study is one of the highest forms of worship of God, and it is the obligation and privilege of every Jew. Jewish education, which should not be limited to children, is a preparation for lifelong Jewish study and engagement. Rabbi Jerome Epstein, United Synagogue's executive vice president, teaches that the Conservative movement has a distinct approach to study. We examine texts critically and we bring knowledge from other disciplines to help us better understand our own heritage. At the same time, we approach the text with a commitment to preserve our sacred traditions. Jewish study is essential because it allows us to appreciate our past, understand our present, and chart where we wish to go in the future.

In his definitive article, *The Sacred Cluster: The Core Values of Conservative Judaism*, Ismar Schorsch, chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary from 1987 to 2006, names the study of Torah as one of those core values, and says, "What Conservative Judaism brings to this ancient [tradition of study] are the tools and perspectives of modern scholarship blended with traditional learning and empathy. No matter how differently done, the study of Torah remains at the heart of the Conservative spiritual enterprise." http://www.jtsa.edu/x497.xml

The Conservative early childhood program is the gateway to Jewish life. Jewish study is at the core of the program for the children, at their own levels, but equally importantly it is at the core of the program for the parents and for the staff.

The learning in which children engage is designed to instill a joyful, solid foundation for the love of being Jewish. Providing a high quality Jewish education that also is developmentally appropriate is an art form. Parents are essential learners in the Conservative early childhood setting. Many parents who bring their children to a Jewish early childhood program are just reentering the Jewish world, just beginning a Jewish journey for their family. The school must do everything in its power to insure that parents can be knowledgeable teachers for their children. This means meeting parents where they are in a nonjudgmental manner, and drawing them into a journey of Jewish learning. Of course, every family's journey is different. Families with one Jewish parent that have chosen a Jewish preschool may require, or desire, different considerations and guidance. We hope that families with no Jewish parents, who can be found in some Conservative early childhood programs, will become ambassadors for the Jewish people after having positive experiences.

Teaching in a Conservative Jewish early childhood program means that the teacher and the director, too, are journeying. Each director and teacher should see her or himself as a Jewish educator – an ongoing learner. Being an educator in Jewish early childhood setting requires being willing to learn and serve as a role model of Jewish values. Jewish educators are lifelong learners.

Staff who are ongoing learners, who offer learning opportunities to others, bring to children a world of joyful Jewish learning. In turn, parents' Jewish identity and practice is strengthened by their children's participation in a Jewish early childhood program. The entire community is strengthened when Jewish learning opportunities are strong components of an early childhood setting.

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Children's Learning

The goals for children's learning in a Jewish early childhood program include laying a strong foundation, by joyfully connecting the child to his or her Jewish self. This learning includes many important building blocks, as we seek to reach the whole Jewish child. In a Conservative early childhood program, these essential elements include Jewish time, specifically Shabbat and Jewish holidays; God; Torah; Jewish folklore; Israel and the Hebrew language; and Jewish values. Content for many of these areas can be found elsewhere in this guide, and in other resources such as Jewish teachers' manuals and various websites, including www.uscj.org, and so are not expanded upon here. Two additional considerations for a Conservative early childhood program are discussed below.

Identity

Jewish early childhood educators agree on the importance of Jewish identity but face the challenge of defining the type of Jewish identity they seek to cultivate (Vogelstein, 2004). Conservative early childhood programs strive to nurture a strong Jewish identity and promote a love of Judaism. By creating an environment that is rich in Jewish values, experiences, observances, and objects, we enable the children to live as educated Jews.

Jewish identity cannot be promoted in a vacuum. It must be part of school and family life. When we work with young children, we cannot separate their identity from that of their family. Jewish identity at school must be reinforced in family life in order to develop fully.

Even when a school does a wonderful job of engaging children and turning them on to Jewish life, providing space and support for each child to develop his or her own Jewish identity, lack of follow-up at home can diminish the effects. We do know, however, that children can influence the family's participation in Jewish life.

While our schools nurture a Jewish identity based on Conservative ideals, we acknowledge that many families in the early childhood program are not from a Conservative background. Our schools include families from the entire spectrum of Jewish life as well as non-Jewish families. We need to seek some sort of balance, being true to the missions of our schools and synagogues while also validating each family's own individual identity. The challenge is to create a program that nourishes Jewish identity but is inclusive of the diversity of Jewish practices and people.

Low-impact strategies:

- Display pictures of Jewish children around the world.
- Introduce children to traditional Jewish foods from different countries (including charoset, breads, cookies, and other foods).
- Play music of various groups of Jews.
- Invite Jewish people of all nationalities to visit and speak in the classroom.

- Make holiday celebrations as joyful and engaging as possible.
- Send home explanations frequently of what children are doing and learning Jewishly.
- Familiarize children with their Hebrew names.

High-impact strategies:

- Discuss as a staff the school's vision of the kind of Jewish identity it wants for its children. How does this school define Jewish identity? What elements does it include? What are some experiences that the school might create for the children in order to foster this identity?
- Teachers have getting-to-know you conversations with parents about their children, and ask about parents' Jewish (or other) identities, and what they hope for their children.
- Enable children to recognize their own actions as Jewish behaviors by labeling them. ("You just did a mitzvah!")
- Make God-talk safe in the classroom by mentioning God. ("We can thank God for this beautiful tree.")
- Convey such abstract concepts as mitzvot, spirituality and Israel through developmentally appropriate practices, including songs, stories, rituals, and hands-on experiences.
- Address children's questions and concerns sensitively and responsively.

Integration

Jewish practice does not exist in a vacuum. We cannot portion out a section of our day for Jewish curriculum. It is our obligation to live as Jews and make our Judaism a part of every aspect of our developmentally appropriate curriculum. Our mission is to find ways to integrate Jewish values, concepts, and vocabulary into our everyday school experience and curriculum. Every facet of our programs – the physical environment, curriculum and family relationships – must be used to enable our children to live Jewishly. As Jewish educators, we must make our classrooms, curricula, and connections to our families reflect that we are Jewish all the time and everywhere. It is who we are.

While our classroom environment reflects our Jewish values and curriculum, we would not be fulfilling our obligations as Jewish educators unless we take care to actively find ways to help our children expand their knowledge and incorporate our Jewish values into their daily life. We must help our children build Jewish connections through interactive play, and by basing new learning experiences on previous ones. Jewish life and learning must be integrated into all aspects of the program. Children are not tourists in the Jewish world; we must help them to really live there. The curriculum should be related to the Jewish calendar and Jewish values, incorporating a strong sense of community.

Low-impact strategies:

- Post photos of the children engaged in Jewish activities (making or eating challah, touching a mezuzah, sharing Shabbat).
- Write and display stories about children engaging in Jewish activities (celebrating Purim, setting the Shabbat table).
- Hang a mezuzah on the door at a child's eye level
- Label the classroom in English and Hebrew

High-impact strategies:

- Invite families into the classroom, both for holidays and Shabbat and also when nothing overtly Jewish is going on. There's Jewish value in having the families participate in class
- Find Jewish values and ideas in all aspects of the curriculum and integrate them into the curriculum. (See the Ethical Behavior section of the Vision.)
- Include Israel in the curriculum year-round.

Family Education and Learning

> Fact: Teaching Torah to toddlers can lead to a lifetime of Jewish learning
> Fact: Jewish preschools serve as a gateway to Jewish life for the entire family
> (Sue Fishkoff, Beyond Torah for Tots, 2006, JTA special report http://joi.org/bloglinks/Preschool,%20JTA.htm)

The importance of the family in early childhood education has been validated by many educators, because early childhood education provides the ultimate opportunity to reach these young Jewish families. They are there, seeking a school with a good reputation, enrolling in Jewish programs and thus taking the first step to connect to the Jewish community. In many instances, consciously or subconsciously, gaining the skills and knowledge they need to create a Jewish life for their families is a key reason they pursued a Jewish early childhood experience for their child (Defining Excellence in EC Jewish Education: 2002). For others, the Jewish education components become an added benefit, but not their primary goal in selecting a Jewish preschool. In either situation, as Ilene Vogelstein, special projects director of CAJE, explained, "the early childhood experience, as the start of Jewish practices at home and the understanding of Jewish values, is the gateway for families to move into future Jewish experiences."

The fact that preschools have a profound effect on the Jewish life of the entire family highlights the need to bring parents into the preschool process. This may be many young parents' first connection or reconnection with Judaism in any way since their own childhoods. It is therefore most important to be open and welcoming to all Jewish families, support these families, and nurture that connection, thus leading to continuity for both the child and the family. We know that the family's relationship to Judaism can positively influence the child's own relationship to Judaism, and that the child's exposure to formalized Jewish learning can inspire parents to start thinking about their own relationship to the Jewish community, practices, identity, and life. Early childhood programs often become mini-communities and offer support while bridging the gap into Jewish institutions and the larger Jewish community.

"Teach the child – reach the family" surely is the strongest statement supporting family involvement. Giving parents the tools they need to take their family on a Jewish journey must be a priority in a Conservative early childhood program. This means providing parents with the tools, time, and opportunities to learn everything that their children are learning, and more. It means crafting easy ways for parents to take home what their children are learning in school. It means meeting parents where they are, and drawing them into a journey of Jewish learning. It means connecting parents to the synagogue and to the broader Jewish community, so that the learning continues when their children leave the early childhood program.

Expanding Knowledge

The literature emphasizes the importance of educating parents so that they are able to participate in Jewish life and be role models for their children. The goal is to give parents the opportunity to expand their own knowledge by making these experiences comfortable, available on all levels, nonthreatening, and fun. This can be done in a variety of ways, appealing to different parents' various learning styles. Workshops, small groups or *chavurot* (small group of families who gather to share Jewish experiences in an informal setting), Torah study, and family friendly activities frequently are successful.

Low-impact strategies:

- Provide a list of internet sites that are user-friendly and can be read and used at the parents' convenience.
- Send written information home with the child on the various holidays; the packet should include both adult- and child-friendly material. These sources can provide information about what is being done in the preschool and suggest activities that can enhance the holiday celebration at home.
- Send home information about adult education programs sponsored by the synagogue or the community.

High-impact strategies:

- Invite parents to join other preschool families in chavurot and learning groups defined by their interests.
- Set up workshops with hands-on activities to familiarize the adults with the rituals and symbols of the various holidays. (For example, run a model seder.)
- Invite interested parents into a Torah study group taught by a member of the professional staff.
- Make available or set up Hebrew study groups for parents interested in learning the language.
- Encourage parents to explore courses offered by the Melton Parent Education Program or others.

Fostering Community

Because people often live far from their immediate families, preschools can fill an important community-building function. Early childhood programs give families the opportunity to meet others in similar situations, as they get together informally and form bonds that last long after the affiliation with the preschool is completed. Jewish early childhood programs can take this one step further, infusing these social interactions with Jewish content, often leading to further Jewish community involvement, commitment, and synagogue affiliation. Any activity that makes families feel welcomed and supported in their daily lives most likely will be successful.

Low-impact strategies:

- Have a parent greeter welcome new families to the preschool, answer their questions, and introduce them to other preschool families.
- Begin the year with classroom coffee meetings, introducing the families from that class to each other. This makes it easier to arrange play dates for the children and can help parents develop friendships with each other.
- Have a representative of the synagogue's sisterhood or men's club invite preschool parents to become involved in their activities
- Create additional programming that is inviting to new families with babies to bring them into a Jewish preschool.
- Have the synagogue reach out to new families, explain the traditions involving new babies to them, and invite them to join the synagogue for baby namings and family services.
- Organize intergenerational activities with the children. Invite the parents to join their children in sing-alongs and in sharing holiday experiences with the seniors in the larger community. If possible, invite the seniors into the preschool and ask parents to help.
- Provide child care and/or children's programming at Shabbat services so families can come to services together.

High-impact strategies:

- Help families form a bikur cholim committee to help with meals or provide emotional support when families find themselves dealing with illness or death.
- Have a simcha committee to recognize preschool families' joyous milestone, including births, adoptions, or new jobs. A Welcome Baby box complete with a teddy bear, information about preschool and parent education classes, and a mazal tov from the community always is a nice touch.
- Host Shabbat dinners so small groups with similar interests can connect.
- Establish a chavurah program so new families can be welcomed in a comfortable, nonthreatening way. Match "veteran" families with newer-to-the-school families.
- Invite the families to participate in any celebrations of Israel given by the synagogue or the greater community.

Continuity

The programs developed in early childhood settings establish the foundation for Jewish identity upon which both lifelong Jewish learning and a connection to the Jewish community can be built. These programs are the bridge to further Jewish educational involvement. The professionals and lay leadership of synagogues need to understand, respect, and support the importance of early childhood education. Once a connection to Jewish learning and the Jewish community is firmly in place, many families will continue their children's education as they affiliate with the synagogue themselves.

Low-impact strategies:

- Suggest that the director of the religious school become a visible and familiar presence in the preschool, even acting as another resource person for the families.
- Invite children ready to enter the religious school (perhaps the Sunday programming) to visit it, along with their families, so they all understand what this next level of education offers.
- Establish a stronger curricular link with the religious school, so its curriculum can be built on that of the preschool. Share this curriculum with the parents when they visit the preschool and in writing.
- Provide parents with links to the websites of the religious school and local day schools, so parents can see what these institutions do.
- Meet with day school directors and offer parents ways to learn about day school education.
- Post information about both the religious school and day schools on a bulletin board in the preschool.

High-impact strategies:

- Set up coffees with parents of the religious school so your preschool parents can have a better idea of what to expect next year.
- Invite the children into actual classes, perhaps even accompanied by someone from the preschool staff, so that they are comfortable with the transition.
- If at all possible, have a teacher from the early childhood program teach kindergarten in the religious school, so the preschool children, frequently the bulk of the class population, have a continuation of curriculum.

Jewish Living

The impact of Jewish preschool on the families of its students has been reported in many studies. In many instances, the reported changes include increased Jewish observance, identity, and education.

> Nearly 70 percent of the interviewed families were "doing something different" as a result of their child's Jewish preschool experience. Jewish ritual and lifestyle changes included lighting Shabbat candles, joining a synagogue and deciding to send a child to a Jewish day school.
>
> (Beck 2002)

One of the goals of Jewish family education is to attract families to Jewish life, its commitments, and its values, not just to joining a synagogue. Each family's progress toward this goal must be continually addressed and nurtured since each family is unique and affected by different things.

Low-impact strategies:

- Encourage families to take baby steps in incorporating Judaism into their daily lives, finding their comfort level and growing from there.
- Help make Shabbat a part of a family's weekly routine by making challah and candles available to them every week.
- Provide information about opportunities for the families to become involved in tzedakah activities.
- Send home information or recommend websites that give guidelines on creating Jewish memories.
- Send children home with Shabbat boxes that include everything that is necessary, including prayers, to celebrate Shabbat at home.

High-impact strategies:

- Invite parents to participate in a Friday night, Tot Shabbat, and/or havdalah service so that they can become familiar with these rituals and incorporate them into their family practice.
- Sponsor workshops for families to familiarize them with customs or rituals that may not be a part of their family experience; for example, attaching a mezuzah to a doorpost.
- Help parents to work together to build a sukkah and invite other families to share in the mitzvah of eating in it.
- Plan a Mitzvah Day to help families incorporate mitzvot into their everyday lives.

Identity

Research indicates that a child's Jewish identity is intricately linked to the family's Jewish identity:

- Parents, especially mothers, play a major role in their child's image of God, their moral development, and the transmission of Jewish values.
- Children's identity is inseparable from their parents' identity.
- Early childhood educators have a unique opportunity to build close relationships with parents.

(Vogelstein, 2004)

Jewish behaviors such as ritual practice, forming social affiliations through marriage and friendships, participating in Jewish art and culture, and joining Jewish organizations and institutions are indicators of a strong Jewish identity. As Jewish early childhood educators, we must be proactive in connecting families to the Jewish community and fostering these behaviors. Since we know that children can influence the family's participation in Jewish life, Jewish early childhood educators must connect with families in order to integrate concepts and experiences. As educators, we must strive to connect

what we teach in class with real life events. We must reach out to families and help them to connect the Jewish learning in the classroom with Jewish family life at home.

Jewish early childhood programs need to reexamine the relationships that they have with families. Marvell Ginsberg (1992) reports that early childhood Jewish education "is aimed at creating a healthy cadre of self-accepting, knowledgeable, Jewish children; but perhaps even more important, positive parents."

Programs must find ways to provide Jewish education for parents and help them to understand the importance their actions have on their children. Parents whose child participates in Jewish early childhood education and who engage in Jewish education opportunities for themselves strengthen their own Jewish identity and practice.

Low-impact strategies:

- Create a welcoming community.
- Offer nonthreatening orientation programs, informal parent meetings and social gatherings.
- Encourage families to host events, including model Shabbat dinners and Sukkot celebrations, in their homes for other EC families.
- Send home educational materials, background information, and music.
- Arrange for clergy to become familiar with families and make themselves accessible to them.

High-impact strategies:

- Offer infant and child care for working Jewish families.
- Develop relationships between the EC program and such Jewish organizations as B'nai Brith, Hadassah, ORT, and any of the synagogue's social groups.
- Offer synagogue membership free or at a reduced rate.
- Set up a lending library of great Jewish books for the parents.
- Ask the synagogue's clergy and its early childhood staff and outside Jewish educators to provide educational programs to the parents.

Staff Learning

Jewish education is a process of lifelong learning. All the participants, especially the early childhood director and teachers, are lifelong learners. In a Conservative Jewish early childhood program, all adult participants share a willingness to learn on an ongoing basis.

Professional Development

Early childhood educators are required to keep learning. Every state requires a certain number of hours in continuing education. But in a Jewish early childhood program, staff members participate in professional development that increases not only their knowledge of developmentally appropriate practice but expands their Jewish learning as well. Main areas of Jewish learning for staff include Jewish time, particularly Shabbat and Jewish holidays; God; Torah, as in the Five Books of Moses; Jewish values; Jewish folklore; and Israel and the Hebrew language. Directors must provide their staff with opportunities for their own development and personal Jewish growth.

Low-impact strategies:

- Offer timely written materials and provide opportunities for discussion.
- Take time during staff meetings to discuss the staff meeting shiurim http://uscj.org/Archive7067.html.

High-impact strategies:

- Provide *chevruta* style learning (text study in pairs).
- Offer incentives, such as bonuses or salary increases, for taking local or on-line Jewish adult education courses.
- Arrange mentoring opportunities that pair new and seasoned staff members for collegial discussions and growth.
- Offer workshops with hands-on activities to familiarize the staff with the rituals and symbols of the various holidays and other Jewish aspects of the curriculum.

God

At its very core, a Conservative Jewish early childhood program revolves around the concept of God. Educators must be willing to explore their own relationships with God in order to be comfortable talking about God with children. Staff must be open and willing to entertain a discussion about God, which may include the use of basic Jewish texts, including Torah, liturgy, midrash or Jewish folktales. By having these discussions at an adult level, staff members will have a better idea of how to invite and incorporate God into the classroom environment.

Low-impact strategies:

- Offer timely written materials and provide opportunities for discussion, either with a mentor or chevruta partner.
- Read the God and Spirituality section of the Vision.

High-impact strategies:

- Create role playing opportunities to explore teachable moments in conversations with children – "It's raining outside – why did God make the rain? God created the rain to feed the things that live outdoors, like plants and trees."
- Study common brachot that show different ways of saying thank you to God.

Jewish Values

When educators are familiar and comfortable with Jewish values and incorporate them into their own behavior, they are better able to recognize them, label them, and encourage them in the daily life of the classroom. Collecting tzedakah, visiting nursing homes, and giving canned goods to a food pantry are tangible examples of incorporating values into the classroom environment. As teachers model Jewish values, children will see how to communicate, treat each other and the world around them, and live a life of Torah.

Low-impact strategies:

- Offer a workshop to introduce staff to the variety of children's books that support the teaching of a particular value or set of values. Documents such as "Is The Rainbow Fish Jewish?" (http://www.jewishlibraries.org/ajlweb/publications/proceedings/proceedings2002/estrin.pdf) can be helpful.
- Read the Ethical Behavior section of the Vision. Keep the stories in the back of your mind and use them when they fit in class.
-

High-impact strategies:

- Create role playing opportunities to explore teachable moments in conversations with children – "Is that the hat David lost? Returning it to him is a very Jewish thing to do –it's called *hashavat avaydah*."
- Strive to be a role model of Jewish values all the time.
- Recognize Jewish values being modeled by other staff members ("When Morah Sara saved that bug from the children and put it outside, she modeled *kavod habriot* (honor for all living things) and also *tza'ar ba'alay cha'yim* (avoiding cruelty to animals).

Shabbat and Holidays

Teaching about and celebrating Shabbat and other Jewish holidays allows children to grow in their understanding of what it means to be Jewish and part of the Jewish

community. In order to be comfortable teaching Shabbat and Jewish holidays, staff must have a combination of personal experience on an adult level and basic knowledge of the rituals and customs associated with Shabbat and holidays.

Low-impact strategies:

- Provide literature and discussion of the holiday at faculty meeting
- Offer workshops with hands-on activities to familiarize the staff with the rituals and symbols of Shabbat and Jewish holidays.

High-impact strategies:

- Celebrate a holiday with the staff several weeks *before* the holiday occurs so the staff will live the experience, gaining and understanding of the laws and *minhagim* (customs) of each holiday.
- Encourage attendance at specific events, such as megillah reading or Simchat Torah services.
- Ask the director, rabbi and observant families to invite teachers to join them for Shabbat and holiday celebrations in a real home setting. Encourage staff to observe and celebrate the holidays, because the way to understand them is to live them. The goal is that staff members will become empowered to create their own meaningful experience in their homes and classrooms.

Torah

Jewish texts, including the Torah (the Five Books of Moses) as well as Jewish folklore, have much to add to the Jewish early childhood classroom. Teachers who are familiar with these texts are able to enrich their classrooms and strengthen the foundations of their children's Jewish identities. In his opening address, given on September 2006, Arnold Eisen, the chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, said:

> …solid, critical scholarship is an integral part of the teaching and learning of Torah. We simply cannot know what it might mean to follow the Torah's teachings or walk in its paths or serve God or help one another unless we have so deeply explored the variety and complexity of meanings and paths generated over the years that we can knowingly carry them forward, keep them alive, in radically new circumstances. …. We let down the tradition if we do not pass it on enlivened by this effort: rendered live to others because it has come to life in us.
>
> http://www.jtsa.edu/x1987.xml

Low-impact strategies:

- Provide resources for sharing Torah with young children, such as First Steps in Learning Torah with Young Children (2 volumes – Bereshit and Sh'mot) from the Board of Jewish Education of New York (www.bjeny.org) or Torah Alive (www.urjpress.com)

High-impact strategies:

- Engage staff in Torah study with a great teacher.
- Discuss Torah stories as a staff, with a focus on how to share the stories with children of various ages.

Israel and Hebrew

Israel is the Jewish homeland. A love for Israel and a feeling of connection to it is a critical part of a Jewish education. The Conservative movement strives to increase ties between American Jews and Israel and supports Israel in a myriad of ways, including the active use of United Synagogue's Fuchsberg Jerusalem Center. It is challenging to teach about Israel and integrate it into the curriculum when you have not been there, although it is far from impossible. It is a director's task to build in her staff (and herself) a familiarity with and connection to Israel, so that staff is able to weave a connection with Israel into daily classroom life.

Hebrew is the language of the Torah as well as of Israel, and Hebrew should be woven into conversation throughout the day. Language is more than a way of communicating. Learning Hebrew is a tangible indication of identifying with Jewish religious tradition and people. In "Monolinguism Can Be Cured," Frieda Robins posits that:

> Language acquisition is directly linked to cultural beliefs and practices. Our understanding of the relationship between language and culture dictates that the study and mastery of the Hebrew language are essential to the transmission of the authentic voice of Jewish tradition to Jewish American children.

Learning Hebrew strengthens Jewish identity and creates a bond to Israel and its culture. We want our children to be familiar with our vocabulary and with Hebrew expressions so they can find a sense of belonging in our Jewish world. Teachers are expected to learn the Hebrew of blessings and tefillot that are part of the daily curriculum, as well as simple Hebrew songs that are sung daily, to celebrate Shabbat, and to mark Jewish holidays. In addition, incorporating Hebrew words and phrases every day creates an important connection to Israel for both the children and the teachers. Staff must be willing to learn and use Hebrew and should be ready to learn more as it relates to the curriculum.

Low-impact strategies:

- Provide lists of appropriate Hebrew words to introduce in the classroom.
- Provide workshops on basic Hebrew, including brachot used in the classroom.
- Provide a list of movies and books about modern Israeli life.
- Provide CDs of modern Israeli musicians for the classrooms.
- Host a lunch for staff featuring typical Israeli foods.
- Start the day singing Hatikvah.
- Label items in the classroom in Hebrew and English.
- Send the Hebrew used in the classroom home for parents to learn and reinforce.

High-impact strategies:

- Ask the staff to incorporate appropriate, meaningful Hebrew vocabulary words into the curriculum and their daily conversations. Phrases can include *boker tov* (good morning), and *todah rabbah* (thank you very much), *b'vakasha* (please and you're welcome). When they count objects, they can sometimes do so in Hebrew.
- Insure that Hebrew songs and brachot are a daily part of the classroom routine.
- Invite Israeli parents to come to talk to the teachers about aspects of Israeli life.
- Encourage staff to research connections to Israel for every curriculum unit.
- Give teachers stipends for Hebrew classes.
- Organize a staff trip to Israel.

Community Support

The value of connections between clergy, members of the synagogue leadership, educators, and families in the early childhood program cannot be overstated. A broad support system including these community members promotes a partnership for Jewish living and learning. Efforts should be made to bring these groups together in a variety of settings.

Low-impact strategies:

- Invite the rabbi, the congregation's president, and other appropriate professional staff members and volunteers to parent orientations.
- Read the "Working With Clergy (and Other Key Community Members)" section of the Vision.

High-impact strategies:

- Invite the rabbi and the president of the congregation to staff orientations and planning sessions to help establish personal relationships, in order to help forge a connection of shared interest in and responsibility for the education and welfare of the families.
- Invite the rabbi to teach ongoing in-service sessions on a particular holiday or Torah portion. This can be done with parents and staff together.
- Encourage the EC staff to go to the clergy to ask Jewish questions.

Continuity

The most valuable early childhood educators are able to serve as consultants to parents who seek information. Staff must be up to date not only on child development but also on Jewish knowledge in order to be able to offer suggestions on how to incorporate Jewish classroom practices into the home. Staff should be able to serve as tour guides for each family's Jewish journey.

Low-impact strategies:

- Make sure the staff knows where to send parents for answers to different sorts of questions.
- Brainstorm suggestions at staff meetings on how parents can incorporate the Jewish practices the children learn at school at home.
- Provide the teachers with written materials on holiday observance to give parents. Include song sheets, Hebrew vocabulary, and information on Jewish observance.

High-impact strategies:

- Foster relationships between parents and teachers. Help parents get to know teachers by giving them some biographical information. Provide support and time so parents and teachers have a chance to speak, possibly by having extra staff at drop off/pick up times or paying teachers for time spent emailing parents.
- Hold in-house parent/teacher coffee meetings to provide the opportunity for staff and parents to get to know each other. Invite the rabbi to these gatherings as well.
- Insure that the teachers who work with 4 year olds, minimally, are familiar with ongoing Jewish education opportunities, particularly the synagogue's religious school and local day schools. Encourage teachers to talk with parents about Jewish education opportunities for their children.
- Invite the synagogue religious school principal in for a meet and greet or coffee with the parents of 4 year olds who will be leaving the preschool at the end of the school year.
- Have the 4 year olds' teachers visit the local day schools, with a focus on the kindergarten classes, to familiarize them with the programs available to parents who want to send their children to day school.

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Ritual Observance

Ritual Observance and Halachah

Rituals are the physical expressions of our Jewish beliefs. They are the symbols by which we can learn and express our spirituality as a community. Jewish rituals are shaped by *halachah*, Jewish law. "Since each age requires new interpretations and applications of the received norms, halachah is an ongoing process. It is thus both an ancient tradition, rooted in the experience and texts of our ancestors, and a contemporary way of life, giving value, shape and direction to our lives. For many Conservative Jews, halachah is indispensable first and foremost because it is what the Jewish community understands God's will to be. Moreover, it is a concrete expression of our ongoing encounter with God" (*Emet Ve-Emunah*, p. 21).

Conservative Judaism seeks always to meld the traditional with the modern. To this end, Conservative Judaism approaches halachah with deep reverence. Within the Conservative framework, Jewish law must be preserved, but "it is subject to interpretation by those who have mastered it, and…the interpretation placed upon it by duly authorized masters in every generation must be accepted with as much reverence as those which were given in previous generations" (Dr. Louis Finkelstein, as quoted in Klein, 1979).

Beginning with the Talmudic period, and continuing ever since, rabbis have recognized that the realities of life in the Jewish community change continually. They took pains to insure that as changes in the law were required, they were made only by the rabbinic leaders of the community, not by individuals. We in the Conservative community are committed to carrying on the rabbinic tradition of preserving and enhancing halachah by making appropriate changes to it through rabbinic decision. This follows from our conviction that halachah is imbued with a divine element, making it indispensable for each generation.

Common sense tells us that there cannot be a rule for everything. The same law can be observed in a variety of ways. The rabbis of old said that in some cases, local custom (*minhag*) had the force of law. For example, halachah determines basic prayers, although the form of the liturgy and melodies vary widely, with different but strongly held minhagim (plural of minhag) in use in different parts of the world. The bar mitzvah also was a folk ritual that became an integral part of official Judaism. Other examples of minhagim that have come to hold the force of law are the celebration of Simchat Torah and wearing a kipah (although the idea of head coverings goes way back). The existence of folk customs shows that halachah was an important part of everyday life that could be adapted to fit local circumstances and understandings.

It is highly significant to note that each congregation's authority for religious practice is its rabbi, functioning as its *mara d'atra*, or religious decision maker. The congregational rabbi looks to the Conservative movement's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, which issues rulings shaping the Conservative community's practice. While this

committee and the Rabbinical Assembly set forth parameters that govern all Conservative rabbis, within those bounds there are variations of practice recognized as both legitimate and in many cases contributory to the richness of Jewish life

Ritual Observance and Early Childhood

Young children learn best by doing. They need to see, hear, taste, touch and smell in order to truly understand and internalize new things. What a wonderful opportunity they have to learn about Judaism by experiencing its rituals. "Emotions are evoked and memories etched not with brilliantly argued points of theology, but through the senses" (Mogel, Blessings of a Skinned Knee, p. 255). Shabbat rituals are an excellent way to teach fundamental Jewish principles. Children can watch as the Shabbat candles are lit, cover their eyes as they say the blessing, and then sip the grape juice and taste the challah. The smell of the match will become associated with Shabbat, and if challah is baked in the classroom so will the smell of the fresh baked bread. "Children's delight in the world of the senses is always waiting to bubble out, so religious rituals have a natural and easy appeal for them" (Ibid). Children will come to understand what it is to be Jewish, indeed to be a Conservative Jew, through their taste buds, fingertips, noses, eyes and ears.

Ritual Observance
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Kipot

A kipah, also known in Yiddish as a yarmulke, is a head covering traditionally worn by Jewish males. Wearing a kipah is a Jewish way of showing reverence and respect to God, as well as distinguishing ourselves from non-Jews. The custom of wearing a head covering is thousands of years old, although there is no Biblical commandment to do so at all times. According to the Shulchan Aruch, a code of Jewish law, men are required to cover their heads and should not walk more than four cubits without a hat. According to Isaac Klein in *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice*, a Conservative guide to halachah, our practice should be:

a. cover the head when in the sanctuary
b. cover the head when praying, studying, or reading sacred literature
c. cover the head when performing a ritual
d. cover the head when eating; eating is preceded and followed by benedictions

Although traditionally men have worn kipot (the plural of kipah), in recent times women in the Conservative and Reform movements also have adopted the practice.

There are no laws about children wearing a kipah or covering their heads. Nevertheless, children can begin to become familiar with Jewish garb and the connection between themselves, prayer time, eating, and God by wearing kipot. Logical times for children to don kipot (if they are not required to wear them all the time) are at snack and mealtimes, during visits to the sanctuary, and other prayer times. Rules or customs in an early childhood setting should be determined through discussion with the director, teachers, the rabbi, and possibly the parents. Customs and rules about head coverings should be a school wide affair, not determined classroom by classroom.

Some questions to consider include:

1. What are the customs regarding kipot in the synagogue community?
2. Do women wear kipot, or only men?
3. When and where are men required to wear kipot?
4. When and where are women required to cover their heads?
5. When do people in this community wear kipot – all the time or just during tefillah?
6. What do we hope children will learn by wearing kipot?
7. When does it make sense for children to wear kipot?
8. Will boys be required to wear kipot at these times or just encouraged?
9. Will girls be required to wear kipot at these times or just encouraged?
10. How will parents react to their children wearing kipot?
11. How will we educate and invest parents in our kipah policies or customs?
12. Will teachers serve as role models as kipah wearers or head coverers?

Mezuzah

Inside a small rectangular case affixed to the doorway leading into a Jewish home, you will find a small piece of parchment with delicate Hebrew writing – the text of the Shema. The concept of mezuzah harks back to the time of the exodus from Egypt, when the Israelite slaves were commanded to smear the blood of the paschal lamb on their doorposts so that God would pass over their houses and not inflict the plague of *makat bechorot (*killing of the firstborn) on them. The mitzvah (commandment) itself is written in Devarim (Deuteronomy) 6:9 and 11:20:

וּכְתַבְתָּם עַל-מְזֻזוֹת בֵּיתֶךָ וּבִשְׁעָרֶיךָ

U'ktavtam al mezuzot beitecha u'visharecha.

Inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

The word *mezuzah* means doorpost, and in ancient times an abbreviated version of the Shema actually was carved into the doorpost of a house. Later on, the present version of the Shema was written on parchment and attached to the doorpost, and eventually it was placed in a hollow reed. That ultimately evolved into the mezuzah cases that we see on doorposts today.

A mezuzah *klaf* (parchment scroll):

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ה׳ אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ ה׳ אֶחָד׃ וְאָהַבְתָּ אֵת ה׳ אֱ-לֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל-לְבָבְךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל-מְאֹדֶךָ׃ וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוְּךָ הַיּוֹם עַל-לְבָבֶךָ׃ וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם לְבָנֶיךָ וְדִבַּרְתָּ בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתֶךָ וּבְלֶכְתְּךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ וּבְשָׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמֶךָ׃ וּקְשַׁרְתָּם לְאוֹת עַל-יָדֶךָ וְהָיוּ לְטֹטָפֹת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ׃ וּכְתַבְתָּם עַל-מְזֻזוֹת בֵּיתֶךָ וּבִשְׁעָרֶיךָ׃

וְהָיָה אִם-שָׁמֹעַ תִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶל-מִצְוֹתַי אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם לְאַהֲבָה אֶת ה׳ אֱ-לֹהֵיכֶם וּלְעָבְדוֹ בְּכָל-לְבַבְכֶם וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁכֶם׃ וְנָתַתִּי מְטַר-אַרְצְכֶם בְּעִתּוֹ יוֹרֶה וּמַלְקוֹשׁ וְאָסַפְתָּ דְגָנֶךָ וְתִירֹשְׁךָ וְיִצְהָרֶךָ׃ וְנָתַתִּי עֵשֶׂב בְּשָׂדְךָ לִבְהֶמְתֶּךָ וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבָעְתָּ׃ הִשָּׁמְרוּ לָכֶם פֶּן-יִפְתֶּה לְבַבְכֶם וְסַרְתֶּם וַעֲבַדְתֶּם אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם לָהֶם׃ וְחָרָה אַף- ה׳ בָּכֶם וְעָצַר אֶת-הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלֹא-יִהְיֶה מָטָר וְהָאֲדָמָה לֹא תִתֵּן אֶת-יְבוּלָהּ וַאֲבַדְתֶּם מְהֵרָה מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר ה׳ נֹתֵן לָכֶם׃ וְשַׂמְתֶּם אֶת-דְּבָרַי אֵלֶּה עַל-לְבַבְכֶם וְעַל-נַפְשְׁכֶם וּקְשַׁרְתֶּם אֹתָם לְאוֹת עַל-יֶדְכֶם וְהָיוּ לְטוֹטָפֹת בֵּין עֵינֵיכֶם׃ וְלִמַּדְתֶּם אֹתָם אֶת-בְּנֵיכֶם לְדַבֵּר בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתֶךָ וּבְלֶכְתְּךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ וּבְשָׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמֶךָ׃ וּכְתַבְתָּם עַל-מְזוּזוֹת בֵּיתֶךָ וּבִשְׁעָרֶיךָ׃ לְמַעַן יִרְבּוּ יְמֵיכֶם וִימֵי בְנֵיכֶם עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע ה׳ לַאֲבֹתֵיכֶם לָתֵת לָהֶם כִּימֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם עַל-הָאָרֶץ׃

There are many ways to explain the mezuzah. Some people see it as an amulet that helps protect their home. According to that theory, that's why the word *Shaddai* is written on the back of the *klaf*, the parchment. Shaddai is not only one of the names of God, but it also is an acronym for *shomer delatot Yisrael*, "Guardian of the doors of Israel." Others say that the mezuzah reminds us to act in a holy way, both when we are inside our homes and when we are outside. This is especially relevant in the early childhood classroom, where we can use the mezuzah as reinforcement as we teach our children to be *menschen* (good people).

A few of the laws of mezuzah:

- The mezuzah is placed on the right-hand side of the door as you enter.
- It should be attached to the upper third of the doorpost.
- The *klaf* (parchment) should be rolled from the last word, *echad,* to the first word, *shema,* so that the *shema* is on top. Many people wrap the klaf in plastic wrap to protect it before putting it in the case.
- When you are putting the mezuzah up you should tilt it slightly into the room or house, and it should be fastened at the top and bottom. If you use double-sided tape, the tape can run the length of the case.
- The brachah for affixing a mezuzah is:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ
הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו,
וְצִוָּנוּ לִקְבֹּעַ מְזוּזָה

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha'olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu likboa mezuzah.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who has sanctified us with the commandments, commanding us to affix the mezuzah.

The Text of the Mezuzah

Deuteronomy, 6:4-9
Hear, O Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai is one. You shall love Adonai, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your resources. And these things that I command you today shall be upon your heart. And you shall teach them to your children, and you shall speak of them when you sit in your house and when you go on the way, when you lie down and when you rise up. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your arm and they shall be an ornament between your eyes. And you shall write them upon the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Deuteronomy, 11:13-21
And it will be that if you hearken to my commandments that I command you today, to love Adonai, your God, and to serve him with all your hearts and all your souls. And I will grant the rain for your land in its proper time, the early and the late rains, that you may gather in your grain, your wine, and your oil. And I will provide grass in your field for your cattle, and you will eat and you will be satisfied. Watch yourselves, lest your heart be seduced and you turn astray and serve other gods, and prostrate yourselves to them. And the wrath of God will be upon you, and he will restrain the heaven and there will be no rain, and the ground will not yield its produce, and you will disappear quickly from upon the good land that God gives you. And you shall place these words of mine on your heart and on your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand and they shall be ornaments between your eyes. And you shall teach them to your children to discuss them, when you sit in your house and when you go on the way, and when you lie down and when rise up. And you shall write them upon the doorposts of your house and upon your gates, in order to prolong your days and the days of your children upon the good land that God swore to your fathers to give them, like the days of heaven over earth.

Translation from http://www.juf.org/mezuzah2.asp

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Some people continue with the she'hecheyanu prayer:
בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה׳ אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהֶחֱיָנוּ וְקִיְּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לַזְּמַן הַזֶּה.

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha'olam, she'hecheyanu, v'kiy'manu, v'higiyanu lazman hazeh.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who has kept us alive and sustained us and permitted us to reach this moment.

If you are putting up more than one mezuzah at the same time, you have to say the brachah only once. That covers all the mezuzot.

In an early childhood program, we want to make the mezuzah accessible to the children. In that case we can consider hanging it somewhere other than in the traditional top third of the doorway. Since the top third of the doorway is at eye level, or within reach, of the typical adult, we can consider what is at eye level or within reach of the children in the classroom. Some say it is acceptable to have one mezuzah, down where children can reach it, because it is there for the sake of *chinuch,* Jewish education. Some put the mezuzah at the traditional level but keep a stool near the door so children can still reach it. Sometimes there are two mezuzot on the door in an early childhood classroom, one down low where the children can reach, and one higher up to fulfill the halachah. Whatever the decision, the staff should discuss the location of the mezuzah with the rabbi, who is the mara d'atra.

Whether you see the mezuzah as God's protection or God's reminder, having one on the door is a sign to everyone who enters the classroom, and defines it as a Jewish space with the potential for holiness. It serves to remind us of how we should behave when we enter the room, when we are inside it, and when we leave it, if we are to embody that holiness.

Kashrut – Dietary Laws

The dietary laws are a large part of everyday Jewish life. A full chapter in the Torah – Leviticus 11 – and part of one in Deuteronomy – 14 – is devoted to them. Not surprisingly, the dietary laws are the subject of great discussion and debate throughout the Talmud and all of the codes of law written in the post-Talmudic period. Scholars and observant Jews have developed many ways of understanding the laws, most sublimely that kashrut raises the biological act of eating to a holy and spiritual dimension. In *The Blessing of the Skinned Knee*, Wendy Mogel devotes an excellent chapter to an exploration of the ways in which the laws of kashrut can elevate our spiritual selves and teach children the important values of appreciating food, self-discipline and holiness. Whatever God's intention in creating the laws of kashrut, they are among the main tenets of Conservative Judaism.

We can teach our children that Kashrut reminds us that this is God's world. It was given to us as a gift, but with some limits, so we would always remember who gave us this gift. Kashrut makes the act of eating special, holy, and Jewish.

Educators in Conservative synagogues must be familiar with these basic rules:

1) Meat and milk cannot be mixed.
2) You must use different dishes, pots and pans, and utensils for meat and for milk. Synagogues approach this in many ways; many have separate kitchens for meat and for milk to avoid mistakes. You should discuss your synagogue's policies and their practical implications with the rabbi and teach them to your staff.
3) Kosher animals have split hooves and chew their cud. Kosher fish have fins and scales. This means no pork or shellfish.
4) Meat must be kosher, which means it mush have been slaughtered according to the laws of kashrut; an acceptable *hechsher* (certification of kashrut) will show that the *shechitah* (slaughter) has been kosher.
5) All prepared foods must have hechsher that the rabbi finds acceptable.
6) Fresh fruits and vegetables are inherently kosher. They do not need a hechsher.
7) Parve (pronounce *par-ev*) foods may be eaten with either milk or meat. Examples of parve food include fruits, vegetables, eggs, and fish.

Kashrut in the early childhood center

The rabbis of the Talmud spoke of putting fences around the Torah, meaning that sometimes we must take extra precautions to insure that the basic mitzvot are followed. There must be some fences around eating in a school, where teachers, children, and others eat every day, if an acceptable community kashrut standard is to be maintained.

Children

Children should not be allowed to bring food into the school if it could cause meat and milk to be mixed. Often Conservative schools handle this situation by allowing the children to bring only dairy or parve food for lunch. This also sidesteps the issue of

making sure that the meat children bring in is kosher. When the school does have a rule permitting only kosher foods, teachers should check such foods as yogurt, snacks, and so on for kashrut, and the school should have some staples on hand to offer a child in case their lunch is not kosher. The school can make it easier for the parents by giving them a list of popular kosher lunch and snack foods.

Any snacks that are brought in for the children to share, such as for birthday celebrations, should meet the school and the community's kashrut standards so all the children can participate. It's a good idea for schools to send parents a rabbi-vetted list of acceptable birthday treats, by brand name, and of all the local kosher bakeries. Ask your rabbi for a list of hechsherim he or she accepts and share it with the school community. The rise in awareness of food allergies, particularly involving nuts, adds another layer of complication, but certainly it is possible to compile a list of nut-free kosher snacks if someone is willing to put in a few hours of research time.

Older children can begin to take ownership of kashrut. Four-and-five-year-olds can sort two sets of dishes and separate play food into meat, dairy, and parve bins in the dramatic play area. Teachers can ask families to send empty food boxes with hechsherim for children to play with as well. The children can go to a grocery store on a kosher food hunt, having studied hechsher symbols accepted by the local community. (See Appendix A for more information about kashrut)

Families

In the spirit of school community inclusivity, families should be asked to be sensitive to its kashrut standards and to retain this sensitivity when planning events outside school with children who are enrolled there. It's helpful for the congregation's rabbi to send out a letter at the beginning of the school year requesting that families maintain a level of Jewish observance in their children's parties. The letter can remind them not to plan parties on Shabbat and *chagim* (Jewish holidays) and to serve food that is at best kosher and if not kosher, then vegetarian. (See Appendix B for a sample letter.) The policy should be included in the parents' handbook. (See Appendix C for examples.)

Staff

Again in the spirit of school inclusivity, staff members are expected to adhere to the dairy/parve lunch and snack policy. If they make lunch for themselves, they should use the school's microwave, utensils, and other kitchenware only if their food has appropriate hechsherim. This policy should be included in the staff handbook. (See Appendix C for an example.) Staff events that the synagogue sponsors and pays for should be held in places with kosher food or at the synagogue, so all the staff can be included.

Ultimately, the rabbi as mara d'atra is the final kashrut authority in the Conservative synagogue and the early childhood program. This guide is just that, a guide and a vision. All kashrut policies for the schools should be discussed and finalized with the rabbi. See the bibliography for more information sources about kashrut.

***Netilat Yada'yim* –Ritual Hand Washing**

Much of Jewish ritual practice serves to elevate the mundane to a spiritual level. Washing our hands can serve this purpose. Not the soap-and-water kind of washing, although sometimes the licensing rep seems to consider it divine. In Jewish law, we are commanded to wash our hands first thing in the morning and before we eat a meal, specifically a meal at which we eat bread and say ha'motzi.

"Hand washing separates us from what came before and prepares us for what's to come; it symbolizes our becoming conscious of what we do and who we are" (Kula, p. 14). When we wake in the morning, we say the prayer Modeh Ani to give thanks to God for another day, and we wash our hands to acknowledge, both physically and ritually, that we are created in the image of God, and that we must treat our bodies with respect. In a classroom where Modeh Ani is part of the morning circle or daily tefillah, the sensory and spiritual impact of this blessing can be intensified by incorporating hand washing as well. Perhaps two children can have the job of bringing a bowl, pitcher, and towel around the circle to enable each child to wash his or her hands during the time of Modeh Ani.

Washing our hands not just for cleanliness but also ritually before a meal where we eat bread can serve as a signal to slow down and think about how important the meal we are about to eat together will be. We are inviting a special guest – God – to our table, and washing our hands along with saying the brachah will help us to say thank you and to remember the partnership between God and us that was necessary to get this meal to our table. Another nice thing about *netilat yada'yim* (ritual hand washing) is the custom of remaining silent between washing our hands and reciting ha'motzi to signify the connection between two acts.

The ritual:
Because ritual hand washing is different than washing for cleanliness, it should be done in a different way. Preferably we use a special two-handled cup, called a *klee*, although any unbroken vessel will do. We fill the cup with water, hold it in one hand, and pour some water over the other hand, and then we do the same with the other hand. Some people pour three splashes of water over the right hand, and then three splashes of water over the left hand, or switch back and forth three times, using up all the water in the klee. As we dry our hands we say the blessing.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ עַל נְטִילַת יָדַיִם.	
Praised are you Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe Who has sanctified us by commanding us to wash (*literally, to lift up*) our hands.	*Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al netilat yada'yim*

Including netilat yada'yim, either in the mornings or before saying ha'motzi, either every day or just on Fridays before eating challah, should be a school-wide decision, after a check-in with the rabbi. Practice should be consistent throughout the school, and with some forethought it can spiral up through the age groups. Perhaps two-year-olds will say netilat yada'yim only on Fridays when they say ha'motzi and eat challah, three-year-olds who eat lunch at school will wash every day, and four-year-olds will include the ritual in their morning circles with Modeh Ani.

Food Blessings

In the words of the Talmud, whoever enjoys this world's pleasures without reciting a blessing is tantamount to one who steals from God. (*Berachot 35a*).

We eat every day, many times a day. When we pause before eating to say a *bracha* (blessing), we invite God into the simple act of eating. We transform that first bite, and all that follow it, from an ordinary rote action to a holy action, a moment infused with the presence of God. Teaching and using food *brachot* (blessings) is a straightforward way to teach about God's presence in the world around us.* When teaching brachot to children, it is best to introduce each brachah with concrete symbols. Merely saying the brachah before eating will not teach young children what they are saying. Introduce each new brachah in circle time, show the children the food that they are blessing God for creating. For example, what does it mean to "bring forth bread from the earth"? Show the children pictures of wheat in the field, then show them what wheat looks like after it has been harvested. Show children flour and yeast, and then show them how yeast makes dough rise. Give them a context for what they are saying. When teaching the brachot for things that grow on an *eitz* (tree) and in the *adama* (ground), show children pictures of fruit trees and produce that grows from the ground. If we teach through concrete symbols and give children a context, they will truly understand what they are saying and can appreciate more fully how saying the brachah invites God to the snack table.

Each food has a blessing. Following are all the food blessings. With children of all ages, it is important to say the correct blessing with each snack and at each meal time. Saying ha'motzi with every snack and meal robs children of the opportunity to learn something new about God with each different food they eat.

Bread - Ha'motzi –When a meal contains bread, it is customary to say only ha'motzi, which then covers all the other foods consumed at that meal.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַמּוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.
Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, ha'motzi lechem min ha'aretz.

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

Why is bread so important to the Jewish people? The rabbis regarded bread as the staple of their diet and a meal was not considered complete without it. They instituted a special blessing to be recited before eating bread. On Shabbat, two loaves of challah are placed on the table in remembrance of the double portion of manna that the Israelites received in the wilderness every Friday (Exodus 16:5). When the motzi or any other food brachah is recited before eating, you should eat immediately, without talking or pausing for too long (Klein, p. 43).

*For more about why God's presence is so essential in early childhood, see the section on God and Spirituality.

THANKS FOR BREAD

Once a boy who had just eaten lunch turned to his mother and said, "Thank you very much." But his mother said, "You should not thank me alone, for I only prepared the food."

The boy wondered, "Whom should I thank?" He went to the grocery store and saw the grocer. "Thank you, Mr. Grocer, for the very fine bread that I ate at lunchtime."

"Oh," said the grocer, "you should not thank me alone. I only sell the bread. I do not bake it."

So the boy went to the bakery where all the bread was made; and there he saw the baker. "Mr. Baker," the boy said, "I want to thank you for the wonderful bread that you bake."

The baker laughed and said, "I bake the bread, but it is good because the flour is good. And the flour comes from the miller who grinds it."

"Then I will thank the miller," said the boy and he turned to leave. "but the miller only grinds the wheat," the baker said. "It is the farmer who grows the grain which makes the bread so good."

So the boy went off in search of the farmer. He walked until he came to the edge of the village and there he saw the farmer at work in the fields. "I want to thank you for the bread that I eat every day."

But the farmer said, "Do not thank me alone. I only plant the seed, tend the field, and harvest the grain. It is sunshine and good rain and the rich earth that makes the wheat so good."

"But who is left to thank?" asked the boy, and he was very sad, very tired, and very hungry again, for he had walked a long way in one day. The farmer said, "Come inside and eat with my family and then you will feel better."

So the boy went into the farmhouse with the farmer and sat down to eat with the farmer's family. Each person took a piece of bread and then, all together, they said,

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, ha'motzi lechem min ha'aretz.
Praised are You, Adonai our God, Who brings bread out of the earth.

And then the boy discovered that it was God whom he had forgotten to thank.

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From Seymour Rossel, When a Jew Prays. New York: Behrman House Publishers, Inc.,1973. Used with permission of the author.

Cakes , Crackers And Cookies – Borei Minei Mizonot

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה׳, אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא מִינֵי מְזוֹנוֹת.
Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei minei mizonot.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who creates various kinds of nourishment.

This brachah is used for pastry or food made from any of the five species of grain, mixed mainly with fat, oil, honey, milk, eggs, or fruit juice, but not only with water, or for dough filled with fruit, meat, cheese, etc. (Klein, p. 43)

Fruit from Trees – Borei Pri Ha'eitz

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה׳, אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הָעֵץ.
Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri ha'eitz.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who creates the fruit of the tree.

This brachah is said for all fruit that grows on a tree. A tree is defined as a plant whose branches do not perish in the winter, and whose leaves grow from the trunk and from the branches but not from the roots. (Klein, p. 43) We say this brachah for tree nuts, such as pecans, walnuts and almonds. We do not say it for bananas or pineapples, since the stalks (branches) grow anew every year, produce one crop of fruit and then die. Thus, they are considered food from the ground.

Foods from the Ground – Borei Pri Ha'adama

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה׳, אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה.
Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri ha'adama.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who creates the fruit of the ground.

This brachah is for food that grows in or near the earth and includes vegetables, beans, potatoes, or turnips. (Klein, p. 43) We make this brachah before eating rice and peanuts.

Almost Everything Else – Shehakol Niheyeh Bidvaro

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה׳, אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהַכֹּל נִהְיֶה בִּדְבָרוֹ.
Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, shehakol niheyeh bid-va-ro.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, through Whose word everything came to be.

This brachah is used for all foods that are not the product of the soil and includes meat, fish, milk, eggs, cheese, and all beverages except wine. The brachah is very interesting because it does not seem to relate to food – "through Whose word everything came to be." It can be used to illustrate something that is so important to teach to young children – God's presence in everything around us. So we teach this brachah in very different ways than the others.

Wine and Grape Juice – Borei Pri Ha'gafen

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה׳, אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפֶן.
Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri ha'gafen.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

We say this brachah when we drink wine or grape juice but not when we eat grapes. Then we say borei pri ha'eitz.

Birkat ha'Mazon– the Blessing after the Meal

Just as we bless God and give thanks before we eat, so too do we bless God and give thanks when we've finished. The blessing called *Birkat ha'Mazon* (blessing after the meal), is a series of brachot and Biblical references that can be sung or said after a meal at which ha'motzi has been recited. (There are other brachot for snacks and meals that do not include bread.) While it is difficult to recite the entire Birkat ha'Mazon with very young children every day, the concept of thanking God both before and after a meal is important in early childhood. It is appropriate to incorporate an excerpt from the Birkat ha'Mazon at the end of lunchtime, especially with older children. One good excerpt is:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', הַזָּן אֶת הַכֹּל.

Baruch Atah Adonai, hazan et hakol.

Blessed are You Adonai, Who satisfies all.

Just as ha'motzi covers all the food in a meal that begins with bread, so does Birkat ha'Mazon. "Not only do we acknowledge God as provider of food before we eat, we remember God is the source of sustenance even after our stomachs are full. In keeping with the mandate of the Torah: 'V'achalata v'savata, uverachta (Deuteronomy 8:10), You ate, you were satisfied and you gave thanks,' we recite the Birkat ha'Mazon." (Rabbi Yohanan Stein, Har Zion Temple, Penn Valley, PA, http://www.uscj.org/njersey/brachah23.html)

Child-friendly versions of this short Birkat ha'Mazon are available from Carol Boyd Leon, on DAYENU! A Passover Haggadah For Families And Children (Haggadah with CD, sheet music and user's guide, http://carolboydleon.com/books-slash-haggadah), and Judy Caplan Ginsburg on her CD "My Jewish World."

Shabbat Rituals

The mitzvah (commandment) of Shabbat is unique among the Ten Commandments, encompassing ritual and spiritual experiences. We observe Shabbat, the Sabbath, from sundown on Friday night to one hour past sundown on Saturday night, or when we can see at least three stars in the sky.

Two reasons are given for the observance of Shabbat: that on this day God rested from the work of creation (Exodus 20:11) and that it is the remembrance of the redemption from slavery and the exodus from Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:15).

What does this tell us about Shabbat? That we are to be God-like in our behavior, stepping back from our labors to appreciate the world around us. That Shabbat recalls freedom from slavery, our interconnectedness with the Divine, and the luxury of living a Jewish life.

What does it mean to observe Shabbat as a Conservative Jew?

- **Making It different** – The Torah tells us that the seventh day is set aside, special, because on that day God rested from the labors of creation (see Genesis 2:2). Created in God's image, we too are enjoined to set aside Shabbat as different. How? By spending time with community and friends, by shifting our focus from the mundane to the sublime, by remembering on this day that we are part of creation rather than creators ourselves. Conservative Judaism encourages us to set aside Shabbat as a day without the cares of every other day. We strive to make Shabbat special by using it for spiritual pursuits, by carving out this time in the week to be peaceful and restorative.
- **Thinking Shabbat** – From the moment on Friday night when we light the candles that signify that Shabbat has begun, Shabbat is a day for community. We welcome the arrival of Shabbat in community through prayer, we recite the kiddush together, we share a festive meal, we sing songs of celebration. On Shabbat day this theme continues with *tefillah* (prayer) and Torah (reading and studying) and more song. Shabbat is a wonderful time to read, take walks and visit with friends (and nap, though this is not a community activity!).
- **Doing Shabbat** – Part of how we make Shabbat special comes from the things we don't do – we leave the computer turned off, we keep our wallets stowed away, and we eat food we have prepared in advance. The types of work from which we refrain are correspond to the 39 types of work that were halted on Shabbat during the construction of the *mishkan*, the portable sanctuary in the desert. This frees us to appreciate the wonders of creation and links us with the experiences of our ancestors. It is the combination of the things we do with the things we don't do that sets Shabbat apart and gives it holiness.

Adapted from "Shabbat… A Gift to Yourself" http://uscj.org/Shabbat5092.html

Bringing Shabbat into the Early Childhood Classroom

Of all the rituals that take place in the early childhood classroom, the celebration of Shabbat is the most consistently celebrated. Each week, children watch as the candles are lit, and they quickly learn the brachot for candles, grape juice and challah. To ensure that the children and their families experience Shabbat as exciting and spiritually rich, full of joy and delight, and consistent from year to year, takes planning. There are many factors to be considered.

Content: The entire day should reflect the spirit of Shabbat. Torah study, special games, and songs all can enhance the beauty of Shabbat in the classroom. Many schools have a Shabbat abba or ima **–** children or invited parents who lead the class in the Shabbat brachot. Try inviting another class to join in **–** that is a wonderful way for children to understand the value of *hachnasat orchim*, welcoming visitors. Also, use class time to show the children how different Shabbat is from the rest of the week. Perhaps there are special games that only come out on Friday, or regular activities that are closed on Fridays (such as messy art). If tefillot are not done on a daily basis in the school, have a tefillah circle on Friday. If you do tefillot every day, add prayers for Shabbat to make Friday's tefillot extra special.

We begin the Shabbat rituals by giving *tzedakah* (charity).

Lighting Shabbat Candles

Lighting candles on Friday as evening approaches marks the beginning of Shabbat. Tradition teaches us that we are partners with God. Candle lighting is a sacred deed that allows us symbolically to participate in the act of creation: "Let there be light." Traditionally, we light two candles, representing the two times that the fourth Commandment is cited in the Torah: "Remember – *Zachor*" (Exodus 20:8) and "Observe – *Shamor*" (Deuteronomy 5:12) the Sabbath day.

Shabbat candles serve at least two purposes: they provide *shalom ba'yit (*harmony in the home), as they give light, flickering and dancing throughout the Friday night meal, and provide *oneg Shabbat* (the joy of Shabbat) as they symbolize the light and gladness that Shabbat gives us. In order to fulfill both purposes, we light the candles close to where we will have Shabbat dinner.

The order in which we light candles and say the brachah at the beginning of Shabbat is unusual. Normally we say a brachah immediately before we do a *mitzvah* (fulfill a commandment), and the mitzvah follows without interruption. Since Shabbat starts once we say the brachah, we cannot light the candles after we say it – we cannot light candles on Shabbat. We solve this problem by performing the mitzvah in this order:

1. Light the Shabbat candles. Every Jew is obligated to light candles; when both a man and a woman are present, traditionally the woman lights them for everyone there because this is one of the mitzvot traditionally assigned to women. When no woman is present, a man is obligated to light candles for himself.
2. Many follow the custom of drawing their hands to their faces in a circular motion three times, beckoning Shabbat to enter.
3. After the third circle, the person saying the brachah closes or shields her eyes with her hands and says the brachah:

   בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה׳, אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל שַׁבָּת.

   Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu, melech ha'olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Shabbat.

   Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, instilling in us the holiness of mitzvot by commanding us to kindle the light of Shabbat.

4. After she says the brachah, she uncovers her eyes and looks at what are now the lit Shabbat candles for the first time. Personal prayers of thanks may be added silently after the brachah. It is customary for everyone to wish each other Shabbat shalom.
5. Traditionally parents will bless their children after the candles are lit, before saying kiddush. This blessing, and how it can be used in the classroom, is discussed later in this section of the Vision.

Blessing for wine and giving thanks for the holiness of the day

This brachah is the essential ingredient in the kiddush. Like bread, wine has come to represent the unique partnership between God and humanity in producing a product that demands the involvement of both God and human beings. In the Torah's eye, nature's quintessential beverage is "the fruit of the vine," grape wine. Our sages tell us of wine's importance throughout the calendar year and throughout the Jewish life cycle. We recite the kiddush for Shabbat, which begins with Biblical verses not printed here.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה׳, אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפֶן.

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha'olam, borei pri ha'gafen

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

The kiddush continues, giving thanks for the holiness of Shabbat, but this one brachah is sufficient for the early childhood classroom.

Challah

On Shabbat, we put two loaves of challah on the table in remembrance of the double portion of manna that the Israelites received every Friday in the wilderness (Exodus 16:5). We wash our hands and say the blessing netilat yada'yim (which is discussed earlier in this section of the Vison) and then, without talking or waiting too long, we say ha'motzi and eat the challah.

During the week, when we begin a meal we say ha'motzi first, but on Shabbat we say it after kiddush. That's why we cover the challah on Shabbat. We don't want to show a lack of respect to the challah, which is used to being first.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַמּוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, ha'motzi lechem min ha'aretz.

Blessed are You, Adonai, our God, Ruler of the Universe who brings forth bread from the earth.

With rituals and song, tasty food and good friends, early childhood educators have an amazing chance to begin to instill the beauty of Shabbat in their young students, as well as in their parents.

Birkat Banim - Blessing the Children

Shabbat is a perfect time for blessings, and Friday night is a time when parents traditionally have the opportunity to bless their children. The parents may place their hands on the child's head, remembering the preciousness of each soul in their care. The boys are blessed with the words, "May God make you like Ephraim and Menashe," Jacob's beloved grandsons (Genesis 48:20), while the girls are blessed with the names of the four matriarchs, "May God make you like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah." These blessings are followed by the priestly blessing, "May God bless and keep you. May the radiance of God's Presence lift you and be gracious to you. May the radiance of God's Presence shine upon you and bless you with peace." Parents also can whisper a personal blessing to each child, creating a very special moment between them. Children also might be offered the opportunity to give a blessing back to their parents.

In the early childhood setting, where the family as much as the child is the student, the blessing over the children is an important ritual to teach and reinforce with the parents who might not know it. When parents join in the Shabbat celebration at school, they should be given the tools and the time to bless their child(ren). Provide parents with the traditional words in Hebrew, English and transliteration. Give them a copy they can take home. A nice version can be found at http://uscj.org/mid-continent/materials/kidbless.PDF, or you can copy the bottom of this page. Encourage them to try some or all of the traditional blessing. Parents also can be encouraged to offer alternative blessings from their hearts instead or in addition to the traditional ones. Teachers can create rituals of blessing in the classroom even when parents are not present. Perhaps the teacher offers a blessing for the children, and the children then offer blessings to each other and to the teacher. The goals here are multifold. They are to:

- Enable parents to offer the traditional blessing to their children on Shabbat at home, and to encourage them to do so.
- Create a culture of Shabbat as a time for blessings in school.
- Empower children to offer blessings.

The blessing:

For boys:

יְשִׂמְךָ אֱ-לֹהִים כְּאֶפְרַיִם וְכִמְנַשֶּׁה.

Yisimcha Elohim k'Ephraim v'chi-Menashe.
May God make you like Ephraim and Menashe.

For girls:

יְשִׂמֵךְ אֱ-לֹהִים כְּשָׂרָה, רִבְקָה, רָחֵל וְלֵאָה

Yisimech Elohim k'Sarah Rivka Rachel v'Leah.
May God make you like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah.

Priestly blessing, recited for all children:

יְבָרֶכְךָ ה' וְיִשְׁמְרֶךָ.
יָאֵר ה' פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וִיחֻנֶּךָּ.
יִשָּׂא ה' פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וְיָשֵׂם לְךָ שָׁלוֹם.

Y'varechecha Adonai v'yishmirecha.
Ya'er Adonai panav elecha vichunecha.
Yisa Adonai panav elecha v'yasem licha shalom.

May God bless you and watch over you.
May God show you kindness and be gracious to you.
May God bestow favor upon you and grant you peace.

Havdalah

Havdalah is the second side of the parentheses that carve Shabbat out from the rest of the week. Havdalah, the ritual signifying the end of Shabbat, incorporates many of the same elements as the beginning, particularly candles and wine. Just as lighting the Shabbat candles on Friday night marks the beginning of Shabbat, so does extinguishing the havdalah candle flame mark the end. At both we say a *brachah* (blessing) over the flames, and at both we make the brachah over wine. Havdalah is a wonderful opportunity to begin the school week, as well as end it, with a beautiful Jewish ceremony. The rabbis tell us that it is okay to celebrate havdalah as late as Tuesday. Accordingly, it is an important and wonderful ritual to begin the week in the early childhood center, either with the whole school together or individually in each class. Even the youngest children benefit from seeing the candle, smelling the spices, and singing "Eliyahu Hanavi." Celebrating havdalah every Monday delivers the message that life in the school runs on Jewish time.

Havdalah actually is considered a sad time, because it means that Shabbat is leaving us, so we imbue it with symbolism to make the transition easier. The candle has at least two wicks, to bring together the wicks of the individual candles we light on Friday night. The cup of wine is overflowing to symbolize the coming week, which we hope will overflow with goodness and prosperity. The smell of the *b'samim* (spices) is said to be the smell of *olam habah,* the world to come, and it will sustain us until Shabbat comes again. It functions like divine smelling salts. Some people will dip their fingers lightly into the wine that has overflowed and then brush them over their eyebrows and into their pockets as a wish for enlightenment, wisdom, and prosperity in the week to come.

In addition to celebrating havdalah with children every week and inviting parents to this celebration, hosting a havdalah service for early childhood families is magical. This family havdalah service, held on a Saturday night, can be combined with a light communal meal before – a *se'udah shlishit* (third meal) – a kid-friendly program such as a pajama party, or refreshments afterward. It is best to have this program in the winter, when Shabbat ends earlier, so it will not be too late for the children; there is a special element added if you can have it outdoors, if the weather is cooperative and it is not bitterly cold.

Because havdalah is so hands-on and experiential, it is a natural for early childhood. Making it a positive, joyous and meaningful experience for the children and their families is one way we can bring them into the larger experience of Shabbat.

The Ritual:

Many communities begin havdalah with the singing of *Eliyahu Hanavi,* in the hope that Elijah the Prophet will appear to bring peace and redemption. The actual havdalah ceremony begins with lighting a candle that has at least two wicks and filling a cup with wine to overflowing. It continues with reciting a paragraph of declaration that God is our deliverance and that God will bless us and watch over us.

הִנֵּה אֵ-ל יְשׁוּעָתִי, אֶבְטַח וְלֹא אֶפְחָד, כִּי עָזִּי וְזִמְרָת יָהּ ה׳, וַיְהִי לִי לִישׁוּעָה.
וּשְׁאַבְתֶּם מַיִם בְּשָׂשׂוֹן, מִמַּעַיְנֵי הַיְשׁוּעָה. לַה׳ הַיְשׁוּעָה, עַל עַמְּךָ בִרְכָתֶךָ סֶּלָה. ה׳
צְבָאוֹת עִמָּנוּ, מִשְׂגָּב לָנוּ אֱ-לֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב סֶּלָה. ה׳ צְבָאוֹת, אַשְׁרֵי אָדָם בֹּטֵחַ בָּךְ.
ה׳ הוֹשִׁיעָה, הַמֶּלֶךְ יַעֲנֵנוּ בְיוֹם קָרְאֵנוּ.

Hinei El yeshuati evtach v'lo efchad, ki azi v'zimrat yah Adonai vayehi lilishuah. U'shavtem mayim b'sasone mimanei hayeshuah, la'Adonai hayishuah al amcha birchatecha selah. Adonai tzivaot imanu misgav lanu Elohai Yaakov selah. Adonai tzivaot adam botayach bach, Adonai hoshiah hamelech ya'anaynu b'yom kareinu.

Behold, God is my deliverance, I shall trust and not fear, because God is my strength and my salvation. With joy shall you draw water from the springs of deliverance. Salvation is God's; God will bless His people. God, the Master of legions, is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold. God, the Master of Legions, blessed is the person that trusts in You. Help us God. May the King answer us on the day we call.

It continues with the entire community declaring:

לַיְּהוּדִים הָיְתָה אוֹרָה וְשִׂמְחָה וְשָׂשׂוֹן וִיקָר. כֵּן תִּהְיֶה לָּנוּ.
LaYehudim hayta orah v'simcha v'sasone v'yikar, ken tihiyeh lanu

For the Jews there was light, gladness, joy and honor – so may it be for us.

The opening blessing ends with the line:

כּוֹס יְשׁוּעוֹת אֶשָּׂא, וּבְשֵׁם ה׳ אֶקְרָא
Kos y'shu-ot eisa, u'v'shem Adonai ekra.

I will raise up the cup of saving power and call out in the name of Adonai.

We then lift the glass of wine and say kiddush. (We don't drink the wine until the conclusion of havdalah) ***Some classes begin the havdalah service here, due to short attention spans:***

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה׳, אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפֶן.
Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri ha'gafen

Blessed are You Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

We lift the spice box and say:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה׳, אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא מִינֵי בְשָׂמִים.

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei minei v'samim

Blessed are You Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who creates fragrant spices.

Everyone then takes a sniff of the *b'samim.* In the early childhood classroom, it is helpful to have multiple spice boxes.

We lift the candle high, stretch our fingers to the light, and say:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה׳, אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא מְאוֹרֵי הָאֵשׁ.

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei m'orei ha'aish

Blessed are You Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who created the illuminations of fire.

We finish havdalah with the blessing:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה׳, אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַמַּבְדִּיל בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ לְחוֹל, בֵּין אוֹר לְחֹשֶׁךְ, בֵּין יִשְׂרָאֵל לָעַמִּים, בֵּין יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי לְשֵׁשֶׁת יְמֵי הַמַּעֲשֶׂה. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה׳, הַמַּבְדִּיל בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ לְחוֹל.

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, hamavdil bayn kodesh l'chol, bayn or l'choshech, bayn Yisrael l'amim, bayn yom ha'shvi'I l'shayshet y'mai hama'aseh. Baruch Atah Adonai, hamavdil bayn kodesh l'chol.

Blessed are You Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who separates between holy and secular, between light and darkness, between Israel and the nations, between the seventh day and the six working days of the week. Blessed are You, Adonai, who separates between holy and secular.

אֵלִיָּהוּ הַנָּבִיא אֵלִיָּהוּ הַתִּשְׁבִּי אֵלִיָּהוּ אֵלִיָּהוּ אֵלִיָּהוּ הַגִּלְעָדִי
בִּמְהֵרָה בְיָמֵינוּ יָבוֹא אֵלֵינוּ עִם מָשִׁיחַ בֶּן דָּוִד

Eliyahu Ha-Navi	**Elijah, the Prophet**
Eliyahu ha-Navi, Eliyahu ha-Tishbi, Eliyahu, Eliyahu, Eliyahu ha-Giladi.	Elijah the Prophet, Elijah the Tishbite, Elijah, Elijah, Elijah the Gileadite.
Bimhayrah v'yamenu, yavo aleinu, im Mashiach ben David, im Mashiach ben David.	Speedily and in our days, come to us, with the messiah, son of David, with the messiah, son of David.

Yom Tov Sheni Shel Galuyot – The Second Festival Day of the Diaspora

There are some observances that differentiate Conservative early childhood programs from others. One of them is the celebration of two days of chag (holiday on which no work is done) instead of one. The Jewish calendar can be a tricky thing, especially when not everyone agrees on it. Orthodox and most Conservative Jews in the Diaspora (outside of Israel) celebrate two days of chag on most Jewish holidays. Two days of Rosh Hashanah, two days at the beginning and again at the end of Pesach, and so on. Reform Jews and Israelis, on the other hand, celebrate only one day of chag.

Jews began celebrating the second day of chagim a very long time ago. Soon after the destruction of the Second Temple, when the Sanhedrin existed, the new month began when the new moon was sighted. Messengers would spread the news of the sighting – running from town to town or using torch lights – so the people of Israel and those who lived close by could get the information quickly. Those people would observe only one day of chag. People who lived farther away and could not be certain that they had received news of the new moon in time would celebrate two days of chag, to be certain that one of them was the right one. Celebrating two days was considered to be far superior to celebrating the wrong one.

The messenger system lasted until the fourth century of the common era, when the astronomy had advanced and a calendar could be determined in advance. People were no longer dependent on the testimony of witnesses and the speed of runners. When that happened, the *Yom Tov Sheni Shel Galuyot* – the second festival day of the diaspora – logically should have been abolished. The Reform movement did so. The Conservative and Orthodox movements, on the other hand, have retained the two-day chagim. Because when there is no compelling reason to abandon a custom we have inherited from our ancestors we should retain it, and because we should remind ourselves that when we live outside of the land of Israel we are living in galut, or exile, most Conservative rabbis elect to retain the custom of observing the second day of the chagim. In each Conservative synagogue, the rabbi, as mara d'atra, has the authority to decide whether the community should celebrate the second day.

Rosh Chodesh – The New Month

Young children are just learning about the cycles of life and nature. The passage of seasons is predictable and gives a sense of order and stability to their world. We often talk about the calendar, demonstrating how we mark the passage of time. How special, then, to recognize that as a Jewish people we have our OWN calendar! The Jewish calendar is lunar and solar. The appearance and disappearance of the moon dictates the beginning and end of each month. This lunar calendar is adjusted so that the holidays always fall in their proper season, as determined by the sun. *Rosh Chodesh* (head of the month) is the Jewish celebration of the appearance of the new moon and the corresponding start of a new Hebrew month. The day is signaled by the first sliver of the new moon shining in the sky. The moon determines the timing of the Jewish holidays. You'll always see the new moon crescent on Rosh Hashanah, because Rosh Hashanah is Rosh Chodesh Tishre too. You'll always see the full moon through the *s'chach* of the sukkah on the first night of Sukkot and when you open the door for Elijah on Pesach.

Traditionally, Rosh Chodesh has been a women's holiday, observed in ancient times by refraining from work, and in recent decades by women's groups gathering with song, prayer and storytelling to mark the new moon. The assignment of Rosh Chodesh as a women's holiday is attributed to a midrash. When Moses brought the Israelite people to Mount Sinai, he left them waiting at the bottom of the mountain while he went up to the top to speak with God and receive the Torah. While Moses was away, the people panicked, afraid that he would never return and they would be deserted in the wilderness to die (Exodus 32). They demanded that Aaron, Moses' brother and right-hand man, build a golden calf for them to worship. According to the midrash, the women did not join in the panic, and indeed refused to give up their jewelry to be melted to form an idol. As a reward for the women's faith, God granted them Rosh Chodesh as a holiday, so that women, like the moon, would be rejuvenated each month.

Rosh Chodesh and early childhood

Rosh Chodesh is also a vibrant and appropriate holiday to celebrate in Jewish preschools. Rosh Chodesh is a calendar holiday – it marks the beginning of a new month. As we well know, young children do not yet grasp time concepts as broad as "week," "month," or "year." In celebrating Rosh Chodesh, the focus in the early childhood program is not on the Hebrew month, but rather on the cyclical nature of Jewish life. This can be done in very concrete ways, through the development of a connection to the moon, and by alerting children to changes that take place in their world with a Jewish rhythm. Because Rosh Chodesh happens every month, over time the regularity and repetition of themes, songs, and prayers will help the children become aware of the moon as a Jewish symbol and a Jewish timekeeper.

The concepts that preschoolers might be taught about Rosh Chodesh and the moon can be kept simple.

1. The moon changes – it grows bigger, becomes full, and gets smaller.
2. This cycle of the moon happens over and over again.
3. When the sliver of the new moon reappears in the sky, we celebrate
4. Rosh Chodesh and a new Hebrew month.
5. The moon is a Jewish timekeeper.

Prayer is also a vehicle for relating the moon to God and the Jewish framework. While a lengthy Rosh Chodesh service may not be appropriate, a brief excerpt or two from the traditional liturgy, added to the daily tefillah at circle time or said at a special Rosh Chodesh celebration, allows children to understand that Rosh Chodesh is in the same category as "other Jewish things that have blessings." A possible blessing (but as always check with your rabbi), excerpted from the *Kiddush Levanah (*the sanctification of the moon*),* is:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה׳, מְחַדֵּשׁ חֳדָשִׁים.
Baruch Atah Adonai, m'chadeish chodashim.
Blessed are You, God, for renewing the months.

Another concrete way to connect children to the moon and the cycle of Jewish time is "the Rosh Chodesh spot." At the beginning of the school year, each class chooses its own Rosh Chodesh spot: a tree, a grassy hill, a garden. The class goes there every Rosh Chodesh, developing a sense of ownership. Teachers may take photos of very young children each Rosh Chodesh so they may observe the changes in themselves. The basic concept again is that everything changes. Over a year, children will be able to see one spot in nature die and be renewed. By tying this cycle of nature to Rosh Chodesh, itself a holiday of cycles, the children will come to relate nature to Judaism, and a groundwork will be established to further their understanding of the cyclical nature of Judaism as they grow and mature.

It is critical that parents, too, learn about Rosh Chodesh. The school calendar should be marked with both secular and Hebrew dates, or at least should include each Rosh Chodesh. When children celebrate Rosh Chodesh in school parents can be invited to join or should at least receive information about what their children are doing.

The celebration in school naturally piques children's interest in learning more about the moon. Learning about natural patterns, such as the phases of the moon, eventually help children understand patterns in math. The pattern of "day and night" is clear even to the youngest of our children. When they can relate a scientific or mathematical concept to a Jewish part of their world, it makes the whole Jewish child feel more secure. More importantly, it helps us to relate God's creation to the scientific world. The children learn that the moon will cycle anew each month, and we celebrate that renewal with God.

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Appendix A – More Kashrut Details

Because there is a range of kashrut observance among Conservative Jews and each Conservative synagogue sets its own policies, it is important to clarify the Conservative movement's position and describe some of the practices typical of early childhood programs in Conservative synagogues.

1) Gelatin – Gelatin is made from processed animal bones; it is used in many processed foods, including Jell-O, some puddings, many yogurts, Frosted Mini-Wheats, marshmallows, and Pop-Tarts. Often products that contain gelatin bear a "K" as the hechsher symbol on the package, and sometimes the gelatin is listed as "Kosher Gelatin" in the ingredients. Dr. Isaac Klein, in his responsa on "The Kashrut of Gelatin" (1969) and "The Kashrut of Cheeses" (1970) argued that gelatin ceases to be food as it is processed, and does not affect the kashrut of the food product. Some Conservative rabbis agree, while others maintain that some gelatin is not kosher. Therefore, it is important to check this with your congregation's rabbi before you set a policy about gelatin. This is important to remember at all times. Even when these foods are being used not as food but in other activities – for example, marshmallows in the sensory table - children might end up eating them.

2) Cochineal – Sometimes called "carmine" when it is used as an ingredient in some food products, this red dye is derived from the shell of the cochineal insect. Because insects are considered not to be kosher, you must be careful when you buy items that contain carmine. Be sure to check with your rabbi; some consider carmine a kashrut problem and others do not.

3) Cheese and Rennet – "The Conservative movement permits the eating of American-made cheese without a hekhsher, although there are movement authorities who do require certification." (http://uscj.org/Kashrut5091.html) Rennet, which can be made from the lining of animal stomachs, often is used to curdle cheese. Because rennet contains an animal byproduct it could be considered as meat, which would cause a problem if it were used to make cheese. Moreover, often the stomach lining comes from an animal that has not been slaughtered in a way that would make its meat kosher. Similar to the issue with gelatin, some Conservative rabbis, scholars, and leaders have decided that it is acceptable to use rennet to make cheese because by the time the animal stomach lining has been treated by chemicals, acids, and dehydration, it is no longer food. (Klein, 1970). Today, most rennet is made from genetically engineered bacteria, and the major brands have hechsherim. Still, it is important to check with your rabbi. Most early childhood programs in Conservative synagogues buy cheese that has a hechsher from a reliable kashrut organization, thus avoiding cheese with rennet made from animal by-products.

4) Bagels and baked goods – Some synagogues buy bagels and other baked goods from bakeries that do not serve or process meat but do not have official kashrut

supervision. Typically the early childhood program follows the synagogue's practice.

5) Hot Dogs – There has been much debate over the past few years about the level of kashrut of some hot dogs. If you are planning on serving hot dogs, check with your rabbi to find out which brands he or she deems acceptable (and of course make sure you are serving them with parve buns!).

6) Typically grape juice must have an acceptable hechsher, especially if it is being used for ritual purposes. It is important to learn your rabbi's policy.

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Appendix B – Sample Letter from the Rabbi

Dear Parent(s),

We understand that there has been some confusion about the Academy's kashrut and birthday party policy and we want to clarify what the policy is and why it was developed. As part of Temple Beth Am, we are informed by the practices of Conservative Judaism and look to Rabbi Rembaum as our *Mara d'atra*, or religious authority. He advises us in developing our religious practices and policies.

The Academy's policy is that when the school sponsors an event, whether on campus, at an outside venue, or at a family's home, all the food served must be certified kosher under rabbinic supervision. For other events, like birthday parties or play dates, we have asked families to be considerate of our diverse student body in terms of personal religious practices. We ask that you not schedule parties on Shabbat or Jewish holidays and that you plan the menu to be inclusive of our families that observe Kashrut. In practice, this has meant that while the food served does not have to be rabbinically certified, there may not be a mixture of milk and meat items and it should be made from kosher ingredients.

Our community is exceptional for many reasons, but particularly because we are inclusive and not judgmental of each other's religious practices. When inviting friends over for play dates or dinner, we have always made sure that even if our homes are not kosher, that kosher options are available and that all our children are made to feel welcome in their friends' homes.

Our Academy teaches our children about the importance of being part of a community. The kashrut policy was formulated with this idea in mind, along with the values that inform Conservative Jewish practice and Temple Beth Am. It is in this spirit that we ask everyone to be sensitive to this policy and our communal spirit.

As always, if you have any questions please feel free to speak with either one of us. We are here for both your children and you.

Looking forward to an outstanding year.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Mitchel Malkus
Education Director

Angie Bass
ECC Director

Appendix C - Examples of Kashrut Policies in USCJ EC Program Parent and Staff Handbooks

Following are some examples from parent and staff handbooks. Each synagogue will have different policies, so be sure to check with your rabbi before setting policy down in a parent or teacher handbook.

Parent Handbooks

Example 1: Kashrut. To ensure an appropriate level of kashrut (Jewish Dietary Laws) the following standards are to be maintained by students and faculty:

- No meat of any kind may be brought into the school building. Lunches **MUST** be dairy or parve (See Lunches, above)
- No shellfish may be brought into the school building. This includes shrimp, lobster, crab, and oysters.
- Store-bought baked goods that are brought into the school for parties or Shabbat **MUST** have a "hechsher" (symbol of being kosher).
- Home-baked or cooked food may not be brought into the school for class parties or school events.

Example 2: FOOD/KASHRUT POLICIES: Torah Tots is part of Synagogue Aleph Bet, a Conservative Synagogue and therefore follows the rules of Kashrut. You must adhere to the following guidelines to ensure that you are following our Kashrut policy. You may only send in **dairy or parve foods as stated below.**

1. A mid morning snack is provided. All snacks are kosher and children will be given apple juice, grape juice or water with their snack. Some of the snacks that the children will be given are cheerios, crackers, vegetables, and fresh fruit. On Friday, the children will be provided with challah as well as a healthy, kosher, snack provided by parents.
2. All children are required to bring a **dairy** or **parve** lunch from home. The lunches will be refrigerated. A list of acceptable foods is provided in the back pages of this manual for your convenience. Please be aware that our refrigerators are small; therefore, ice packs in the lunch bags would be very helpful.
3. All dairy products are allowed. This includes milk, yogurt, cheese sticks, cottage cheese and cream cheese.
4. All parve foods are allowed. This includes eggs, peanut butter (or peanut butter substitute) and tuna fish.
5. Fresh fruits and vegetables are allowed.
6. All bread and grains are allowed. You may send bagels, pita bread, rice, and pasta. With respect to chips and pretzels please check the label for a hechsher.
7. **All meat, turkey, chicken, pork and shellfish products are not allowed. This includes all kosher meat products**.
8. The school does have microwaves for heating up your child's lunch. Any lunch item you would like heated up, must be placed in a microwaveable container

Staff Handbook
one example

Our school follows the Kashrut laws defined by the Conservative movement.

- For children staying for an enrichment class or Lunch Bunch, parents should only send dairy or parve lunches. If a child has a severe allergy, we may contact other parents to restrict a certain item in their child's lunch that could pose a serious risk to another child in the classroom.

- When the child is celebrating his/her birthday at school, we ask the parent to purchase Kosher baked goods at their local grocery store that contains a K, OU, CRC on the outside label or another accepted hechsher (*attach a list of accepted hechshers*). *List local kosher bakeries with addresses* Kosher ice cream, frozen yogurt or most Entenmanns's products are also Kosher. Please do not have parents bring any homemade treats or balloons that might cause choking accidents. The best birthday snacks are small and nutritious. **A "K" on a yogurt is not acceptable – it must have an "OU" because it has items in it that are insect or meat-based. Cheese must also bear a Kashrut symbol.**

- Many people eat a meat meal on Friday night for Shabbat so please notify the parents if milk in any form is added to Shabbat baking projects. No chocolate chips, unless labeled as parve, should be added to challah baked for Shabbat.

- Teachers may bring dairy foods for their own consumption. School stoves, microwaves, and ovens may be used to warm food brought from home if it is kosher and dairy or parve.

Working With Clergy
(and Other Key Community Members)

Two facts guide the relationship between a United Synagogue early childhood program and the synagogue's rabbi:

1. The rabbi is the mara d'atra, the religious authority in his or her community. This means that for questions of religious observance in the early childhood program, the rabbi is the ultimate decision maker.
2. Research shows that the involvement of the clergy is a key feature in a successful early childhood program.

This section of the Vision will provide suggestions to early childhood directors and teachers on building a successful relationship with the clergy and other synagogue professionals, and for supporting them in active roles in the early childhood community.

Encouraging Jewish professionals in the synagogue community to get involved in early childhood

1. Benefits for children

Professionals such as rabbis, cantors, education directors, and building administrators play an important role in making connections for young children. Jewish professionals can represent the wider Jewish world to children, if they take the time to become part of children's lives. When children form relationships with rabbis and cantors, their pool of trusted adults in the Jewish community expands. As they get to know adults involved in Jewish life in a consistent way, children come to understand that being Jewish is not just for children, and it's not just something that happens at home or in their classroom. By example, children learn that being Jewish is a serious, grown-up, and fun thing to be. Jewish professionals can be significant resources for children with questions about God and other areas of Jewish life.

2. Benefits for families

Jewish professionals get children excited about being Jewish. Once a relationship has been formed, children become excited when they see their rabbi in the hall, when the education director joins them for snack, when the cantor sings songs with them on Shabbat, when the building administrator takes them on a tour of the building's kitchen. This excitement and familiarity spills over to help forge a connection between the child, and the child's family, and the host organization of the early childhood program. After being in the four-year-old room at the preschool, children become excited to go to Sunday school at the synagogue, so they can continue to see their friend the rabbi. As parents become familiar with the synagogue professionals through their child, they become more comfortable approaching synagogue professionals and becoming involved in the synagogue. These connections are crucial in drawing families into the synagogue as members. Jewish professionals are invaluable players in making this happen.

3. Benefits for teachers

When rabbis, cantors, and education directors take the time to teach early childhood teachers and directors, and to be available for questions and perhaps for personal support, teachers have more confidence and real ability to teach and integrate the Jewish curriculum. They will feel less inhibited about seeking advice and answers to questions, more likely to invite clergy into the classroom to interact with children, and more likely to refer a parent in need to the synagogue clergy.

4. Benefits for the professionals and the synagogue

Being with children is joyful. There's nothing like a cuddle with a two-year-old, or a serious conversation with a small group of four-year-olds about how God created inchworms, to significantly improve a person's day. Involvement of synagogue professionals can result in a better early childhood program, which will lead to more families in the school, which can lead to more synagogue members and young families involved in the life of the entire synagogue.

5. What the research says

A think tank sponsored by the Jewish Theological Seminary's William Davidson Graduate School of Education, Hebrew Union College, and CAJE found the following to be key features of a successful synagogue – early childhood relationship, and by extension, of a successful early childhood program:

a. The rabbi values the early childhood program enough to be involved. He or she spends time with children, teaches teachers and the early childhood director, and is available to all parents of young children.
b. When there are multiple rabbis or cantors, one has a significant relationship with the early childhood program as part of his or her portfolio.
c. All clergy members interact with the children, families, and staff in the early childhood program.

Supporting other Jewish professionals in their involvement in early childhood

Clergy and synagogue professionals may not yet have the skills to grab and hold the attention of three-year-olds. They may need guidance about how to speak to children, what to talk about, how long to talk, how to listen, and what exactly to do with children. For these reasons or others, the Jewish professionals most closely connected to your school may be reluctant to begin a relationship with your children. As an early childhood professional who recognizes the importance of such links, it is your job to establish relationships and help maintain them.

1. Inviting Jewish Professionals into Your Program

The rabbi (or rabbis), cantor, education director and executive director all have important roles to play in the early childhood program. Once you have convinced them of the importance of this involvement, using the points in the first part of this section, it is time to actually get them into your classrooms. It may be easiest to start small, especially if your Jewish professionals are reluctant to enter the early childhood wing of the building, or claim to be too busy to become involved in the early childhood center.

Rabbi Jonathan Lubliner of the Jacksonville Jewish Center offered his teachers the following suggestions of how they could invite clergy to become part of their classrooms:

- Invite a rabbi or cantor to your classroom to read a story of your choice.
- Invite a rabbi or cantor to join the class for snack and to teach a new brachah.
- Invite a rabbi or cantor to teach the children a new prayer or Jewish song, or to come and learn one from the children.
- Plan a pretend trip to Israel, and invite a rabbi or cantor to serve as the tour guide.
- Invite a rabbi or cantor to bring a ritual object to class to show and teach children.
- Meet the rabbi or cantor in the sanctuary to see the Torah, learn about prayer, or search for Jewish symbols.
- Keep an "Ask the Rabbi" box in the classroom for children's questions about God, prayer, Shabbat, and holidays. When enough questions have been collected, forward them to the rabbi, so he or she can come to the classroom to answer them.
- Before a holiday, invite the rabbi or cantor to share holiday thoughts and stories.
- Bake with a rabbi or cantor – challah, matzah, hamantaschen, Israeli salad, etc.
- Invite a rabbi or cantor to dress up as a favorite Jewish hero and join the class for snack or lunch.
- Ask the rabbi to join the children outside for a lesson in playground Hebrew.

Other suggestions include:

- Ask the rabbi or education director to put time in his or her calendar to stop by each classroom on Fridays, just to wish the children Shabbat shalom.
- Arrange for classes to take turns inviting the cantor or executive director to join them for snack, with a child-made, hand-delivered invitation, of course.
- Find times for the children to take a field trip to the rabbi's office. Ask the rabbi to meet you there, so he or she can tell you all about the many books on the shelf.
- Make sure it's okay, and then poke your head into the executive director's office every time you pass by, just to say hello.
- Stress the importance of getting to know the children's names to your Jewish professionals.
- In small groups, ask the rabbi to discuss children's Hebrew names with them.

2. Building working-with-children skills

Not every adult is comfortable working with young children. Many rabbis who don't interact with the children in their synagogue's early childhood program avoid this interaction because they are uncomfortable with small children. This will result in not prioritizing involvement in the early childhood program, which will result in the rabbi being too busy to spend time with the children. Your synagogue professionals may need lots of support and pointers, even if they are parents of young children themselves! Here are some pointers:

- Begin with very structured, brief interactions. Perhaps you could suggest that the professional read a story to the children, and provide the book to be read. Type up two follow-up questions that the professional should ask the children after the story.
- Provide the professionals with brief summaries of developmental expectations for children at each age.

- Suggest several songs the professional (if he or she is musical) can sing with the children.
- Provide guidelines on the appropriate amount of time to spend with the children in different kinds of activities, and reasonable expectations of different age groups (and specific class dynamics, as necessary).
- Enable the professional to bring something of him or herself to the encounters with children (sign language, puppets, travel stories, other personal interests).
- After interactions with the children, meet with the synagogue professional and provide honest yet gentle and always constructive criticism.

3. Strive for regular interactions with children
   As the children become more comfortable with the synagogue professionals, and the professionals become more comfortable with the children, work to find more ways to integrate the professionals into your program.
   - Schedule the cantor to sing with the children as they get ready for Shabbat each week, or at the school's weekly Shabbat celebration on Fridays.
   - Schedule the rabbi to come to tell a Jewish story each week or so, during circle time, in preparation for Shabbat, or at the school's weekly Shabbat celebration on Fridays.
   - Schedule the executive director to share snack with one class a month.
   - Schedule a few opportunities throughout the year for parents to learn with various synagogue professionals.
   - Schedule opportunities for parents and children to get to know the education director and learn about the religious school.
   - Schedule regular opportunities for early childhood staff to learn with synagogue professionals

Synagogue Professionals and Early Childhood Educators

More often than not, it will be the responsibility of the early childhood director to seek religious advice and final approval from the rabbi on decisions of ritual practice. It will, most likely, also be the responsibility of the early childhood director to build and sustain relationships between synagogue professionals and the early childhood program. Don't be afraid to take this step and ask for these connections. It will be highly rewarding to both sides.

Clergy and other synagogue professionals can be extremely beneficial as partners in early childhood education. Whether it takes a little pleading and storytelling lessons, or if the Jewish professionals in question used to be early childhood educators themselves and know the ropes, establishing relationships between early childhood programs and synagogue professionals is well worth the time of everyone involved. The relationship will reap benefits for children, families, teachers, and the Jewish community overall.

Creating a Jewish Environment

The environment of the classroom is truly the unspoken curriculum. Walk into another teacher's classroom when no one is in the room. What do the walls tell you? Can you tell this is a Jewish classroom? What can you learn from the books on the shelf, the way the art supplies are stored, the food in the house corner? How do you feel, standing there in the middle of the room? Are you enticed to jump in, play and explore? Do you get a "hands off" vibe? Does this room belong to the teachers or to the children who live there? What messages do the colors convey? Would a child with ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) feel over-stimulated? Would a curious child find enough to capture her interest? Is the message "Jewish Life Happens Here" conveyed by more than just one bulletin board with Shabbat symbols, hanging unseen since the beginning of the school year?

Excellence in a Conservative early childhood program begins when the physical environment of the school and classroom make visible the Jewish life that is happening in the school. Resources such as the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) can help guide us in creating excellence in the overall early childhood environment; the following material will just address creating a high quality Jewish environment. There are ways to support the Jewish curriculum through every area of the classroom. Making good use of the walls, the supplies, and the materials will help achieve balance and excellence.

The Walls

The walls of the classroom let people know who gathers there, what is going on, and what is important. First and foremost, anybody who walks into the school, or the classroom, should immediately know that this is a Jewish place. While we stop short of a sign announcing, "Jewish Life Happens Here!" we do want that to be the conclusion anyone could easily arrive at. The evidence of Jewish life must be as much part of the classroom as anything else, not limited to one or two Jewish books on the bookshelf, and a bulletin board in the corner with pictures of the Jewish holidays. The walls should influence the Jewish life in the classroom, and Jewish life in the classroom should influence the walls.

Some tips and suggestions:

- Posters and art work should reflect different kinds of children and families, Jewish, Israeli, and secular scenes.
- Photographs of children and families in the class, engaged in Jewish and secular activities, can be color photocopied and enlarged into posters at any office supply or copy store. Laminate the best ones – it's cheaper than buying posters and more relevant to the children.
- Consider how the walls reflect the emerging Jewish aspects of the curriculum. Make sure the walls change often to reflect the ongoing life of the class, and can serve to teach parents what their children are learning Jewishly. We tend not to notice visuals that have been in place for a long time.

- If every child's project comes out looking the same, reconsider the goals of the project. Was the child able to put him or herself in the project, or did the teacher usurp any creative opportunities?
- Don't forget the ceiling, floor, windows, and hallways. These areas are included in this category as spaces with the ability to communicate, but remember not to fill them to the point of over-stimulation.
- A conscious effort must be made to include Jewish images consistently in the general visual culture.
- Visuals and props that can supplement the ongoing, changing Jewish life of the classroom might include:
  - ❖ A mezuzah in the doorway. (For more about this, see the Ritual Observance section of the Vision.)
  - ❖ Signs on the door in Hebrew and/or transliteration declaring Shalom or *bruchim haba'im* (welcome).
  - ❖ A Jewish/Hebrew name for the class, posted prominently.
  - ❖ Information/explanations for families about what their children are doing and learning Jewishly.
  - ❖ Pictures of Jewish values and mitzvot, such as bikur cholim (visiting a person in the hospital), shalom (a child helping two other children to stop fighting), or tikkun olam (children recycling).
  - ❖ An Israeli flag.
  - ❖ Pictures from Jewish calendars and Jewish catalogs, cut out and mounted with contact paper at eye level. Posters are also often available for free from Jewish organizations.
  - ❖ Jewish calendar for the teachers to use, hung in the classroom at adult level.
  - ❖ Children's art work, related to Jewish things happening in the room (body outlines with Hebrew and English labels, apple prints, mitzvah tree leaves, handmade Tzedakah box, Bible scenes created by children).
  - ❖ Signs to explain what is happening in the classroom. ("On Fridays we eat challah for Shabbat," "At naptime we listen to Jewish lullabies,") Signs can be laminated and used from year to year ("We are carrying flags for Simchat Torah!")

- A poster (or posters) with everyday *brachot* (blessings). This insures that everyone knows the words, and serves as a reminder to include brachot in the rhythm of daily life. The more accessible a visual is, the more useful it is. Posting brachot in Hebrew, English, and transliteration will make the words of the brachot accessible to all the adults in the room. Illustrating the brachot with pictures of the appropriate foods (or actions) will help the children understand the meaning of the brachot.

- Hebrew labels transform a print-rich environment into a Jewishly print-rich environment. (Examples of labels in English, Hebrew and transliteration can be found in *Jewish Every Day*, pp. 359-362.)
- In schools in which the early childhood program and the religious school share rooms, do whatever work it takes to find a satisfactory balance of shared space.

Supplies and materials

As with the curriculum that happens on the walls, the supplies and materials in the classroom also will help integrate Jewish life into the daily life of the classroom. It is essential both that supplies and materials of a Jewish nature are plentiful in the classroom, and that these Jewish materials and supplies are integrated into the general inventory of materials in the classroom. Plant strategic tidbits or props to pique children's curiosity. Letting children discover a strategic prop that you have planted before especially time-bound curriculum events (such as holidays) allows the holiday to become part of the life of the class more naturally. Add different kinds of shofrot to the science table before Rosh Hashanah; bring the chanukiah the children made in their class last year to circle time and see what discussion develops; place camels and people in the sand table before Pesach. Observing children with a strategic prop may lead the curriculum in unplanned directions, although still providing specific holiday concept experiences and achieving larger, pre-determined goals.

Standard supplies and materials that can be a permanent or regular part of the classroom stock might include:

- ❖ Jewish shape sponges and cookie cutters for painting
- ❖ Jewish shape cookie cutters mixed in with the other play dough toys
- ❖ Hebrew newspaper for covering the tables during art projects
- ❖ Jewish foods (plastic challah, matzah, etc.) and kosher/Jewish ethnic food boxes in the house corner
- ❖ Stuffed Torahs, and an aron (ark) in which to store them
- ❖ Jewish stamps mixed in with other stamps and stamp pads
- ❖ Jewish star pasta, Jewish stickers, and Jewish glitter shapes from a party store
- ❖ Jewish shape punches for cut-outs
- ❖ Real Jewish objects for children to see and touch. Metal seder plate, groggers, large dreidels, chanukiah, candlesticks, kiddush cup, spice box, etc.
- ❖ Israeli scarves for dress up
- ❖ Jewish holiday cloth napkins and tablecloths for the house corner
- ❖ Jewish shape and Hebrew stencils
- ❖ Jewish software for schools with computers
- ❖ Jewish puzzles – a good percentage of the puzzles in the classroom should be Jewish in nature or support the Jewish elements of the curriculum
- ❖ Jewish games – games like lotto, matching games, and dominoes are commercially available with Jewish themes and graphics. Board games, like Torah Slides and Ladders or Magical Mitzvah Park, also may be appropriate

- Music. A large percentage of the music available in the classroom should be Jewish in nature. The Jewish cassette tapes or CDs should be mixed in with secular tapes or CDs and played frequently
- Books. The children's bookshelf should contain a large percentage of Jewish books, which are rotated frequently (just as all the books should be rotated frequently). There are many Jewish board books for younger children, and many popular English children's books are available in Hebrew. Favorite English stories printed in Hebrew help to familiarize children with Hebrew writing in a relevant and fun way
- Props for block play to facilitate synagogue, Jewish life and Israel play, such as camels, stained glass blocks, Jerusalem stone blocks, people with kipot, castle blocks, etc.
- Blocks with Hebrew letters and Jewish pictures
- Magnetic Hebrew letters mixed in with magnetic English letters
- Catalogs from Judaic stores and old New Years cards to cut up

Materials and supplies also can be useful in integrating Jewish elements into secular topics. For an example, a unit on construction might include blueprints for a synagogue or aron kodesh. The community helper unit could be supplemented by adding a "rabbi uniform" – talit, robe, kipah, siddur – to the dress up corner. A unit on dinosaurs could include the book *Dinosaur on Shabbat* by Diane Levin Rauchwerger. Seeking out ways to integrate Jewish elements into the unspoken, seemingly secular curriculum will insure that the whole curriculum is truly integrated.

This material adapted from *Jewish Every Day: The Complete Handbook for Early Childhood Teachers*, by Maxine Segal Handelman, A.R.E.Publishing, 2000 (available from Behrman House)

Conclusion

In the summer of 2007, early childhood educators at the CAJE conference developed the following statement on the key elements necessary to create a vibrantly Jewish early childhood education program:

> "The purpose of Early Childhood Jewish Education (ECJE) is to lay the foundation for lifelong Jewish engagement by supporting the development and enhancement of the Jewish identity of children and their families through Jewish knowledge, Jewish values, and Jewish experiences. The key elements to achieve this are:
>
> • Engaging in Torah for living and learning
> • Connecting with Israel – the land, the people and the Hebrew language
> • Experiencing Jewish time and space
> • Building relationships and connecting with the larger Jewish community
> • Providing opportunities that inspire families to live vibrant Jewish lives
> • Imparting a sense of belonging to the Jewish people
>
> "In order for these elements to be present, excellent early childhood Jewish education must have:
>
> • Educators who are knowledgeable about Judaism and early childhood education
> • Commitment to (systemic) lifelong Jewish and pedagogic learning
> • Community support
> • Environments that are welcoming and that embrace Jewish diversity"

http://www.caje.org/earlychildhood/files/EC-Pre-Conference-Joint-Statement_11-5-07.pdf

This Vision for Conservative early childhood programs strives to help schools include these key elements not just in a Jewish way, but in a Conservative Jewish way. The distinctions sometimes are subtle. Even so, as the education in the early childhood program of a Conservative synagogue or Schechter school more neatly fits the tenets of Conservative Judaism, families will be drawn more seamlessly into the life of the Conservative synagogue, strengthening the Conservative movement and the Jewish people.