Hillel ISRAEL | MATANEL FOUNDATION GRANTED TO GIVE | The Matanel Fellowship for Global Jewish Leadership

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Introductions

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Matanel Foundation

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

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

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

The Matanel Fellowship, the results of which are presented in the following pages, is a realization of all those goals at once. Exceptional student leaders were selected; an outstanding curriculum was developed; and yes — we added a third country. Students from Israel, Poland, and the United States learned throughout the year with top-tier educators on Zoom, culminating in an immersive Shabbat experience in Budapest.

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

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

With pride and gratitude,

Rabbi Noga Brenner Samia
CEO, Hillel Israel
November 2025

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

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

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

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

Serdeczne gratulacje! Mazal tov! Congratulations!

Esti Palmer
Associate Director, Immersive Experiences
Hillel International

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

Anna Birman

Anna Birman is studying toward a dual degree in cognitive science, and Jewish ethics in the Joint program between Columbia University and the Jewish Theological Seminary in NYC, USA.

SUMMARY

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

Students chosen to participate in this course will be students who do not have a formal Jewish education, as a result of their families/communities needing to hide their Judaism, either currently or in the recent past, due to historical or political circumstances. Through sessions about Jewish history, activities that facilitate thinking about one's own Jewish identity and goals, the opportunity to lead the community in prayer, and Zoom sessions to build a global Jewish community across cohorts, students will become a new link in their generational chains and confident, effective leaders in the Jewish world.

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

DEFINITIONS

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

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

2. **Region (or Class Region):** The area in which the cohort is located and the home region of the students.
3. **Family Region:** The area from which student's family is from, if known. Family Region may be the same as Class Region.
4. **Cohort Community:** Cohort community is defined as the small community that will form in each class.
5. **Broader Community:** Broader community is defined as the inter-generational circle in the region the class is held.
6. **Global Community:** Students across all cohorts.
7. **Transmitter:** A transmitter is a person or people who pass(es) on Jewish culture in a formal (school) or informal (home) setting. A transmitter is different from a teacher because the end goal of the knowledge is for it to be incorporated into a person's life and value system.
8. **Inheritance:** In my project, "inheritance" will be defined as receiving guidance on Jewish identity as part of your education, formal or informal. While the sum-total of Jewish heritage may be the same, individual inheritance varies by the guidance on Jewish culture/identity/tradition the student receives via the transmitter and by the time at which they receive this information.

LOGISTICS

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

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

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

WHY THIS AGE?

The middle school and early high school age is a time when many teenagers are thinking about their identities and what their lives might look like in the future. For many students that meet the eligibility requirements of this course, this is the time when they may start thinking about their Jewish identities and have questions, which aligns both developmentally and with the age of Jewish adulthood. This course will help them develop the skills of self-reflection and initiative, turning their questions into introspection and agency over their own lives. Many Orphans of Heritage are in a position to make decisions about their Jewish lives as young teens. While many Jewish identity programs are aimed at college-aged students, the goal of this program is to reach students before they enter college so that they can develop their connection to Jewish life before they move away from home and have to make Jewish life decisions on their own.'

WHY THIS PROJECT?

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

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

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

PROGRAM EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

1. Survey

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

2. Questionnaire *(see Appendix A Figure 6).*

a. Students will answer the questions from the incoming survey (See Appendix A Figure 1) again. This response will be both for the student to track their thinking and for teachers to have a qualitative measure of how the students have changed.

b. Students will be asked about their plans to participate in Jewish life in the coming year. Students have the opportunity to ask their teachers for help materializing this plan in this section.

3. Follow-up Questionnaire

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

4. Attendance

a. High attendance at the meetings throughout the program will demonstrate interest.

b. Success will be measured by the participation of students in the Broader Jewish Community, if it exists. Ideally, the teacher will be part of that community and will be able to follow engagement over several years.

THEME 1: PLACE, MEMORY, & HISTORY

Suggested time: *1 hour per part, 3 lessons. Part B completed at home.*

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

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

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

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

> If a world event triggered the emigration of the family, the teacher may assign an informative article on that event;
>
> If the family was involved in a Jewish movement (like the Neologue movement in Budapest), assign an article on the movement and its major institutions and philosophies.

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

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

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

THEME 2: PRESENT DAY & IDENTITY

Suggested time: *1 hour*

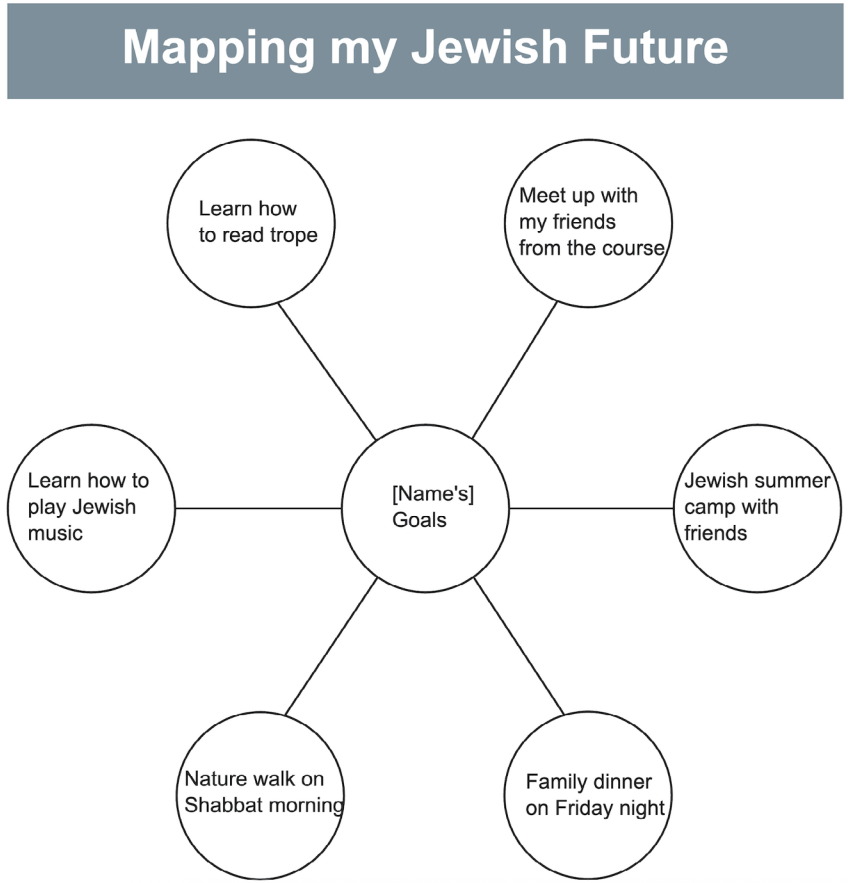
Materials: *Pens/markers, Bubble map templates, short stories*

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

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

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

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



THEME 3: CREATION

Suggested time: *Teacher's discretion.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Part 4: After the service, students will share with parents and guardians the traditions they wish to incorporate into their lives and homes, using their bubble maps as a guide. Mordecai Kaplan wrote in his 1934 book Judaism as a *Civilization* that "the scope of the Jewish teacher must be enlarged to include the home of the child he teaches. In fact, most of the influence he wishes to exert upon the child he must learn to exert through mediation of the parent" (Kaplan, 1934, p. 496). While Kaplan's argument that in order to impart values, teaching must move past the classroom and into the home rings true, in the context of students eligible for this program, personal experience shows that the most powerful tool a teacher can offer is the ability for the student to become a mediator themselves. Therefore, the teacher's role in this course is to empower students to initiate and sustain Jewish practices themselves, while working in parallel with parents/guardians to ensure that the child's initiatives are encouraged and supported in practical ways.

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

THEME 4: GLOBAL JEWISH COMMUNITY

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

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

CONCLUSION

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

APPENDIX A

Figure 1: Student Application

(100-250 words per question)

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

Figure 2: Student Incoming Survey

Scale of 1-10:

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

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

Figure 3: Teacher Application

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

Figure 4: Prompts for Theme 1 Memory

Questions to ask family:

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

What was their life like?

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

How was your family Jewish after the break in practice?

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

Figure 5: Prompts for Theme 1 History:

Where is this place on the map?

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

What is the Jewish community like there now?

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

Figure 6: Student Outgoing Survey/Questionnaire

Scale of 1-10:

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

Short Answers:

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

Follow up in 3 months:

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

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

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

PROPOSED CHALLENGE

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

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

INITIAL IDEAS & SOURCES

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

The sessions include:

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

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

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

Modern Cultural Tools I visioned included

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

Sources and Inspiration

- Pew Research Center reports on Gen Z and Jewish life
- The Jewish Education Project's jewish educator portal for a database of possible age-appropriate activities https://educator.jewishedproject.org/content/what-we-do
- Jewish Studio Project for art-based processing of trauma https://www.jewishstudioproject.org/about-jsp
- Writings by modern writers and thinkers such as Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Shira Telushkin and more

WHY THIS FORMAT?

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

LOGISTICS & IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS

Marketing and Recruitment Strategy

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

Structure and Participation Format

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

Facilitation and Leadership

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

Facilitator Guide

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

OVERVIEW

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

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

SESSION 1: PERSONAL EXPRESSION

Theme: *"Where Am I In This Story?"*

Goals:

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

Suggested Activities:

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

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

SESSION 2: COLLECTIVE RITUAL & ART

Theme: *"We Carry Light Together"*

Goals:

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

Suggested Activities:

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

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

SESSION 3: FUTURE VISIONING & BELONGING

Theme: *"A People, A Purpose, A Plan"*

Goals:

- Explore the meaning of Peoplehood in 2025

Invite commitment, curiosity, and hope

Plant seeds for continued community-building

Suggested Activities:

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

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

Optional Add-ons:

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

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

Dor Ben Avi

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

THE CHALLENGE

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

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

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

THE RESOLUTION

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

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

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

MY PERSONAL CONNECTION

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

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

HISTORICAL MEMORY

Between Memory and History — Avraham Infeld

Sometimes there is a confusion between memory and history. In my opinion those are two different terms. History is the knowledge about events that occurred in the past; memory asks you how those events affect you today and tomorrow. If history is prose (the song's text) — memory is poetry. And like any good poetry — memory is not necessarily based on facts. History is based on the obligation to bring evidence and facts, whereas memory is not subject to these constraints. Sometimes we remember things that may not have happened, but this does not diminish the value or the truth of the memory. Did the Exodus from Egypt really happen? What are the facts about the destruction of the Holy Temple? Archaeologists and historians can debate the evidence and come to different conclusions. However, for us as Jews, their conclusions are irrelevant. We know that the memory of the Exodus is real and continues to be meaningful.

A nation of storytellers — Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

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

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

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

Questions:

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

Which is more dominant in your personal Jewish life?

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

THE LAND OF ISRAEL (ZIONISM)

Who am I — A.B. Yehoshua

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

An Endless Ideal, 1899 — Benjamin Ze'ev Herzl

Honorable Congress! We have not gathered here to elect a head of state, for we are not a state. We are a community — a community organized in a new way, indeed, but with an ancient destiny that appears as early as the First Book of Kings.

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

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

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

Questions:

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

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

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

THE HEBREW LANGUAGE

Avraham Infeld — Summer Camp

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

We once held summer camps for Israeli and American teenagers. There were 300 kids in the dining room, and I couldn't tell the difference between the Israelis and the Americans. They looked alike to me in the jeans and shoes they wore, until the end of the meal, when the Reform rabbi stood up and announced the "Birkat," or the blessing of food as it was called in American summer camps. All the Americans began to sing in harmony in Hebrew. The other 150 kids in the room had no idea what was going on. They had never heard the blessing, and they didn't know the melody, but they were the only ones who really understood the words. The young Americans asked the Israelis: What kind of Jews are you? Why don't you know the blessing of food? When was the last time you went to synagogue? And the young Israelis asked in response: What kind of Jews are you? Do you understand the language in which you were singing?

Hebrew and Translation — Avraham Shlonsky (1968)

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

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

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

Questions:

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

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

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

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

MOUNT SINAI (SHARED VALUES) — FATE OR DESTINY

Covenant of Fate — What is it?

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

Rabbi Yosef-Dov Halevi Soloveitchik

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

Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua Heschel

Covenant of Destiny — What is it?

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

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

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

Rabbi Yosef-Dov Halevi Soloveitchi

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

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

Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua Heschel

Questions:

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

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

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

FAMILY (TRADITION)

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

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

Regev Ben David

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

Amos Oz

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

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

Yaffa Bnaya

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

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

Roy Sharon

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

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

Rabbi Angela Buchdal.

Questions:

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

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

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

Progressive and Proud: Reclaiming Jewish Identity in Social Justice Spaces

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INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT

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

This exclusion is exacerbated by the rise of what Sharansky (2004) calls the "new antisemitism," which disguises itself as anti-Zionism by denying Jews the right to self-determination, holding them collectively responsible for Israeli state actions, or demanding they renounce core aspects of their identity to participate in social justice work. Deborah Lipstadt (2019) emphasizes that antisemitism is unique in its ability to position Jews as both oppressors and outsiders simultaneously, a dynamic that resonates strongly in progressive contexts where Jewish students may be accused of "white privilege" while also facing marginalization.

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

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

PROGRAM VISION & GOALS

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

Vision: To create a safe, empowering environment for

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

Learning Goals:

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

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

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

Session 1: Naming the Tension

- Introductions, storytelling, and exploration of lived experiences.
- Jewish texts on identity and responsibility (Pirkei Avot 1:14).
- Group norms for dialogue and safety.

Session 2: Understanding Antisemitism in Progressive Spaces

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

Session 3: Strategies for Dialogue & Advocacy

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

Session 4: Reclaiming Jewish Voice in Progressive Movements

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

Format & Facilitation

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

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

RESOURCE GUIDE

Key Definitions

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

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

Jewish Texts

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

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

Conversation Tools & Myths

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

Practical Strategies

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

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

Each session follows a consistent 90-minute structure:

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

Facilitator Role:

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

Sample Activity:

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

IMPLEMENTATION & REPLICATION

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

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

CONCLUSION

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

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

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

Hagar Avidor

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INTRODUCTION

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

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

A CHALLENGE OF CONNECTION: UNDERSTANDING THE SCOPE

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

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

THE CAMPUS CRISIS

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

IMPACT ON COMMUNITY LIFE

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

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

MY PROPOSED SOLUTION: DIALOGUE CIRCLES FOR COMMUNITY BUILDING

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

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

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

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

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

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

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

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

Leadership: Two co-facilitators — one Jewish and one non-Jewish — trained and skilled in dialogue methodology. The facilitators will be professionals with backgrounds in group-leading, and will go through a short preparation seminar, focused on the program's curriculum.

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

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

Program structure:

Each session follows a consistent structure:

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

OPTIONAL SESSION THEMES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

After the program ends, I expect participants to show reduced intergroup anxiety, increased empathy, a greater sense of closeness and more positive attitudes toward the other group. These aspects will be measured through surveys, filled out twice by participants, once before the start of the program and once after it ends.

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

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES

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

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

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

MY ROLE AS A JEWISH LEADER

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

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

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

CONCLUSION

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

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

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

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

Lily Lebwohl

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SESSIONS OUTLINE (8 WEEKS)

1. Creating Belonging — Opening & Community Building

a. Icebreakers designed for inclusivity (sharing one personal Jewish memory or question).

b. Study and discussion of Avraham Infeld's Five-Legged Table of Jewish Identity (memory, family, Mount Sinai, Israel, Hebrew).

c. Explore the idea of belonging vs. fitting in.

2. Jewish Diversity

a. Reflect on the question: "Where do you feel that you belong?"

b. Explore global Jewish communities.

c. Review Pew data on Jewish identity.

d. Reflect on the question: "What makes someone Jewish enough?"

3. Jewish Learning Without Prerequisites

a. Judaism 101: Shabbat, holidays, Torah, Talmud, mitzvot, minhag.

b. Break into small groups, each group teaches one concept to others after discussion.

c. Fellowship builds a shared dictionary of key terms.

4. Becoming, Belonging, Building

a. Discuss Berger & Levisohn's framework.

b. Map personal Jewish journeys.

5. Jewish Values & Ethics

a. Study texts on ethics (Pirkei Avot).

b. How can Jewish values guide personal and communal life?

c. Global connection: compare how Jewish values are lived out in Israel, America, and other Diaspora communities.

6. Shabbat through the lens of Inclusion

a. Fellowship participants design and lead a low barrier Shabbat dinner.

b. Participants invite 1–2 friends outside the fellowship to the dinner and use their evaluations of the Shabbat after the dinner.

7. Barriers & Bridges

a. Identify exclusionary barriers in Jewish spaces.

b. Create initiatives to lower them.

c. Start moving from reflection to action.

8. Looking Forward — Leadership & Belonging

a. Participants share personal Jewish visions.

b. Revisit Infeld's "Five-Legged Table" and discuss which leg do you want to strengthen in your own Jewish identity?

c. Closing ritual of blessings.

EVALUATION PLAN

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

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

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

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

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Ahavat Chinam: A Learning and Reflection Workshop

Maya Jamil

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

PART I: A CHALLENGE FACING GLOBAL JEWRY

Discussion Questions

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

What role do you foresee for yourself within that resolution?

Facilitator Notes

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

PART II: AHAVAT CHINAM

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

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

Source 1: Yoma 9b:8-12

יומא ט׳ ב:ח׳-י״ב אֲבָל מִקְדָּשׁ שֵׁנִי שֶׁהָיוּ עוֹסְקִין בְּתוֹרָה וּבְמִצְוֹת וּגְמִילוּת חֲסָדִים, מִפְּנֵי מָה חָרַב? מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהָיְתָה בּוֹ שִׂנְאַת חִנָּם. לְלַמֶּדְךָ שֶׁשִּׁקּוּלָה שִׂנְאַת חִנָּם כְּנֶגֶד שָׁלֹשׁ עֲבֵירוֹת: עֲבוֹדָה זָרָה, גִּלּוּי עֲרָיוֹת, וּשְׁפִיכוּת דָּמִים.

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

Discussion Question

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

Source 2: Rav Kook, Orot HaKodesh

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

Discussion Question

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

Source 3: Leviticus 19:18

ויקרא י״ט:י״ח לֹא־תִקֹּם וְלֹא־תִטֹּר אֶת־בְּנֵי עַמֶּךָ וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֲךָ כָּמוֹךָ אֲנִי יְהוָה:

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

Discussion Questions

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

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

Source 4: Rashi on Leviticus 19:18:2

רש״י על ויקרא י״ט:י״ח:ב׳ ואהבת לרעך כמוך. אָמַר רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא זֶה כְּלָל גָּדוֹל בַּתּוֹרָה (ספרא):

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

Discussion Questions

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

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

PART III: THE MAGEN DAVID

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

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

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

Discussion Question

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

Facilitator Notes

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

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

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

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

Discussion Questions

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

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

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

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

Discussion Questions

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

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

Facilitator Notes

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

PART IV: THE MAGEN DAVID AT DOHÁNY STREET SYNAGOGUE

Facilitator Notes

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

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

Discussion Question

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

PART V: THE MATANEL EXPERIENCE

A Personal Reflection on Unity in Action

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

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

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

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

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

PART VI: CELEBRATING OUR DIFFERENCES

Facilitator Notes

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

Poem: "Celebrating Our Differences"

Different Backgrounds
Different Traditions
Different Cultures
Different Practices
Different Beliefs

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Closing Question

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

FACILITATOR CLOSING NOTE

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

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

Valeriia Rodenko

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

IDEA

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

CHALLENGE

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

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

OBJECTIVES

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

TARGET AUDIENCE

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

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

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

FORMAT & ACTIVITIES

Friday Night – Step-by-Step Shabbat Experience

- **Welcome Circle** — creating a safe, intimate space for the group to connect
- **Intro Discussion:** "What is Shabbat and what does Shabbat mean to you?"
- **Candle Lighting and first Tzedakah in Hillel Warsaw** — with reflection on its symbolism and relevance
- **Kiddush & Ritual Explanations** — the "how" and the "why" of each blessing
- **Shared Shabbat Dinner** — with guided pauses to introduce:
  - Hand washing, challah, traditional songs
  - Historical origins & diverse interpretations of Shabbat
  - Open conversation & personal stories
- **Interactive moments** — participants shared feelings, memories and even theories about traditions
- **Closing Reflections** — discussion of the difference in their meanings before and after the Shabbat lecture

TONE & APPROACH

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

INSPIRATION & PERSONAL CONNECTION

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

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

One phrase from that trip stayed with me:

"Our differences make us united."

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

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

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

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

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

Many expressed a strong interest in continuing this format or attending similar sessions in the future. Following this, Esti Palmer suggested training the 15 participants from the original Shabbat dinner so they could each lead a similar experience.

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

For the next iteration, I would:

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

SCALABILITY & GLOBAL POTENTIAL

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

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

CONCLUSION

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

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

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

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

Shabbat: A Friday Night Ritual Guide

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

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

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

Shabbat Shalom,
Yakira Galler

CANDLE LIGHTING הדלקת נרות *Hadlakat Neirot*

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

Intention

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

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל שַׁבָּת

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

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

PEACE BE UPON YOU

שלום עליכם *Shalom Aleichem*

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

Intention

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

שלום עליכם מלאכי השרת מלאכי עליון מלך מלכי המלכים הקדוש ברוך הוא 3

בואכם לשלום מלאכי השלום מלאכי עליון מלך מלכי המלכים הקדוש ברוך הוא 3

ברכוני לשלום מלאכי השלום מלאכי עליון מלך מלכי המלכים הקדוש ברוך הוא 3

צאתכם לשלום מלאכי עליון מלך מלכי המלכים הקדוש ברוך הוא 3

Adding a line calling for the return of the hostages in Gaza was customary for many starting after October 7th, 2023 . Hopefully there will never be a time in our future where this prayer is again needed. Be'ezrat Hashem (with the help of God)

שובכם לשלום מלאכי השלום מלאכי עליון מלך מלכי המלכים הקדוש ברוך הוא 3

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

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

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

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

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

(Add for the return of hostages)

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

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

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

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

of the king of kings, the holy and blessed one

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

(Add for the return of hostages)

BLESSING FOR CHILDREN

ברכת הילדים *Birkat Hayeladim*

Here are three different iterations of the blessings for children.

Intention

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

For Sons

יְשִׂ֣ימְךָ֣ אֱלֹהִ֔ים כְּאֶפְרַ֖יִם וְכִמְנַשֶּׁ֑ה
יְבָרֶכְךָ֥ יְהוָ֖ה וְיִשְׁמְרֶֽךָ׃ יָאֵ֨ר יְהוָ֤ה פָּנָיו֙ אֵלֶ֔יךָ וְיִחֻנֶּ֑ךָּ׃ יִשָּׂ֨א יְהוָ֤ה פָּנָיו֙ אֵלֶ֔יךָ וְיָשֵׂ֥ם לְךָ֖ שָׁלֽוֹם׃

Y'simcha Elohim k'efrayim v'chiminasheh. Y'varechecha Adonai v'yishmarecha. Yaeir Adonai panav eilecha v'yichunecha. Tisa Adonai panav eilecha v'yaseim l'cha shalom.

May God bless you like Ephraim and Menasheh, May God bless you and protect you. May God show you favor and be gracious to you. May God show you kindness and grant you peace.

For Daughters

יְשִׂ֣ימֵךְ֣ אֱלֹהִ֔ים כְּשָׂרָה֙ רִבְקָ֣ה רָחֵ֔ל וְלֵאָ֑ה
יְבָרֶכְךָ֥ יְהוָ֖ה וְיִשְׁמְרֶֽךָ׃ יָאֵ֨ר יְהוָ֤ה פָּנָיו֙ אֵלֶ֔יךָ וְיִחֻנֶּ֑ךָּ׃ יִשָּׂ֨א יְהוָ֤ה פָּנָיו֙ אֵלֶ֔יךָ וְיָשֵׂ֥ם לְךָ֖ שָׁלֽוֹם׃

Y'simcha Elohim k'sarah rivkah rachel v'leah. Y'varechecha Adonai v'yishmarecha. Yaeir Adonai panav eilecha v'yichunecha. Tisa Adonai panav eilecha v'yaseim l'cha shalom.

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

For Children

יְבָרֶכְךָ֥ יְהוָ֖ה וְיִשְׁמְרֶֽךָ׃ יָאֵ֨ר יְהוָ֤ה פָּנָיו֙ אֵלֶ֔יךָ וְיִחֻנֶּ֑ךָּ׃ יִשָּׂ֨א יְהוָ֤ה פָּנָיו֙ אֵלֶ֔יךָ וְיָשֵׂ֥ם לְךָ֖ שָׁלֽוֹם׃

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

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

KIDDUSH FOR FRIDAY EVENING

קדוש לליל שבת *Kiddush l'leil Shabbat*

Sit or stand according to your custom.

Intention

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

Ashkenazi: אשכנזי

וַיְכֻלּוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל־צְבָאָם: וַיְכַל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה. וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִכָּל־מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה: וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ כִּי בוֹ שָׁבַת מִכָּל־מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר־בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת

סְבְרִי:

respond: לחיים

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפֶן

respond: אמן

בָּרוּךְ אָתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְרָצָה בָּנוּ וְשַׁבַּת קָדְשׁוֹ בְּאַהֲבָה וּבְרָצוֹן הִנְחִילָנוּ זִכָּרוֹן לְמַעֲשֵׂה בְרֵאשִׁית. כִּי הוּא יוֹם תְּחִלָּה לְמִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ זֵכֶר לִיצִיאַת מִצְרָיִם. כִּי בָנוּ בָחַרְתָּ וְאוֹתָנוּ קִדַּשְׁתָּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים וְשַׁבַּת קָדְשְׁךָ בְּאַהֲבָה וּבְרָצוֹן הִנְחַלְתָּנוּ. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה מְקַדֵּשׁ הַשַּׁבָּת

respond: אמן

Vay'hi erev vay'hi boker yom hashishi:

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

Savri: (respond: l'chaim)

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

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

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

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

Attention: (to life)

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

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

Sephardi: ספרדי

יוֹם הַשִּׁשִּׁי

וַיְכֻלּוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל־צְבָאָם: וַיְכַל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה. וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִכָּל־מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה: וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ. כִּי בוֹ שָׁבַת מִכָּל־מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר־בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת

סְבְרִי:

respond: לחיים

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפֶן׃

respond: אמן

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְרָצָה בָּנוּ, וְשַׁבַּת קָדְשׁוֹ בְּאַהֲבָה וּבְרָצוֹן הִנְחִילָנוּ, זִכָּרוֹן לְמַעֲשֵׂה בְרֵאשִׁית. כִּי הוּא יוֹם תְּחִלָּה לְמִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ, זֵכֶר לִיצִיאַת מִצְרָיִם. וְשַׁבַּת קָדְשְׁךָ בְּאַהֲבָה וּבְרָצוֹן הִנְחַלְתָּנוּ. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, מְקַדֵּשׁ הַשַּׁבָּת

respond: אמן

Yom hashishi

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

Savri: (respond: l'chaim)

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

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

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

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

Attention: (to life)

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

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

HAND WASHING

נטילת ידיים *N'tilat Yadayim*

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

Intention

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

בָּרוּךְ־אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ עַל נְטִילַת יָדָיִם

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

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

HAMOTZI

המוציא

Intention

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

בָּרוּךְ־אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַמּוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ

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

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

GRACE AFTER MEALS

ברכת המזון *Birkat Hamazon*

Intention

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

Food/Sustenance

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

Land/Home

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

Jerusalem/Hope

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

Peace/Fullness/Goodness

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

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

On Shabbat Say:

שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת בְּשׁוּב יְהוָה אֶת שִׁיבַת צִיּוֹן הָיִינוּ כְחֹלְמִים. אָז יִמָּלֵא שְׂחוֹק פִּינוּ וּלְשׁוֹנֵנוּ רִנָּה אָז יֹאמְרוּ בַגּוֹיִם הִגְדִּיל יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת עִם אֵלֶּה. הִגְדִּיל יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת עִמָּנוּ הָיִינוּ שְׂמֵחִים. שׁוּבָה יְהוָה אֶת שְׁבִיתֵנוּ כַּאֲפִיקִים בַּנֶּגֶב. הַזֹּרְעִים בְּדִמְעָה בְּרִנָּה יִקְצֹרוּ. הָלוֹךְ יֵלֵךְ וּבָכֹה נֹשֵׂא מֶשֶׁךְ הַזָּרַע בֹּא יָבוֹא בְרִנָּה נֹשֵׂא אֲלֻמֹּתָיו.

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

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

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

Some add:

תְּהִלַּת יְיָ יְדַבֶּר פִּי וִיבָרֵךְ כָּל בָּשָׂר שֵׁם קָדְשׁוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד׃
וַאֲנַחְנוּ נְבָרֵךְ יָהּ מֵעַתָּה וְעַד עוֹלָם הַלְלוּיָהּ
הוֹדוּ לַיְיָ כִּי טוֹב כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ
מִי יְמַלֵּל גְּבוּרוֹת יְיָ יַשְׁמִיעַ כָּל תְּהִלָּתוֹ

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

Hodu Ladonai ki tov ki l'olam chasdo

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

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

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

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

המזמן: רַבּוֹתַי/חֲבֵרַי, נְבָרֵךְ
המסבים: יְהִי שֵׁם יְיָ מְבֹרָךְ מֵעַתָּה וְעַד עוֹלָם
המזמן: יְהִי שֵׁם יְיָ מְבֹרָךְ מֵעַתָּה וְעַד עוֹלָם. בִּרְשׁוּת מָרָנָן
וְרַבָּנָן וְרַבּוֹתַי, נְבָרֵךְ (בעשרה: אֱלֹהֵינוּ) שֶׁאָכַלְנוּ מִשֶּׁלּוֹ
המסבים: בָּרוּךְ (בעשרה: אֱלֹהֵינוּ) שֶׁאָכַלְנוּ מִשֶּׁלּוֹ וּבְטוּבוֹ חָיִינוּ
המזמן: בָּרוּךְ (בעשרה: אֱלֹהֵינוּ) שֶׁאָכַלְנוּ מִשֶּׁלּוֹ וּבְטוּבוֹ חָיִינוּ.
בָּרוּךְ הוּא וּבָרוּךְ שְׁמוֹ

Hamizamen: *Rabotai/Chaverai n'vareich*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Blessing on the Food

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם הַזָּן אֶת הָעוֹלָם כֻּלּוֹ בְּטוּבוֹ בְּחֵן בְּחֶסֶד וּבְרַחֲמִים, הוּא נוֹתֵן לֶחֶם לְכָל בָּשָׂר כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ וּבְטוּבוֹ הַגָּדוֹל תָּמִיד לֹא חָסַר לָנוּ וְאַל יֶחְסַר לָנוּ מָזוֹן לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד בַּעֲבוּר שְׁמוֹ הַגָּדוֹל כִּי הוּא אֵל זָן וּמְפַרְנֵס לַכֹּל וּמֵטִיב לַכֹּל וּמֵכִין מָזוֹן לְכָל בְּרִיּוֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ הַזָּן אֶת הַכֹּל

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

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

Blessing on the Land

נוֹדֶה לְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ עַל שֶׁהִנְחַלְתָּ לַאֲבוֹתֵינוּ אֶרֶץ חֶמְדָּה טוֹבָה וּרְחָבָה וְעַל שֶׁהוֹצֵאתָנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וּפְדִיתָנוּ מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים וְעַל בְּרִיתְךָ שֶׁחָתַמְתָּ בִּבְשָׂרֵנוּ וְעַל תּוֹרָתְךָ שֶׁלִּמַּדְתָּנוּ וְעַל חֻקֶּיךָ שֶׁהוֹדַעְתָּנוּ וְעַל חַיִּים חֵן וָחֶסֶד שֶׁחוֹנַנְתָּנוּ, וְעַל אֲכִילַת מָזוֹן שָׁאַתָּה זָן וּמְפַרְנֵס אוֹתָנוּ תָּמִיד בְּכָל יוֹם וּבְכָל עֵת וּבְכָל שָׁעָה

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

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

On Chanukah and Purim add:

עַל־הַנִּסִּים וְעַל־הַפֻּרְקָן וְעַל־הַגְּבוּרוֹת וְעַל־הַתְּשׁוּעוֹת וְעַל־הַמִּלְחָמוֹת שֶׁעָשִׂיתָ לַאֲבוֹתֵינוּ בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בַּזְּמַן הַזֶּה׃

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

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

On Chanukah:

בִּימֵי מַתִּתְיָהוּ בֶן יוֹחָנָן כֹּהֵן גָּדוֹל חַשְׁמוֹנַאי וּבָנָיו כְּשֶׁעָמְדָה מַלְכוּת יָוָן הָרְשָׁעָה עַל עַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְהַשְׁכִּיחָם תּוֹרָתָךְ וּלְהַעֲבִירָם מֵחֻקֵּי רְצוֹנֶךָ וְאַתָּה בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ הָרַבִּים עָמַדְתָּ לָהֶם בְּעֵת צָרָתָם רַבְתָּ אֶת רִיבָם דַּנְתָּ אֶת דִּינָם נָקַמְתָּ אֶת נִקְמָתָם מָסַרְתָּ גִבּוֹרִים בְּיַד חַלָּשִׁים וְרַבִּים בְּיַד מְעַטִּים וּטְמֵאִים בְּיַד טְהוֹרִים וּרְשָׁעִים בְּיַד צַדִּיקִים וְזֵדִים בְּיַד עוֹסְקֵי תּוֹרָתֶךָ

וּלְךָ עָשִׂיתָ שֵׁם גָּדוֹל וְקָדוֹשׁ בְּעוֹלָמֶךָ וּלְעַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל עָשִׂיתָ תְּשׁוּעָה גְדוֹלָה וּפֻרְקָן כְּהַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וְאַחַר כָּךְ בָּאוּ בָנֶיךָ לִדְבִיר בֵּיתֶךָ וּפִנּוּ אֶת הֵיכָלֶךָ וְטִהֲרוּ אֶת מִקְדָּשֶׁךָ וְהִדְלִיקוּ נֵרוֹת בְּחַצְרוֹת קָדְשֶׁךָ וְקָבְעוּ שְׁמוֹנַת יְמֵי חֲנֻכָּה אֵלּוּ לְהוֹדוֹת וּלְהַלֵּל לְשִׁמְךָ הַגָּדוֹל׃

Bimei matityahu ben yokhanan kohen gadol khashmonai u'vanav k'she'amda malkhut yavan harsha'a al amkha yisrael l'hashkikham toratekha u'lha'aviram makhukei r'tzonekha v'ata v'rakhamekha harabim amad'ta lahem b'eit tzaratam ravta et rivam danta et dinam nakamta et nikmatam masarta giborim b'yad khalashim v'rabim b'yad m'atim u'tmei'im b'yad t'horim u'r'sha'im b'yad tzadikim v'zeidim b'yad oskei toratekha u'lekha asita shem gadol v'kadosh b'olamekha u'lamkha yisrael asita t'shua gedola

u'furkan k'hayom hazeh v'akhar kein ba'u vanekha lidvir beitekha ufinu et heichalkha v'tiharu et mikdashekha v'hidlik neirot b'khatzrot kadshekha v'kav'u shmonat yemei hanukkah eilu l'hodot u'lehalel l'shimkha hagadol

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

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

On Purim:

בִּימֵי מָרְדְּכַי וְאֶסְתֵר בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבִּירָה כְּשָׁעָמַד עֲלֵיהֶם הָמָן הָרָשָׁע בִּקֵּשׁ לְהַשְׁמִיד לַהֲרוֹג וּלְאַבֵּד אֶת־כָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים מִנַּעַר וְעַד זָקֵן טַף וְנָשִׁים בְּיוֹם אֶחָד בִּשְׁלֹשָׁה עָשָׂר לְחֹדֶשׁ שְׁנֵים עָשָׂר הוּא חֹדֶשׁ אֲדָר וְשָׁלָל לָהֶם לָבוֹז וְאָתָּה בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ הָרַבִּים הֵפַרְתָּ אֶת עֲצָתוֹ וְקִלְקַלְתָּ אֶת מַחֲשַׁבְתּוֹ וַהֲשֵׁבוֹתָ לּוֹ גְּמוּלוֹ בְּרֹאשׁוֹ וְתָלוּ אוֹתוֹ וְאֶת בָּנָיו עַל הָעֵץ וְעָשִׂיתָ עִמָּהֶם נִסִּים וְנִפְלָאוֹת וְנוֹדֶה לְשִׁמְךָ הַגָּדוֹל סֶלָה.

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

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

וְעַל־הַכֹּל יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲנַחְנוּ מוֹדִים לָךְ וּמְבָרְכִים אוֹתָךְ יִתְבָּרַךְ שִׁמְךָ בְּפִי כָל־חַי תָּמִיד לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד, כַּכָּתוּב: וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבָעְתָּ, וּבֵרַכְתָּ אֶת יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ עַל הָאָרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לָךְ. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, עַל הָאָרֶץ וְעַל הַמָּזוֹן

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

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

Hillel ISRAEL | MATANEL FOUNDATION | The Matanel Fellowship for Global Jewish Leadership

Blessing on Jerusalem

רְחַם נָא יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל אַמֶּךָ, וְעַל יְרוּשָׁלַיִם עִירֶךָ, וְעַל
צִיּוֹן מִשְׁכַּן כְּבוֹדֶךָ, וְעַל מְלוּכַת בֵּית דָּוִד מְשִׁיחֶךָ, וְעַל הַבַּיִת
הַגָּדוֹל וְהַקָּדוֹשׁ שֶׁנִּקְרָא שִׁמְךָ עָלָיו. אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אָבִינוּ, רְעֵנוּ,
זוּנֵנוּ, פַּרְנְסֵנוּ וְכַלְכְּלֵנוּ וְהַרְוִיחֵנוּ, וְהַרְוַח לָנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
מְהֵרָה מִכָּל צָרוֹתֵינוּ. וְנָא אַל תַּצְרִיכֵנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, לֹא לִידֵי
מַתְּנַת בָּשָׂר וָדָם וְלֹא לִידֵי הַלְוָאָתָם, כִּי אִם לְיָדְךָ הַמְּלֵאָה
הַפְּתוּחָה הַקְּדוֹשָׁה וְהָרְחָבָה, שֶׁלֹּא נֵבוֹשׁ וְלֹא נִכָּלֵם לְעוֹלָם
וָעֶד.

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

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

On Shabbat:

רְצֵה וְהַחֲלִיצֵנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּמִצְוֹתֶיךָ וּבְמִצְוַת יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי
הַשַּׁבָּת הַגָּדוֹל וְהַקָּדוֹשׁ הַזֶּה. כִּי יוֹם זֶה גָּדוֹל וְקָדוֹשׁ הוּא לְ
פָנֶיךָ לִשְׁבָּת בּוֹ וְלָנוּחַ בּוֹ בְּאַהֲבָה כְּמִצְוַת רְצוֹנֶךָ. וּבִרְצוֹנְךָ
הָנִיחַ לָנוּ יְיָ
אֱלֹהֵינוּ שֶׁלֹּא תְּהֵא צָרָה וְיָגוֹן וַאֲנָחָה בְּיוֹם מְנוּחָתֵנוּ. וְהַרְאֵ
אֱנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּנֶחָמַת צִיּוֹן עִירֶךָ. וּבְבִנְיַן יְרוּשָׁלַיִם עִיר קָדְשֶׁךָ
כִּי אַתָּה הוּא בַּעַל הַיְשׁוּעוֹת וּבַעַל הַנֶּחָמוֹת

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

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

On New Moons and Festivals add:

אֱלֹהֵינוּ וֵאלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, יַעֲלֶה וְיָבֹא יַגִּיעַ יֵרָאֶה וְיֵרָצֶה יִשָּׁמַע יִפָּקֵד וְיִזָּכֵר זִכְרוֹנֵנוּ וְזִכְרוֹן אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, זִכְרוֹן יְרוּשָׁלַיִם עִירֶךָ, וְזִכְרוֹן מְשִׁיחַ בֶּן דָּוִד עַבְדֶּךָ, וְזִכְרוֹן כָּל-עַמְּךָ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל לְפָנֶיךָ, לִפְלֵיטָה לְטוֹבָה לְחֵן לְחֶסֶד וּלְרַחֲמִים לְחַיִּים וּלְשָׁלוֹם בְּיוֹם

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

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

On New Moon say:

רֹאשׁ הַחֹדֶשׁ

Rosh HaChodesh

The New Moon

On Passover:

חַג הַמַּצּוֹת

Chag HaMatzot

The Feast of Unleavened Bread

On Sukkot:

חַג הַסֻּכּוֹת

Chag HaSukkot

The Feast of Tabernacles

On Shemini Atzeret:

הַחַג שְׁמִינִי עֲצֶרֶת

HaChag Sh'mini Atzeret

The Eighth Day Feast of Solemn Assembly

On Shavuot:

חַג הַשָּׁבוּעוֹת

Chag HaShavuot

The Feast of Weeks

On Rosh Hashanah:

הַזִּכָּרוֹן,

HaZikaron

Memorial

הַיטִיב, הוּא מֵיטִיב, הוּא ייֵטִיב לָנוּ, הוּא גְּמָלָנוּ, הוּא גּוֹמְלֵנוּ, הוּא יִגְמְלֵנוּ לָעַד לְחֵן וּלְחֶסֶד וּלְרַחֲמִים וּלְרֶוַח הַצָּלָה וְהַצְלָחָה, בְּרָכָה וִישׁוּעָה, נֶחָמָה פַּרְנָסָה וְכַלְכָּלָה וְרַחֲמִים וְחַיִּים. וְשָׁלוֹם, וְכָל טוֹב וּמִכָּל טוּב לְעוֹלָם אַל יְחַסְּרֵנוּ

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

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

הָרַחֲמָן הוּא יִמְלוֹךְ עָלֵינוּ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.

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

The Merciful One will reign over us forever and ever.

הָזֶה, זָכְרֵנוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ בוֹ לְטוֹבָה, וּפָקְדֵנוּ בוֹ לִבְרָכָה, וְהוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ בוֹ לְחַיִּים, בִּדְבַר יְשׁוּעָה וְרַחֲמִים; חוּס וְחָנֵּנוּ, וְרַחֵם עָלֵינוּ, וְהוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ: כִּי אֵלֶיךָ עֵינֵינוּ: כִּי אֵל מֶלֶךְ חַנּוּן וְרַחוּם אָתָּה.

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

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

וּבְנֵה יְרוּשָׁלַיִם עִיר הַקֹּדֶשׁ בִּמְהֵרָה בְיָמֵינוּ. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, בּוֹנֵה בְרַחֲמָיו יְרוּשָׁלַיִם. אָמֵן.

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

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

Blessing for Goodness

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הָאֵל אָבִינוּ מַלְכֵּנוּ אַדִּירֵנוּ בּוֹרְאֵנוּ גּוֹאֲלֵנוּ יוֹצְרֵנוּ קְדוֹשֵׁנוּ קְדוֹשׁ יַעֲקֹב, רוֹעֵנוּ רוֹעֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל, הַמֶּלֶךְ הַטּוֹב וְהַמֵּטִיב לַכֹּל שֶׁבְּכָל יוֹם וָיוֹם הוּא

הַרַחֲמָן הוּא יְתָבַרַךְ־בַּשָׁמַיִם·וּבָאָרֶץ.

Harachaman, hu yitbarach bashamayim uvaaretz.

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

הַרַחֲמָן הוּא יִשְׁתַּבַּח לְדוֹר·דּוֹרִים, וְיִתְפָּאַר בָּנוּ לָעַד·וּלְנֵצַח נְצָחִים, וְיִתְהַדַּר בָּנוּ לָעַד·וּלְעוֹלְמֵי עוֹלָמִים.

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

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

הַרַחֲמָן הוּא יְפַרְנְסֵנוּ·בְּכָבוֹד.

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

May the Merciful One maintain us with honor.

הַרַחֲמָן הוּא יִשְׁבּוֹר עֻלֵּנוּ מֵעַל·צַוָּארֵנוּ, וְהוּא יוֹלִיכֵנוּ קוֹמְמִיּוּת לְאַרְצֵנוּ.

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

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

הַרַחֲמָן הוּא יִשְׁלַח לָנוּ·בְּרָכָה מְרֻבָּה·בַּבַּיִת·הַזֶּה, וְעַל־שֻׁלְחָן זֶה שֶׁאָכַלְנוּ עָלָיו.

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

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

הַרַחֲמָן הוּא יִשְׁלַח לָנוּ אֶת־אֵלִיָּהוּ·הַנָּבִיא זָכוּר·לַטּוֹב, וִיבַשֵּׂר לָנוּ·בְּשׂוֹרוֹת טוֹבוֹת יְשׁוּעוֹת וְנֶחָמוֹת.

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

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

When eating at your parents table:

הַרַחֲמָן הוּא יְבָרֵךְ אֶת (אבי מורי)·בַּעַל·הַבַּיִת·הַזֶּה, וְאֶת (אמי מורתי)·בַּעֲלַת·הַבַּיִת·הַזֶּה

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

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

When eating at your own table:

הָרַחֲמָן הוּא יְבָרֵךְ אוֹתִי (וְאֶת־אִשְׁתִּי/בַּעֲלִי וְאֶת־זַרְעִי) וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר לִי

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

אוֹתָם וְאֶת־בֵּיתָם וְאֶת־זַרְעָם וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר לָהֶם, אוֹתָנוּ וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר לָנוּ, כְּמוֹ שֶׁנִּתְבָּרְכוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב (וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ שָׂרָה, רִבְקָה, רָחֵל וְלֵאָה), בְּכֹל מִכֹּל כֹּל כֵּן יְבָרֵךְ אוֹתָנוּ כֻּלָּנוּ יַחַד בִּבְרָכָה שְׁלֵמָה. וְנֹאמַר: אָמֵן.

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

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

בַּמָּרוֹם יְלַמְּדוּ עֲלֵיהֶם וְעָלֵינוּ זְכוּת שֶׁתְּהֵא לְמִשְׁמֶרֶת שָׁלוֹם. וְנָשֵׂא בְרָכָה מֵאֵת יְיָ וּצְדָקָה מֵאֱלֹהֵי יִשְׁעֵנוּ, וְנִמְצָא חֵן וְשֵׂכֶל טוֹב בְּעֵינֵי אֱלֹהִים וְאָדָם.

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

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

Shabbat only:

הָרַחֲמָן הוּא יַנְחִילֵנוּ יוֹם שֶׁכֻּלּוֹ שַׁבָּת וּמְנוּחָה לְחַיֵּי הָעוֹלָמִים.

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

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

On festivals:

הָרַחֲמָן הוּא יַנְחִילֵנוּ יוֹם שֶׁכֻּלּוֹ טוֹב.

Harachaman, hu yanchileinu yom shekulo tov

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

One the Rosh Chodesh (New Moon):

הָרַחֲמָן הוּא יְחַדֵּשׁ עָלֵינוּ אֶת הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לְטוֹבָה וְלִבְרָכָה.

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

On Rosh Hashanah (The New Year):

הָרַחֲמָן הוּא יְחַדֵּשׁ עָלֵינוּ אֶת הַשָּׁנָה הַזֹּאת לְטוֹבָה וְלִבְרָכָה.

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

On Sukkot:

הָרַחֲמָן הוּא יָקִים לָנוּ אֶת סֻכַּת דָּוִד הַנּוֹפֶלֶת.

Harachaman, hu yakim lanu et sukkat David hanofelet

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

הָרַחֲמָן הוּא יְזַכֵּנוּ לִימוֹת הַמָּשִׁיחַ וּלְחַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא. מִגְדִּיל (On Shabbat, festivals, and days we do not say Tachanun): תּוֹשִׁיעַ וּלְדָוִד מְשִׁיחוֹ, עֹשֶׂה חֶסֶד לִמְשִׁיחוֹ, לְדָוִד וּלְזַרְעוֹ עַד עוֹלָם. עֹשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם בִּמְרוֹמָיו, הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל. וְאִמְרוּ: אָמֵן

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

May the All-merciful make us worthy of the days of the Messiah, and of the life of the world to come. On Sabbaths, Festivals, and New Moons—he is a tower of salvation to his king; On Week-days—Great salvation gives him to his king. And show lovingkindness to his anointed, to David and to his seed, for evermore. He who makes peace in his high places, may he make peace for us and for all Israel, and say, Amen

יִרְאוּ אֶת יְיָ קְדֹשָׁיו, כִּי אֵין מַחְסוֹר לִירֵאָיו. כְּפִירִים רָשׁוּ וְרָעֵבוּ, וְדֹרְשֵׁי יְיָ לֹא יַחְסְרוּ כָל טוֹב. הוֹדוּ לַיְיָ כִּי טוֹב, כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ. פּוֹתֵחַ אֶת יָדֶךָ, וּמַשְׂבִּיעַ לְכָל חַי רָצוֹן. בָּרוּךְ הַגֶּבֶר אֲשֶׁר יִבְטַח בַּיְיָ, וְהָיָה יְיָ מִבְטַחוֹ. נַעַר הָיִיתִי גַם זָקַנְתִּי, וְלֹא רָאִיתִי צַדִּיק נֶעֱזָב, וְזַרְעוֹ מְבַקֶּשׁ לָחֶם. יְיָ עֹז לְעַמּוֹ יִתֵּן, יְיָ יְבָרֵךְ אֶת עַמּוֹ בַּשָּׁלוֹם.

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

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

Bridges Beyond Borders: A Journey Into Jewish Connection

Avihu Sela

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Between Us and Tomorrow — Echoes of a Nation

Katarzyna Witek-Mioduszewska

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

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

Dear Person,

I don't know who you are.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On one hand, we carry pride. Strength.

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

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

Between those living in Israel and those in the Diaspora.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It's the memory of our shared beginning.

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

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

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

I don't dream of a perfect global community.

I don't believe in unity that demands uniformity.

I don't long for a single path.

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

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

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

It can be a wide-open landscape.

A place where questions are as holy as answers.

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

Where tradition is not a wall, but a bridge.

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

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

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

I believe the key to this healing is dialogue.

Real, messy, courageous dialogue.

Not only between people who already agree,

but especially between those who don't.

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

Dialogue means listening, even when it's hard.

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

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

With humility. With hope.

This is the role I hope to play.

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

To write letters. To ask questions.

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

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

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

It is to make room for many voices.

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

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

If this letter survives to reach your time,

If it still means something,

If even one sentence echoes in your heart,

Then maybe we did something right.

I don't know who you are.

I don't know what your world looks like.

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

That perhaps more than anything is hope.

Unorthodox: Everyday Jewish

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

CHALLENGE ADDRESSED

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

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

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

PROJECT PROCESS

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

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

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

Click or scan here to view "Unorthodox: Everyday Jewish"

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

Tsuf Oron

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

THE CHALLENGE

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

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

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

MY VISION AND GOAL

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

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

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

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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

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

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

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

INSPIRATION FROM THE FELLOWSHIP SESSIONS

One of the sessions that inspired me to choose this topic was the activity with “David Cards”. These illustrated cards provide an opportunity to explore various aspects of Jewish identity. One evening during the Immersive Weekend in Budapest, in small groups, each of us chose cards that we felt connected to, which represented part of our story. This activity led to meaningful and open conversations about the role of Judaism in our lives, as well as about family stories and traditions. I was impressed by how easily each of us chose cards and how we all spoke about different aspects of our lives. The conversations touched on everything from family and friends to Jewish identity, history, and our vision for the future.

MORE INSPIRATION

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

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

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

MY ROLE

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

PHOTO EXHIBIT

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



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



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



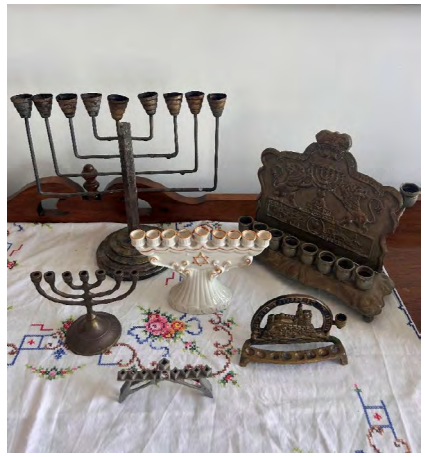
Shabbat Candles that my mother and I light. My parents received these candlesticks as a wedding gift.



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

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

Hillel ISRAEL | MATANEL FOUNDATION | The Matanel Fellowship for Global Jewish Leadership



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



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



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



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



My brother at his Bar Mitzvah Torah reading.



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



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

STORIES SHARED BY MY FRIENDS

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

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

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

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

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

ISRAELIS & GLOBAL ORGANIZATIONS & INITIATIVES

1. **Hillel:** Is an international organization serving more than 180,000 students each year at over 850 colleges and universities around the world, including in Israel. Hillel offers educational, cultural, and social programs that help young Jews of all backgrounds explore and strengthen their Jewish identity.

2. **Mabua:** Is a network of Batei Midrash operated by and for Israeli young adults from across the religious spectrum. The initiative promotes Jewish learning, activism, and community building. Their programs include study frameworks such as the Elul Program, which offers an opportunity for participants to engage with Jewish texts and traditions in a pluralistic environment.

3. **Alma - Home for Hebrew Culture:** A cultural center in Tel Aviv that offers courses, lectures, and cultural programming around Jewish texts, Hebrew literature, philosophy, and art, designed for a secular audience.

4. **Taglit Birthright Israel:** In addition to the best-known program of Taglit that includes 10-day trips in Israel, Taglit also offers a variety of other programs. For example: program of volunteering in Israel and programs for university students.

5. **JCC Global:** Is a network of over 1,000 Jewish Community Centers (JCCs) worldwide. The organization aims to strengthen Jewish peoplehood by fostering local and global connections, cultivating partnerships and training local leaders. Thus, helping Jewish communities feel a sense of belongings.
6. **Moishe House:** An international initiative creating vibrant communities for young Jews in 29 countries around the world. This program includes Shabbat dinners, holiday celebrations, and cultural events that help Jews of all backgrounds connect to Jewish life in a flexible and creative way.

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FOR THE RESOURCE GUIDE:

The official site of Hillel https://www.hillel.org/

The official site of Alma. https://en.alma.org.il/

The official site of JCC Global. https://www.jccglobal.org/

The official site of Mabua. https://mabua.org/en-about-us/

The official site of Mem Global. https://memglobal.org/

The official site of Taglit Birthright Israel. https://www.birthrightisrael.com/

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

Jan Cichońsk

Jan Cichońsk is studying toward a PhD in Biology and Biotechnology at the University of Rzeszów in Rzeszów, Poland.

INTRODUCTION

The day of Simchat Torah, 7th October 2023, was an unimaginable tragedy and a day that changed the Jewish community worldwide. Since that brutal terrorist attack by Hamas, there has been a massive increase in antisemitism around the world. A report published by the World Zionist Organisation and the Jewish Agency for Israel shows that in the year 2024, the number of total antisemitic incidents has increased globally by 100% compared to the year 2023 and by 340% compared to the year 2022 [1]. Furthermore, according to the Global 100 survey conducted on 58000 participants by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), approximately 46% of the world's adult population holds elevated levels of antisemitic beliefs. Among the respondents, half of the people younger than 35 held antisemitic attitudes, which is 13 percentage points higher than respondents older than 50 years [2].

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

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

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

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

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

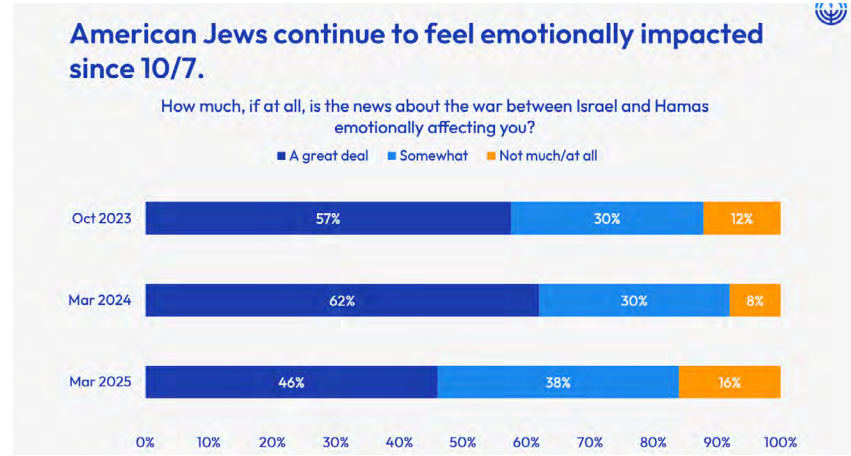

Fig. 1. The emotional impact of the news about the war between Israel and Hamas on American Jewry

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

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

Jewish identities and decrease negative feelings of isolation.

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

METHODS

1. Data Collection

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

2. Participants and Target Audiences

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

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

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

3. Data Curation

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

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

Why the diaspora?

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

The communities were shattered, and many loved ones were brutally taken away. In my project, I also want to include the powerful voices of people from Israel — their pain and strength, grief and hope — drawn from interviews and materials available online. However, the primary focus of my project is to capture the voices of people who may not hear sirens or hide in shelters fighting for their lives, but who experience the psychological shock that reverberated globally, who navigate through the rising levels of antisemitism (verbal and physical attacks), isolation, or who conduct inner debates about their Jewish identities. I want to show the voices of sadness, grief, pride, anger, resilience, and mobilization. I want to amplify the voices that may not be fully heard.

4. The Questionnaire

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

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. 7TH OF OCTOBER

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

a) Yes

b) Somewhat familiar, I have a brief idea

c) No [skip to the next section]

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

a) Yes, I was in Israel on October 7th, 2023

b) People I know were in Israel on October 7th, 2023

c) On October 7th, 2023, both myself AND people I know were in Israel

d) No

e) I don't remember

f) Prefer not to disclose

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

a) Yes, I was impacted

b) People I know were impacted

c) Both myself AND the people I know were impacted

d) No [skip the open question]

e) I don't remember

f) Prefer not to disclose

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

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

a) Yes, I can clearly remember my thoughts or feelings on October 7th

b) Yes, I can somewhat recall my thoughts or feelings of October 7th

c) I can barely recall the thoughts or feelings of October 7th

d) No, I don't remember my thoughts or feelings from that day

e) Prefer not to disclose

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

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

1 – 5
Not at all Greatly

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

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

1 – 5
Not at all — Greatly

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

JEWISH LIFE/COMMUNITY

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

1 – 5
Not at all — Very engaged

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

a) Yes, as a community leader

b) Yes, as a community member

c) Yes (other)

d) Not a member, but I was attending the events

e) No

f) I don't know

g) Prefer not to disclose

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

1 – 5 – 10
Negatively affected — Haven't affected — Positively affected my Jewish identity

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

2. CURRENTLY

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

1 – 5
Not at all — I know every detail

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

1 – 5
Not at all — Greatly

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

2.3. Are you concerned about the rise of antisemitism?

a) Yes, I'm deeply concerned

b) Yes, I'm somewhat concerned

c) I can't tell

d) No, I'm not concerned at all

e) I don't see the rise in antisemitism

f) Prefer not to disclose

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

1 – 5 – 10

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

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

1 – 5 – 10

Hiding my Jewishness — No change — Showing my Jewishness

2.6. Do you feel safe now?

1 – 5

Not at all — Greatly

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

a) Yes, Jewish and Israel knowledge

b) Yes, Jewish knowledge

c) Yes, Israel knowledge

d) No, not at all

e) I don't know

f) Prefer not to disclose

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

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

3. THE FUTURE

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

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

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

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

4. THE CREATIVE EXPRESSION

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

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Contemporary Scandinavia:
Jewish Identity and Personal Security

Tomer Aridor
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INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

THE CHALLENGE FOR GLOBAL JEWRY

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

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

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

METHODOLOGY

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

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

FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

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

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

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

One significant factor mentioned both by interviewees and in research is that much of the antisemitism currently experienced in Scandinavia comes from immigrants of Middle Eastern origin, whose numbers have risen sharply over the past decade. This demographic change has influenced public discourse around Israel and Jews and created new security challenges for Jewish communities.

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

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

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

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

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

CONNECTING TO MATANEL FELLOWSHIP

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

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

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

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

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

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

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

CONCLUSION

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

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Introductions

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

This collection reflects a year of learning, dialogue, and creative exploration undertaken by exceptional young leaders from Israel, Poland, and the United States. Across their projects and reflections, the fellows illuminate several powerful insights. They show that Jewish identity today is dynamic and resilient — a living tapestry shaped by memory, innovation, and personal voice. Their work demonstrates that Jewish peoplehood is not merely a concept, but a practice: the ongoing effort to listen to one another, to bridge differences, and to build a shared future grounded in mutual responsibility.

At a time when the Jewish world faces profound challenges — rising antisemitism, questions of belonging, and increasing polarization — these fellows offer a vision of hope. Through their thoughtful engagement, creativity, and moral courage, they embody the values that will guide the next generation of Jewish leadership. We extend our warmest congratulations to the fellows and our gratitude to the educators and partners who accompanied them on this journey. May the ideas and initiatives collected here continue to inspire and strengthen Jewish communities around the world.

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

The Matanel Foundation

Unity, Not Uniformity: A Global Jewish Peoplehood in Practice.

There are many things that make me proud of the Matanel Global Jewish Leadership Fellowship, but perhaps none more than the journal you are holding in your hands. In so many ways, these pages are a reflection of what we at Hillel believe Jewish life can and should be.

The students whose work appears here come from Poland, the United States, and Israel. They bring with them different backgrounds, experiences, perspectives, and ways of understanding and expressing their Jewish identities. Their projects are equally diverse—each reflecting the questions, passions, communities, and Jewish journeys of the students who created them.

And yet, they are all part of one shared story.

Avraham Infeld, whose words have deeply influenced our work at Hillel, taught that the Jewish people should strive for **"unity, not uniformity."** We do not need to think alike, practice alike, or experience our Jewishness in the same way in order to recognize that we belong to one another.

For me, this fellowship is that idea brought to life.

At Hillel, we believe deeply in the power of global Jewish Peoplehood: in creating opportunities for young Jews not only to learn about Jewish communities different from their own, but to **learn with and from one another**. When an Israeli student studies alongside a Jewish peer from Poland or the United States, Jewish Peoplehood stops being an abstract idea. It becomes a relationship. It acquires names, faces, stories, disagreements, friendships, and a sense of mutual responsibility.

That mission felt particularly meaningful - and particularly challenging - this year. Once again, our students participated in this fellowship against the backdrop of war and uncertainty. The circumstances ultimately forced us to cancel the immersive component of the program, an experience that we had very much hoped would allow the Fellows to deepen their relationships through learning and traveling together in person.

Despite the disappointment, the Fellows continued to show up, learn together, wrestle with ideas, and ultimately transform their learning into the thoughtful projects presented in this journal. That accomplishment is a testament to their commitment and resilience, and also to the extraordinary facilitation, flexibility, and educational skill of **Esti Palmer and Esther Abramowitz from the Hillel International team**, who guided the group through a year that required all of us to adapt and reimagine what was possible.

Perhaps there is something fitting in that. Jewish Peoplehood is not built only when circumstances are easy. It is built precisely when we continue to reach across borders and differences even when doing so becomes difficult.

As you read these projects, I hope you will see what I see: not a single definition of Jewish identity or Jewish leadership, but a beautiful collection of voices that are distinct and yet connected. **Unity, not uniformity.**

I am enormously proud of what these students have created and grateful to The Matanel Foundation for their ongoing support, to Hillel Poland and Hillel Columbia for their partnership and for everyone who made this year possible. I look forward to building on what we have learned - to bringing the Fellows together even more deeply, restoring the immersive experience, and continuing this important work with an even stronger program in the year ahead.

Noga Brenner Samia
CEO, Hillel Israel

There is a Yamim Noraim (High Holidays) playlist that my friend made on Spotify. I listen to it every year starting in Elul all the way through Simchat Torah. I'm listening to it right now. The playlist is my musical spiritual preparation for the upcoming Holidays. It inspires me to think about what I really want to focus on as the year both comes to a close and starts anew. It reminds me of all the events of the past year - the unpleasant and the pleasant, the sad and the funny, the disappointing and the joy.

That same emotional spectrum has defined this past year, both for global Jewry and for Cohort 2 of the Matanel Fellowship. Looking back on this year's fellowship, our time together was a lesson in hope and resilience. We experienced the eager anticipation of our first Zoom session, the exciting energy of planning our retreat in Budapest, and the deep disappointment of having to cancel our in-person gathering due to forces beyond our control. Yet, through every twist, our fellows continuously showed up. They brought their full selves to every session, surmounting the geographical distance into genuine connection.

This journal is a tangible culmination of that shared connection and passion for the global Jewish people. Each project focuses on a challenge facing our community, ranging from antisemitism and pluralism to the evolving relationship between Israel and world Jewry. But they do not only focus on the challenge. Each piece pairs critical analysis with creative, actionable solutions, reflecting where each fellow sees themselves taking responsibility for our collective future.

Dwelling solely on our challenges only widens the gaps between us. To build true Jewish Peoplehood across borders—spanning Israel, Poland, and the United States—we must remain visionaries. By leaning into pluralistic, innovative, and hopeful solutions, Cohort 2 proves that even in turbulent times, we have the agency to shape what comes next.

Serdeczne gratulacje! Mazal tov! Congratulations!

Esti Palmer
Associate Director, Immersive Experiences
Hillel International

Fellow's Poem

Hillel ISRAEL | MATANEL FOUNDATION | The Matanel Fellowship for Global Jewish Leadership

For a Jew in 2026, memory is...

Coauthored by the Matanel Fellowship Cohort 2

For a Jew in 2026, memory is an act of resistance
and a way of honoring those who came before us
It means standing by one another and remaining close to our community,
because Jewish life thrives through shared bonds and collective belonging

For a Jew in 2026, memory is to remember the history of our people
and believe that no matter what we will survive
It is to remember about those we tragically lost
and make sure we never forget them

For a Jew in 2026, memory is remembering the sad and the bad,
all the experiences that we've had, but still choosing *simcha*

For a Jew in 2026 memory is shaping the future
we would like to live in

For a Jew in 2026, memory is something you share with your family
on the other side of the world
without being in the same experience

For a Jew in 2026, memory is a time machine
that brings us to where we want to be

For a Jew in 2026, memory is a dedication to those who came before us
and a commitment to transmit to those who come after us

For a Jew in 2026, memory is the smell of their grandmother's chicken soup,
the taste of spicy fish,
the dance of joy from within,
the pain of loss and the aching of hope

For a Jew in 2026, memory is being in touch with reality during global changes,
Nothing new under the sun

For a Jew in 2026 memory is something you come across
every day

Proposals

Connecting Young Jews Through Service:
Uniting People Through Mitzvot

Kayla Balsam

Kayla Balsam completed her B.A. in Sociology and Human Rights at Barnard College in NYC, USA.

PROBLEM

One of the most critical issues facing the Jewish community today is the lack of unity across differences. This is especially prominent among younger generations, which is alarming because the future of the Jewish community is in our hands. Whether it be for political, social, or religious differences, many young Jews seldom interact with those from outside their immediate circle.

SOLUTION

Bringing young Jewish adults together for activities that appeal to people across the religious, political, and zionism spectrum.

IMPLEMENTATION

Creating one-off community service opportunities that are accessible to young Jews and targeted towards a specific demographic.

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Connecting Young Jews Through Service:
Uniting People Through Mitzvot

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PROBLEM

Division among Jews and a lack of engagement from younger generations are some of the foremost issues facing the Jewish community today. Whether it be a growing divide between American Jewry and Jewish practice elsewhere, polarization on the right and left, or limited dialogue between Jews with different views on Israel, there are several ways in which modern Jews isolate themselves and their micro-communities from each other. Recent data reveals that, among young American Jews, there are increasing numbers of individuals on opposite sides of the religious spectrum: both Orthodox and secular Jewry are more popular choices for younger generations than those who came before them (Pew Research Center). While in itself this is not an issue, the fact that a generation is on opposite ends of the religious spectrum has inevitably led to stark ideological differences that divide young Jews. For instance, young American Jews are more polarized when it comes to politics and issues surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict than older generations; over ⅓ of American Jews younger than 35 do not feel an attachment to Israel, whereas the majority of older Jews do. Over 40% of religious Jews feel an attachment to Israel, compared to only 11% of secular Jews who reported having an emotional connection (Manchester and Siritzky). Again, the problem is not that we are an ideologically diverse community--in fact, that is actually a beautiful thing--but rather that we disallow unity because of our different lifestyles and perspectives. At the end of the day, we are one Jewish people. We have shared values and sometimes need a reminder that we are not so different after all. We are stronger together; it is essential that we focus on unity.

SOLUTION

How do we foster unity across difference? One idea I've been exploring is bringing young Jews together through service. Giving back is deeply ingrained in all Jewish communities. If this is one of the common threads for Jews, it makes sense that opportunities to perform good deeds would appeal to a diverse group of Jewish individuals. Additionally, participating in community service is known to help build relationships and establish trust with others (Reed et al.). If the goal is to strive for a united Jewish community, it starts with relationship-building. With one volunteer group at a time, I hope that fostering connections between Jews who otherwise would not interact will contribute to that goal. Moreover, "more diversity in volunteer groups and activities seems desirable, where people regardless of backgrounds and challenges can meet and connect...[this] may also contribute to increased tolerance and acceptance of differences" (Reed et al.). To put these ideas into practice, I ran three separate volunteer opportunities for different age groups throughout the year. These gatherings were all successful in their own ways; some were a success at getting many people involved, others were great at getting different kinds of people in the room. Not only do these sessions help unite young Jews, but they also bring people closer to their Judaism through practicing Tikkun Olam (repairing the world).

Connecting Young Jews Through Service:
Uniting People Through Mitzvot

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SESSION 1

Service opportunity: Thanksgiving event to make sandwiches for a local food pantry.

Demographic: college students

This event drew a huge crowd, allowing many people to participate in service right before the Thanksgiving break. Because this was integrated into an event at Columbia/ Barnard Hillel, a lot of Hillel "regulars" came. However, we also saw a bunch of people who do not come to the building as often because the A Capella group was performing and there was a kosher dinner (there are limited options on Sundays), so it seems that the event as a whole did a great job of bringing the broader Columbia/Barnard Jewish community together. Having a table set up for a quick service activity was great because it got a bunch of people who came to the event for other reasons involved in the sandwich making, and many people came up to me afterward and told me how much they enjoyed the opportunity. As a result of the event, we made 170 sandwich lunches for a neighboring food pantry. Additionally, several participants followed up with me to tell me how much they enjoyed the opportunity and would love to do it again.



Partners:

NY COMMON PANTRY

Columbia / Barnard Hillel
The Kraft Center for Jewish Student Life
Est. 2000

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SESSION 2

Service opportunity: making blankets for breast cancer patients

Demographic: high school students

This event brought together students from different high schools. At first, I was worried it would be awkward, but the students were very friendly, and all chatted with each other while we worked on the blankets. About half of the students attend public high schools, and the other half attend nearby private schools. One student who attends a boarding school mentioned that there are few Jewish students at her school, but they come together every month for a community lunch. Only one of the students who came goes to a Jewish day school. We made 8 blankets total for donation to the breast cancer wing at Dana-Farber.





Partners:

SHARSHERET
The Jewish Breast & Ovarian Cancer Community

Dana-Farber Cancer Institute

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SESSION 3

Service opportunity: making lunches for school-aged children

Demographic: young adults

This event brought together five Jewish young adults (20s/30s), all from different states, who now live in Boston. One individual who came grew up religious, but now identifies as more culturally/socially Jewish. Two other people who came have some engagement with the Boston Jewish community, but are looking for more opportunities. We are aiming to make 50 lunches and hope to decorate the bags with some fun summer-themed drawings.





Partners:

Repair the World

NEWTON FOOD PANTRY

Lack of Pluralism in Israel as a Global Problem for the Jewish People

Yahav Rachel Schuster

Yahav Schuster is studying toward a B.A. in Psychology and Management at Ben Gurion University in Beer Sheva, Israel.

THE CHALLENGE

The lack of pluralism in Israel in terms of recognizing Jewish movements other than Orthodoxy is becoming more common and hazardous than it has been in the past. It is possible to infer how Israel approaches pluralism from the main governmental organisation's rules,the Chief Rabbinate. The Chief Rabbinate of Israel grants the Orthodox Rabbinate a monopoly over personal status issues (marriage and divorce), kashrut, and burial. Since the Chief Rabbinate is the official state body, the majority of the government's budget for religious services flows to the institutions it recognizes.Some examples of the Chief Rabbinate's biases include:

- The foundation for shuls and community centers that are non-Orthodox are funded by individuals, but Orthodox shuls receive government support.
- Although under The Law of Return, the State of Israel has for many decades recognized conversions by non-Orthodox institutions in communities abroad for the purpose of Aliyah, there are still new Olim (immigrants to Israel) who face difficulties in having their Jewishness recognized. In October 2025, Israel's immigration authority denied aliyah to a US woman (Isabella Vinci) who converted to Reform Judaism online during the COVID pandemic. Their reasoning was that her conversion lacked sufficient community involvement. This means that the Interior Ministry used 'internal criteria' (such as requiring physical presence or a specific length of community membership) to make things difficult for non-Orthodox Olim (in fact, she was involved in community as a teacher in Israel, voluntarily). Moreover, Isabella is not the only one, as I am familiar with this challenge from a friend of mine.
- The Protection of Holy Places Law (also known as The Western Wall Law) passed its preliminary reading (25.02.2026) to grant the Chief Rabbinate exclusive authority over the site, effectively banning egalitarian prayer and non-Orthodox ceremonies. The punishment for noncompliance with this law is7 years maximum in jail.

Another angle to this lack of pluralism is people's behavior of rejecting the idea of different ways to practice Jewish life. A disturbing example of this is the case (22.04.2025) of a 13-year-old girl who was physically attacked and harassed by her peers simply for celebrating her Bat Mitzvah with a Reform 'Aliyah l'Torah'. This proved that for some, religious diversity is met with violence rather than acceptance.

The USA has the biggest number of Jews, after Israel, most of them are non-Orthodox Jews ("Liberal"): Orthodox Jews make up roughly 9% to 11% of the total US population. This means about 89% to 91% of American Jews belong to non-orthodox, progressive or secular traditions. This intolerance toward liberal Jewish denominations in Israel also applies to Diaspora communities, as many Israelis don't perceive them as truly Jewish. This lowers the value of the bond and the care for the global Jewish people during times of crisis and antisemitism.At the same time, this sense of alienation can lead to a decline in the significant economic and global support that Diaspora Jewry provides to the State of Israel.

THE VISION

From my perspective, the most important and immediate change starts with public opinion on a social level. The ideal situation would be to raise awareness of the importance of pluralism and the acceptance of different denominations in Israel. This would create an inclusive environment where people can feel more comfortable with their identity and help reduce violent discourse and intolerance. In the future, this may provide an opportunity for self-exploration, which could restore the sense of Jewish belonging for more Israelis after it was damaged . On a national level, as public awareness and the desire for change grow, it may eventually influence the governing institutions.

PERSONAL ROLE & GROUP PROFILE

I am the coordinator of the Mabatim program at Hillel Ben Gurion. This program explores modern Jewish values and the connection of Israelis to Diaspora Jewry.The 'Mabatim' program participants consist of 11 undergraduate students, aged 22-31, representing diverse religious backgrounds, including religious, traditional, and predominantly secular students. Within this group, two participants made aliyah themselves, providing a unique and valuable perspective to the group discussions.While the recruitment process did not target a specific audience, the group is highly diverse due to the fact that Ben Gurion University attracts students from all across Israel . Additionally, some of the students have prior familiarity with Diaspora Jewry through their participation in summer camp delegations or work with the Jewish Agency.

As the coordinator of this program ,I see my role as instrumental in turning vision into reality. In my view, pluralism is a vital Jewish value that serves us in all aspects of life. Therefore, I believe the most effective way to raise awareness is by building this topic into the Mabatim program. This approach will allow me to engage a group of students, share my personal perspective, and facilitate an in-depth discussion. Even if it does not lead to immediate change, it will still achieve the fundamental goal of raising awareness.

Based on this vision, the session I am leading within the Mabatim program focuses on three primary goals:

- Raising Awareness- To increase Israeli students awareness of the critical importance of religious pluralism and the recognition of diverse denominations within Judaism.
- Strengthening Global Connections- To foster a deeper sense of belonging and connection to Diaspora Jewry by exploring and understanding shared challenges.
- Promoting Critical Thinking- To encourage critical thinking and inclusive dialogue, actively challenging prejudices and mitigating polarizing discourse surrounding religion and state in Israel.

SESSION PLAN

Part of the session	Method	Equipment	Time
Opening	mingling and coffee icebreaker- everyone tells about their week	coffee table	18:30-18:50
Main	I will start with telling a short story that brings my personal experience: one of my students from the time I worked in leadership academy told me that he will never be able to really feel Israeli because of his religion. Today we are going to deal with Pluralism as a vital jewish value. **How can you decide who is jew?** **Method 1: 10 min** Each participant will choose 3 words that define 'Who is a Jew' in their opinion, from a pool of words spread out on the floor (bible, shul, kippa, holidays, community activism...). **Method 2: 30 min** watching a video and discussion How can you decide who is jew? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yi3MBp-3pZo **Leading Questions** • Do you find one of the opinions that are presented in the video that you agree with? • Do you think there should be a contznsus for one definition? If so, what are the outcomes? • Do you think that we shouldn't have a consenthus for one definithion? • Do you think that without the need to define who is jew for the Shvuot law, there was any discussion at all about it? • Do you think that a discussion about the Jewish definition was an issue back at your parents or grandparents time?	laptop, words cards, HDMI, JBL, projector	18:50-19:30
	Break		19:30-19:40

SESSION PLAN

	Method 3: 40 min **Face the challenge- where can we find lack of pluralism in Israel?** we will split into groups of 4 (3 groups) each group will search on other topic- • Ethiopian Aliyah • Aliyah from the former Soviet Union • The Brother Daniel court case. Each group will have to answer the following questions and share it with everyone- • What was the challenge? • What was the reaction of the state of Israel to this complex situation? What was the reaction of the Israeli society supporting\ rejecting (if it did exist)? • If you had been questioned on your jewish identity in this situation, what would you feel? Imagine what it would have been like if you were a part of this case.		19:40-20:20
	Plurlism **Leading Questions for the discussion** • Is it possible to define only one way to be a Jew? How can you decide who is Jew? • What is the connection between all those cases? This question will lead **to the idea that we can't define the Jewish people as a closed group with clear boundaries. here are a lot of people that are connected to the Jewish people although they are not Jewish according to Halacha (the Brother Daniel, Olim from Russia and Ethiopia, my student) and we have to be more pluralist and accept them.** • We will read together the definition of pluralism. • Why is it important for society, public bodies, and the government to accept different Jewish denominations and complex cases? • Have you ever personally felt a lack of religious pluralism in Israel? Do you personally know communities or individuals who have this problem? • Do you believe this challenge is only a problem for the Israeli people, or is it also connectedto the global Jewish community?	Information page	
Closer	Debrief and summarize the main ideas of the meeting- ask each participant to share something new they learned.		20:20-20:30

EVALUATION & MEASUREMENT

For this session, success is measured qualitatively through the depth of student engagement and the substance of the discussion. The primary indicator of success will be a productive and active dialogue where all participants challenge themselves to get to the core of the issues and explore them deeply. Specifically, the session will be considered successful if participants share during the closing circle that they learned something new or gained a fresh perspective on pluralism to take forward.

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Pitching the Tent: Language, accessibility, and Jewish Leadership

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INTRODUCTION

The word "pluralism" floats around Jewish communal spaces as a ubiquitous yet ambiguous term, sometimes hard to define, and even harder put into practice, especially for young and emerging leaders. Too often, Jewish student leaders struggle to transform their inherent knowledge of accessibility in pluralistic spaces into concrete action in order to make all participants feel welcome and accepted. This is a challenge that is natural for any young student leader to experience, no matter their previous experience. As students learn about themselves, begin leading communities, and seek to give back to Jewish life, they also have to learn and develop leadership skills that are not necessarily innate. Leadership development is an ongoing process that can and should start from the youngest leaders and educators.

The central challenge that this one-session program addresses is how Jewish community leaders and educators, especially youth leaders, can create accessible Pluralistic spaces for all Jews participating in their programming, whether religious or otherwise. A common term used for this work is creating a "big tent," where Jews of all backgrounds, knowledge, political beliefs and more, are embraced and engaged. But too often, pluralistic Jewish spaces can feel intimidating for those who are being exposed to different Jewish practices, customs, and backgrounds for the first time, especially those who come to the space without formal Jewish education or who have had barriers and limited opportunities to engage in Jewish life. Still, they are there out of a desire to be immersed and find community, and student leaders can make their spaces welcoming and accessible to all. In this sense, accessibility extends far beyond physical accommodations (although essential in every community). True accessibility looks like intentionally creating environments where community members can feel comfortable stepping outside of their comfort zone and asking questions, without any assumptions about prior knowledge, in order for all who participate to not feel embarrassed or judged.

Language is one of the most significant challenges to navigate in Jewish spaces. Jewish programming, and its

participants, frequently use Hebrew and Yiddish, liturgical terms and acronyms that someone unfamiliar with them would have a difficult time understanding. Phrases and terms such as "davening" (praying in Yiddish), "Kabbalat Shabbat" (the Friday night service), and references to movements, rituals, and holidays, might feel like basic knowledge to some, but entirely unfamiliar to others. It is important that these terms are able to be used in a way that all who participate don't feel like they are being ostracized for not knowing a certain language or jargon. When leaders and community members fail to explain these terms, define unfamiliar concepts, or provide translations and context, they inadvertently communicate that some forms of Jewish knowledge are prerequisites for belonging in their space. Accessibility through language is therefore not about eliminating Jewish vocabulary or traditions, but about ensuring that language serves as an invitation into the community rather than a barrier to entry.

Accessibility requires leaders to think intentionally about the ways information is communicated to their community. Small practices, such as explaining Hebrew words, providing transliterations alongside Hebrew text, and normalizing a culture of asking open questions can dramatically change a participant's experience. These practices ensure that all community members feel safe to participate and engage as fully as possible. Additionally, actively teaching new phrases and words increases someone's Jewish self-confidence and feeling of belonging, which can result in continued engagement in Jewish spaces.

Oftentimes, Jewish community leaders lack the skills to properly create accessible spaces, leaving people feeling left out. Even if community leaders know in principle that accessibility is important, it is sometimes difficult to put that into practice. I am proposing a program designed to train new and emerging leaders to be models and mentors of pluralistic accessibility. This can enable them to become role models in their own communities and transmit their knowledge to other leaders and community members by providing accessible programming at all levels.

While this program is written in English and is intentionally unspecific, to take into account the plethora of groups, communities, and leaders, it can be tailored and specified depending on the context of the program, such as a Hillel student board, Jewish Federation emerging leaders division, or synagogue youth groups, from rising juniors and seniors in high school to late twenties young professionals. One 90-minute session is not enough to fully train emerging student leaders in this work, however this program is an introduction to the importance of accessibility. It also provides them with the tools to explore what it means for their communities to be accessible.

This session will enable participants to feel empowered, inquisitive, and ready to make their communities welcoming and accessible for all.

Why is this work important?

Based on Avraham Infeld's vision of Global Jewish Peoplehood of being unified without being uniform, this program seeks to equip and empower student leaders in creating baseline accessibility so that all participants can feel their most authentic selves in community with each other. This kind of accessibility allows pluralism to thrive, and is an essential tool in creating welcoming spaces. The program, as seen below, has multiple interactive activities which intentionally start out from a more theoretical/ conceptual idea of accessibility to applicable and tangible practice of accessibility. Students engaging in this program should leave with a greater understanding of the importance of accessibility in pluralism, the tools to implement accessibility in their spaces, and a desire to advocate and create inclusive and welcoming communities.

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PROGRAM OUTLINE

Contextual Information

Who: 10-15; The program relies heavily on personal reflection, discussion, and role-play. A smaller group will have more opportunities for individuals to share deeply, as well as create an intimate environment where all participants can feel free to participate openly and truthfully. The intended participants are for emerging College or young adult leaders (not younger than 17). This can look like student boards, committee chairs, head counselors, and other young leaders who are eager to bring these practices back to their communities.

What: 90 minute in-person, interactive session that moves from reflective/theoretical perspectives to actionable ones. Where: As part of leadership training programs such as camp staff weeks, leadership retreats, board meetings, and more.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of the session, participants will be able to

- Understand how language and assumptions can unintentionally create barriers to participation in Jewish communal life
- Reflect on their own experiences with inclusion and exclusion and connect those experiences to their ongoing leadership
- Read and reflect on Jewish texts as a practice of engaging in language accessibility
- Identify practical strategies for making Jewish programming accessible
- Practice responding to real-life scenarios
- Commit to actionable steps for bringing the skills learned back to their communities

Materials needed:

- Regular Post-it notes (4 per participant)
- Four Post-it poster sheets (Post-it “gadols”)
- Pens
- Printed source sheets (one per participant and facilitators)
- Speaker (to play music during quiet reflection time)

Welcome (10 minutes): Icebreaker questions

- Name, pronouns (if you feel comfortable), hometown, role in your Jewish community, and fun fact
- Word mapping
  - Using a word cloud website ask participants to:
  - "Think back to a time you walked into a Jewish community where you knew almost no one. Maybe it was your first day at Hillel, camp, Hebrew school, group trip? What sort of emotions did you feel?"
  - Have participants fill out the website with one-word responses and start to discuss common themes or outliers
- Say: "We often think exclusion begins when someone says something hurtful. But often, our bodies recognize whether we belong long before our brains can explain why. Sometimes belonging is shaped by unintentional and imperceptible moments."
- Explain the goals of the session.

Activity 1: Gallery Walk (15 minutes)

Hand out 4 post it notes to each participant (and pens) and ask them to answer a different prompt on each note:

1. A time you felt included in a Pluralistic Jewish communal space
2. A time you felt excluded in a Pluralistic Jewish communal space
3. A time you included someone in a Pluralistic Jewish communal space
4. A time you excluded someone in a Pluralistic Jewish communal As participants hang their post-it notes on the respective Post-it Gadols (previously hung on the wall), have one or two volunteers share what people wrote. Facilitators can ask about patterns participants noticed, things that surprised them, etc...

Activity 2:

Text Study (25 minutes)

This text study invites participants to explore how Jewish religious texts explore questions around language as not only a method of communication as a tool of dignity and community.

Language and translation in the Torah is an important Jewish value, one that we can learn from as we engage in Jewish communal work today. As we read through the texts, notice how language, communication, and accessibility is discussed and how they might be able to inform our work today.

Notice as well, how the text study is formatted and how it might differ from previous ones you are used to seeing.

See below for a link to the source sheet created through Sefaria: https://voices.sefaria.org/sheets/738345?lang=bi

Activity 3: Role play (20 minutes)

Facilitators will split the participants into pairs in order to role-play different scenarios that might come up in their communities. After 5 minutes, the partners should reverse roles. At the end, the facilitators should encourage 1 or 2 groups to volunteer to replay their scenario. At the end, facilitators should lead a discussion into how they felt being in different roles, how they felt they responded, what they wished they had done differently.

Here are some suggestions for scenarios (facilitators should feel free to write their own that could be more tailored to their audience, but this is a broad start):

1. The person leading a Shabbat service announces that they will "daven Maariv before making Kiddush." A new participant looks confused. You are the community leader. How do you address the situation?
2. In a board meeting, a committee chair is explaining an event and says that they don't need to use transliterated texts because everyone can read Hebrew or they just won't care. How do you challenge that assumption?
3. A community member keeps using Hebrew words and acronyms to someone who looks confused. How do you as a leader gently intervene?
4. You notice a community member asking someone who is there for the first time, "where are you visiting from?" The new person looks flustered and quietly says that they are a member of the synagogue/go to the school/ is a camp counselor, etc. How would you address the community member in a private conversation following the event?

Reflection and wrap up: (15 minutes)

Have the large group answer some of these reflection questions:

- What challenged you the most today?
- What felt the most comfortable?
- What is one thing you want to take from the program today?

Have participants write down 1 concrete accessibility goal that they will commit to bringing about to their communities and 1 question they have moving forward to share with their supervisors.

Evaluation Methods:

- Check in with participants and/or their supervisors for a one (or two)-on-one conversation about student leaders' progress with accessibility in their communities as well as address and work through any difficulties.
- Encourage participants to become ambassadors for accessible leadership in their organizations.

Unseen Heritage

Julia Michlik

Julia Michalik completed her M.Eng. in Architecture at the Politechnika Wrocławska in Wrocław, Poland.

Świdnica lies in Lower Silesia, a region defined by a complex history of shifting borders. Over the centuries, this land has been shaped by Czech, German, and finally Polish rule. Through all these geopolitical changes, a vibrant Jewish community lived and contributed deeply to the region's cultural fabric. The atrocities of the Holocaust sought to erase their lives and landmarks completely. However, the story of Jews in Poland did not end. Today, a small but resilient community is actively rebuilding and reclaiming its identity. Remembering and honoring Jewish heritage here is no longer just an act of mourning. It is a vital step in anchoring this modern revival, proving that their legacy survived Reconstructing lost landmarks gives the rebuilding community a tangible connection to their roots. This belief in the power of physical spaces to preserve cultural memory guided my focus.

As an architect specializing in the restoration of historical buildings, I believe my professional skills are the most meaningful tools I have to contribute to the Jewish community. For this reason, I chose to reconstruct the synagogue in Świdnica specifically as part of my Matanel project. I wanted to dedicate my expertise to a reconstruction effort that carries genuine cultural weight and serves a higher purpose.

The Świdnica synagogue was originally designed by Edwin Oppler, the same outstanding architect who created the Great Synagogue in Wrocław, being of Jewish descent himself, he had strong ties to the Wrocław community and the surrounding region. Early in his career, he worked extensively on the restoration of historical buildings, including prominent cathedrals in many countries.

This shared focus on historical preservation creates a deep personal connection to his work for me. In 1859, he established his own architectural practice in Hannover, leading to the design or reconstruction of thirty buildings. His exceptional interior designs for the Marienburg Castle in 1864 even earned him the title of Royal Building Counselor.



Fot. 1 : Edwin Oppler's synagogue in Wrocław

Oppler is particularly recognized for his numerous synagogue designs. He intentionally departed from the widely popular Arab and Moorish stylizations of the time, choosing instead to introduce the arcade style along with late Romanesque and early Gothic architectural details. He built synagogues in Wrocław, Świdnica, Hameln, and Bleicherode. Tragically, none of them survived, as they were all completely destroyed by the Nazis. The Great Synagogue in Wrocław remains the most magnificent example of his work, towering over the city, it served as a powerful symbol of how large and significant the Jewish community was in Wrocław at the time.



Fot. 2 : Edwin Oppler's synagogue in Świdnica

The Świdnica synagogue, located in a town near Wrocław, was built in 1877 on Emperor Wilhelm Street, which is now Niepodległości Avenue. This was made possible thanks to funds raised by members of the local Jewish community. The brick building was erected on a rectangular plan in the Romanesque Revival style, which was most evident in its architectural details such as the windows, door frames, decorative friezes, and cornices. Among its most characteristic features were two towers and an octagonal dome. The building could accommodate a total of about 250 people in its male section and female gallery. The presence of an organ inside the synagogue was a clear testament to the liberal character of the local Jewish community. Unfortunately, the building was destroyed during Kristallnacht in November 1938.



Fot. 3 : Present day

I chose this specific building primarily because it has never been reconstructed before, and I believe bringing it back to life serves a much deeper purpose than just architectural recognition. For the Jewish community still present in Świdnica,

which proudly hosts its own branch of the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland (TSKŻ), this project offers a tangible link to their roots. By restoring the synagogue visually and spatially, I want to give the local community a physical anchor for their identity, validating their continued existence in a place where their history was targeted for absolute erasure.

For the Jewish community as a whole, this reconstruction is an act of cultural resilience. It demonstrates that the violent attempt to wipe out Jewish landmarks failed, and that lost heritage can always be reclaimed and passed on. I plan to hopefully share my completed work with the organizations in both Świdnica and

Wrocław. With the 3D model already finished, my goal is to present them with a 3D physical print and high-quality printed visualizations. Ultimately, I hope to invite community members to experience the reconstructed synagogue through AR glasses. Allowing them to stand before this magnificent building exactly as it once was is a way to transform historical loss into a foundation of strength and pride for the future.



Fot. 3 : My 3D reconstruction



Fot. 4 : My 3D reconstruction

SOURCES

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Carrying Light: Living Judaism Like Yakov Shapiro

Nika Voronina

Nika Voronina is studying toward a B.A. in Labor Studies and Sociology & Anthropology at Tel Aviv University in Tel Aviv, Israel.

THE CHALLANGE

In today's global world, many young Jews feel a sense of disconnection from their identity, their roots, Israel, and the meaning of being Jewish at this moment in history. Jewish identity can sometimes become theoretical, political, or simply distant from everyday life. The central question is: how do we maintain a real, living connection, not only through knowledge, but through values, experience, and people? The challenge I want to address is not only a lack of knowledge, but a lack of emotional and meaningful connection. What does it mean to be Jewish in the world today? How do we pass on a love for Israel not as something formal, but as an inner feeling - as part of one's identity?

THE VISION

My project is based on the story of a person who was deeply connected to Israel, Yakov Shapiro. He loved the land of Israel in a sincere and profound way. Yakov lived that love through his life, his travels around the world, his encounters with people, and most of all, through a genuine sense of joy. My vision is to present Judaism not only as a system of laws or history, but as a way of living through the values of joy, openness, love of others, connection to place, and the desire to pass these values forward - just as Yakov lived his life. I want to create a project that shows how one person, through the way he lived, was able to carry light and pass it on to others. Not through formal teaching, but through presence, energy, and story. Success in this project would mean that people begin to see Judaism not as something external, but as something they can actively live. That they understand it is not only about knowing, but about being.

PERSONAL ROLE

My connection to this project is deeply personal. I am not only telling a story, I am trying to understand my own place through it. My role is to take the values this person represented and translate them into today's language. To show how it is possible to continue his path, even though he is no longer here. I see myself as a transmitter,

someone who takes something alive, human, and meaningful, and continues to pass it on through words, storytelling, and emotional connection.

The platform for sharing these values will be an interactive website that will create a space where people can experience the values Yakov lived by. Rather than presenting a simple biography, the website will invite visitors to explore different parts of Yakov's life through stories, photographs, memories, and the experiences he shared with others.

The website will include sections about his travels, his work as an Israeli shaliach (Jewish Agency emissary), his involvement in Hillel, and the meaningful moments that reflected his love for Israel, Judaism, and community. One of the most important parts of the website will be a collection of personal memories shared by the people who knew him. These stories will help visitors understand who Yakov was through the eyes of those whose lives he touched.

I hope the website encourages people not only to learn about Yakov, but also to reflect on their own Jewish identity and the values they want to carry forward. My goal is for visitors to leave the website feeling inspired, not only by Yakov's story, but by the idea that every person has the ability to create meaningful connections, strengthen their community, and pass on values through the way they live.

https://yashapiro.me/

Our Jewish Cookbook

Maayan Wollman

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One of the challenges facing the global Jewish community that concerns me most is the growing sense of division within our own people. As an Israeli, this is something I experience and think about often, and I worry that these divisions will not disappear anytime soon. Ashkenazi and Sephardic, Jews from different countries and backgrounds, and people from different religious traditions can find themselves turning against one another instead of standing united in the face of the challenges we face from the outside. Instead of celebrating and cherishing our shared history and culture, as well as the differences that make our communities unique, we sometimes allow those differences to divide us. Especially during difficult and challenging times like these, when we are facing so many challenges from the outside, I believe it is more important than ever to come together and stand united. And what better way to come together and strengthen our sense of community than by gathering around a shared meal?

This cookbook is a celebration to honor the Jewish people - our food and recipes, our diverse culture, our rich history, and, above all, our wonderful people. These recipes offer a small taste not only of the food of the global Jewish people, but also of our shared history and heritage. I collected recipes from my grandmother, close friends, and Matanel fellows. These recipes come from different countries, cultures, communities, and traditions within the Jewish world, each carrying its own unique story. I invite you to explore these pages, try the recipes, and share them with family, friends, and even strangers. May this book inspire you to gather around the table, share a meal and stories, and celebrate the many flavors of our Jewish heritage together.

Everyone loves and needs food; it is one of the most basic and universal human experiences we share. Some of our fondest memories are connected to food: a meal with our family, a holiday around the table, a dish made by a grandparent. Food has a unique ability to bring people together, create memories, and open the door to conversation. By creating this cookbook, my aim is to celebrate and cherish the many cultures, foods, traditions, and stories that make up the Jewish people. I hope that these recipes will leave the pages of this book and find their

way into kitchens and dining tables, where people can cook, eat, talk, laugh, and connect. Maybe we cannot always agree on politics or on the "right" way to be Jewish, but we can all enjoy a meal together.

"Food is not just fuel. Food is about family, food is about community, food is about identity. And we nourish all those things when we eat together." — Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

TOVA'S HONEY CAKE FOR ROSH HASHANAH

Starting off the cookbook with a special recipe for the start of the year. This recipe belongs to my grandmother Tova, z"l (zichrona l'vracha - of blessed memory), who baked this cake every Rosh Hashanah. Ever since she passed away, my mother has carried on the tradition every year - keeping her recipe, and her memory alive. To me, this is the true power of food.

Ingredients

- 4 eggs, separated
- 1 1/4 cups sugar
- 1/2 cup honey
- 1/2 cup oil
- 1/2 cup strong brewed tea
- 2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cloves
- Zest of 1 lemon
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 cup boiling water
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice

Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C (350°F) and grease a baking pan.

2. In a bowl, mix the flour, cinnamon, cloves, and lemon zest.

3. In a separate bowl, beat the egg whites with the oil and 1/4 cup of the sugar until light and fluffy. Add the egg yolks and honey, and mix well.

4. In another bowl, dissolve the remaining sugar in the hot tea and boiling water. Let cool slightly.

5. Stir in the baking soda and lemon juice into the tea mixture. Gradually add to the batter, mixing until smooth.

6. Pour the batter into the prepared pan.

7. Bake for about 30 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean.

DALIA'S KURDISH CHAROSET FOR PASSOVER

This recipe comes from 2026 Matanel Fellow Moria, who shared a beloved dish for Passover, passed down from her grandmother, Dalia, z"l (zichrona l'vracha - of blessed memory).

Ingredients

- Almonds
- Walnuts
- Pecans
- Sesame seeds
- Silan (date syrup)

Directions

1. Finely chop the almonds, walnuts, and pecans.

2. Toast the nuts and sesame seeds in a dry pan over medium heat until fragrant and lightly golden. Set aside.

3. In a pot, gently heat the silan (date syrup) over medium heat until it begins to caramelize slightly around the edges.

4. Add the toasted nuts and sesame seeds to the pot and mix well.

5. Let the mixture cook on low heat for about 30–40 minutes, stirring occasionally, until everything is well combined and deeply flavored.

6. Remove from heat and allow to cool completely.

7. Transfer to a jar and store.

Notes

No measuring cups here — just the timeless method of "a little of this, a little of that," exactly how grandmothers know best.

TOVA'S JERUSALEM KUGEL

Sweet or savory? My absolute favorite is Jerusalem Kugel — a recipe passed down from my grandmother Tova z"l (zichrona l'vracha - of blessed memory), a seventh-generation Jerusalemite.

Ingredients

- 400 g thin egg noodles
- 1/2 cup oil
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- Caramelized sugar (see instructions)
- 3 eggs

Directions

1. Cook the noodles in boiling water with 1 teaspoon of salt. Drain and set aside.

2. In a separate pan, heat 1/2 cup oil with 1 cup sugar over medium heat until the sugar melts and turns a deep amber caramel.

3. Carefully pour the hot caramel over the cooked noodles and mix well.

4. Add the black pepper and stir.

5. Add the eggs and mix until fully combined.

6. Transfer the mixture to a greased baking dish.

7. Bake at 180°C (350°F) until set and golden brown on top.

ALIZA'S MOROCCAN FISH FOR SHABBAT DINNER

This recipe comes from my good friend and roommate Yovel, who shared her favorite recipe from her grandmother Aliza, z"l (zichrona l'vracha - of blessed memory), who learned to make these fish from her own grandmother in Morocco. Every time Yovel used to visit her, the thing she looked forward to most was eating her grandmother's fish. In fact, it was always the first thing they would smell when they walked through the door.

Since her grandmother passed away, Yovel and her family have continued the tradition, making this fish every Friday evening. As Yoval herself puts it: "Friday without fish isn't Friday."

Ingredients

- 3–4 fish fillets or whole fish
- Lemon juice or vinegar, for soaking the fish
- Garlic
- Bell pepper, sliced
- Carrot, sliced
- Hot pepper, sliced
- Dried or fresh Shushka pepper
- Fresh cilantro, optional

For the Sauce

- 1/2 cup oil
- 1 heaping tablespoon sweet paprika mixed with oil
- Salt, to taste
- Black pepper, to taste
- 1/4 teaspoon turmeric
- 1 cup hot water, plus more as needed

Directions

1. Before you begin, soak the fish in lemon juice or vinegar for 5–7 minutes.

2. Start by preparing the pan. Lightly roast the garlic, bell pepper, carrot, hot pepper, Shushka pepper, and cilantro (if using) in a large sauté pan.

3. Meanwhile, prepare the sauce in a separate bowl. Combine the oil, sweet paprika, salt, black pepper, and turmeric. Mix well.

4. Pour the sauce over the vegetables in the pan. Let it cook for a few minutes to allow the spices to open up and release their flavor.

5. Add 1 cup of hot water to the pan. You can add more water later if needed.

6. Once the sauce begins to bubble, gently place the fish into the pan, skin-side down. Spoon some of the sauce over the fish and cook over medium heat for at least 30 minutes.

7. About halfway through cooking, add a handful of chopped fresh cilantro. You can spoon the sauce over the fish from time to time as it cooks.

8. Once the sauce has thickened and the fish is fully cooked, taste and adjust the seasoning as needed.

9. And that's it — the Friday fish is ready to serve!

GEORGETTE'S BATATA VADA (SWEET POTATO VADA)

This recipe comes from my good friend and colleague Eden, who shared one of her favorite traditional Indian family recipes – a great vegan dish!

Ingredients

For the Potato Filling

- 6 red potatoes, suitable for boiling
- 1 bunch fresh cilantro, finely chopped
- 4 hot green peppers, finely chopped (or to taste)
- 1 teaspoon mustard seeds
- 1 teaspoon cumin seeds
- 1 teaspoon turmeric
- 1 tablespoon oil

For the Batter

- 2 cups chickpea flour (besan)
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon turmeric
- 1½ cups cold water, added gradually

The batter should be relatively thick and smooth.

For Serving

- Chutney
- Harissa
- Ketchup

Directions

1. Place the potatoes in a pot of water and boil until tender.

2. Let the potatoes cool slightly, then peel and roughly mash them. The potatoes should remain slightly chunky rather than becoming completely smooth like mashed potatoes.

3. Heat 1 tablespoon of oil in a small pan or saucepan. Add the cumin and mustard seeds. *Be careful, as the seeds may pop.*

4. Add the chopped green peppers and the turmeric. Stir well and cook briefly.

5. Add the seasoned mixture to the potatoes and mix well. Add the chopped cilantro and combine.

6. Shape the potato mixture into small or medium-sized balls, depending on your preference.

7. In a separate bowl, prepare the batter by gradually adding the cold water to the chickpea flour, salt, and turmeric. Mix until smooth and relatively thick.

8. Dip each potato ball into the batter, making sure it is evenly coated.

9. Heat oil in a deep pan. Once hot, carefully fry the coated potato balls until the outside is golden and crisp.

10. Remove and place in a strainer to drain the excess oil.

11. Serve warm with your favorite chutney, harissa, or ketchup.

Tip: These are best enjoyed fresh and crispy, straight from the pan.

SARAH'S HAMANTASCHEN FOR PURIM

This recipe comes from 2026 Matanel Fellow Sarah, who bakes hamantaschen every Purim to share with friends and loved ones. I invite you to bake this batch, join the tradition, and share these sweet treats with the people you love.

Ingredients

For the Dough

- 3 eggs
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- ¾ cup vegetable oil
- 2 ½ teaspoons vanilla extract
- ½ cup orange juice
- 5 ½ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon baking powder

For the Filling

- 1 cup fruit preserves, any flavor
- Alternative: Nutella works wonderfully too!

Directions

1. Preheat your oven to 350°F (175°C). Lightly grease two large cookie sheets or line them with parchment paper.

2. In a large bowl, beat the eggs and sugar together until light and fluffy. Stir in the vegetable oil, vanilla extract, and orange juice until well combined.

3. In a separate bowl, whisk together the flour and baking powder. Gradually stir the dry ingredients into the wet batter to form a stiff dough.

4. If the dough feels too soft or sticky to roll out, simply stir in a little more flour until it reaches the right consistency.

5. On a lightly floured surface, roll the dough out to about ¼-inch thickness. Roll, roll, roll your dough!

6. Cut into circles using a cookie cutter or the rim of a drinking glass. Keep rolling and cutting until all the dough is used. (If you have extra scraps at the end, sometimes you can make a giant hamantasch!)

7. Place the circles about 2 inches apart onto the prepared cookie sheets.

8. Spoon about 2 teaspoons of preserves (or Nutella) into the center of each circle. Be generous with your dollop, but not too generous!

9. Pinch the edges together to form three corners, framing the filling. Don't forget to pinch the corners securely so they don't burst open in the oven!

10. Bake for 12 to 15 minutes in the preheated oven, or until the edges are lightly browned. Allow the cookies to cool for 1 minute on the cookie sheet before removing them to wire racks to cool completely.

A LITTLE YIDDISH TRADITION:

האָפּ מיינע המן-טאַשן / האָפּ מיינע ווייסע / האָפּ מיט מיינע המן-טאַשן / האָט פּאַסירט אַ מעשה

Hop mayne homen-tashen \ Hop mayne vayse \ Hop mit mayne homen-tashen \ Hot pasirt a mayse!

Off you go! My hamantaschen / Off you go! My white ones / Off you go! With my hamantaschen / A whole story happened! It was epic.



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Breaking Down The Stereotypes And Prejudices Associated With The Term 'Cosmopolitan' In The Post-Soviet Region

Timofey Abramiuk

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INTRODUCTION

I grew up in Minsk, Belarus, in a family that carried its Jewish identity quietly. Long before I understood the history behind that quietness, I understood its effects: a sense that some doors opened more slowly for my family than for others, and that the reasons were rarely spoken aloud. This project is my attempt to speak them aloud – to trace where that quietness came from, and to argue that the story of Jews in the post-Soviet region deserves to be told as more than a story of victimhood. It is also a story of resilience, scholarship, and cultural contribution that predates and outlasts the prejudice directed at it.

The title of this project uses a word that carries more weight than it first appears to: "cosmopolitan." Understanding why requires understanding both where Jewish life in this region was physically confined, and how the language used to describe Jews shifted from restricting their movement to questioning their loyalty. Both threads – the legal and the linguistic – converge in the modern prejudice this project seeks to address.

WHAT "COSMOPOLITAN" REALLY MEANS: FROM A COMPLIMENT TO A CODE WORD

In its original sense, a "cosmopolitan" was simply a person who felt at home across borders – a citizen of the world rather than of one nation. The term took on a very different meaning in Russian intellectual life. In the nineteenth century,

the critic Vissarion Belinsky used the phrase "rootless cosmopolitan" to describe writers he considered to lack a genuine Russian national character. That phrase lay dormant for a century before it was revived, deliberately, as a weapon.

Between 1946 and 1953, Stalin's government waged what became known as the anti-cosmopolitan campaign, part of a broader assault on "bourgeois Western influence" led by ideologue Andrei Zhdanov. Officially, the campaign targeted critics, scientists, and artists accused of insufficient Soviet patriotism. In practice, it disproportionately destroyed the careers, and sometimes the lives, of Jewish intellectuals. "Rootless cosmopolitan" became a euphemism that Soviet audiences understood to mean "Jewish" without the state ever having to say so – a way of levelling an antisemitic accusation while denying it was one. Thirteen Jewish writers and artists were executed in December 1952 in what is remembered as the "Night of the Murdered Poets," and the campaign culminated the following year in the fabricated "Doctors' Plot," which accused predominantly Jewish physicians of conspiring to poison the Soviet leadership.

This history matters for the title of this project because it reframes what the word "cosmopolitan" was really accusing Jews of: not of belonging everywhere, but of belonging nowhere – of being permanently foreign, no matter how many generations their families had lived on the same soil. Reclaiming the word means insisting on the opposite: that Jewish communities in Belarus and across the former Soviet Union were, and are, deeply in specific towns, universities, laboratories, and streets – and that the accusation of rootlessness was itself fiction.

"DELO VRACHEY": THE DOCTOR'S PLOT AS THE CAMPAIGN'S CULMINATION

The anti-cosmopolitan campaign reached its most dangerous point in what became known as delo vrachey, the Doctors' Plot. Arrests began quietly in September 1952, but the case became public on 13 January 1953, when the newspapers Pravda and Izvestiya announced that nine prominent Kremlin physicians, six of them Jewish, had been arrested as "killer doctors." They were accused of poisoning Central Committee secretary Andrei Zhdanov in 1948 and plotting to murder senior Soviet military leaders, all supposedly on behalf of American and British intelligence and of "international Jewry" – a formulation that, unlike "cosmopolitan," barely bothered to disguise its target. The physicians, among them Miron Vovsi, the Red Army's chief internist, were arrested on Stalin's personal order and tortured until they confessed. The pretext for reopening the case was a 1948 letter from a Kremlin cardiologist, Lidia Timashuk, questioning the doctors' treatment of Zhdanov – a document that had sat unused in the archives for four years until it was convenient to revive it.

Only Stalin's death on 5 March 1953 stopped the case from becoming a full show trial. Weeks later, the new Soviet

leadership admitted the confessions had been obtained through torture and declared the entire plot fabricated; the surviving doctors were quietly released and rehabilitated, and in 1954 several security officials were themselves executed for having manufactured the case. Many historians now read the Doctors' Plot as the opening stage of a purge that Stalin's death interrupted before it could be carried out fully – several of his own inner circle later recalled fearing it was meant to be the pretext for a far larger, USSR-wide campaign against Soviet Jews.

The affair was not confined to Moscow. Research by historian Leonid Smilovitsky into how the campaign played out specifically in Soviet Belarus found that, in its wake, Jews were systematically removed from political posts and from the republic's press organs in 1953, and that the Belarusian ministries of the interior and state security were purged of Jewish staff entirely. This is precisely the kind of institutional, employment-level exclusion that my own family's generation lived through directly – not an abstract policy debated in Moscow, but a concrete removal of people from jobs they had held, in the towns where my own relatives lived and worked.

WHERE THE ROOTS WERE CONFINED: THE PALE OF SETTLEMENT

To understand how that fiction became so entrenched, it helps to go back further, to the legal architecture that first defined where Jews in the Russian Empire were permitted to live at all. This was the Pale of Settlement, known in Russian as черта оседлости (cherta osedlosti), literally the "line of permanent settlement." It was established in 1791 by Catherine the Great, after the partitions of Poland in 1772, 1793, and 1795 brought large numbers of Jews under Russian rule for the first time. Rather than granting these new subjects the same freedom of movement as other Russians, the imperial government confined them to a defined western territory stretching roughly from the Baltic to the Black Sea – encompassing the whole of present-day Belarus and Lithuania, most of Ukraine, and parts of Poland, Moldova, Latvia, and western Russia.

Within the Pale, Jews were largely barred from owning or farming land, excluded from most rural areas, and forbidden from residing permanently in cities such as Moscow or St. Petersburg. By the turn of the twentieth century, roughly five million Jews lived within its boundaries. A narrow set of exceptions – university graduates, members of the wealthiest merchant guilds, certain licensed artisans – were permitted to live beyond it, which meant that from the very beginning, Jewish access to the rest of the empire ran through the state's discretion rather than through equal citizenship. The Pale was never formally softened so much as it was dismantled outright: it collapsed with the disintegration of the empire during the First World War and was formally abolished by the Provisional Government in April 1917.

AFTER ABOLITION: HOW THE BARRIERS PERSISTED IN SOVIET BELARUS

The legal end of the Pale in 1917 did not mean the end of the exclusion it had encoded; the mechanism simply changed from geography to bureaucracy. Soviet internal passports required every citizen to list an ethnic "nationality," and for Jews, this entry functioned, in the words of one historian describing the system, as effectively a badge of discrimination – a permanent, state-issued marker that made the identity impossible to set aside even for those who wished to assimilate fully.

In Soviet Belarus, specifically, this bureaucratic labelling, combined with existing prejudices, directly impacted access to education and employment. Historical accounts of the post-war Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic note that, relative to their small share of the population, Jewish students remained disproportionately represented in universities and technical institutes – a fact that the republic's leadership interpreted in explicitly anti-Semitic terms as evidence of a hidden threat to the Belarusian state, rather than as evidence of a community that valued education despite difficult circumstances. From the 1920s onwards, unofficial quotas restricting Jewish admission to universities and desirable professions were a persistent, albeit rarely written-down, feature of Soviet institutional life, alongside the 'rootless cosmopolitan' purges described above. The result was a system in which formal legal equality coexisted with deeply entrenched 'glass ceilings' – informal barriers that were never written into law and were therefore almost impossible to challenge yet consistently felt by those living under them.

My family was directly affected during those years when the campaign against cosmopolitanism was underway. It was precisely at this time that my grandfather, Chaim Gordon, was a student and was studying at university. The fact that one was required to state one's nationality on all documents can be traced and confirmed through his example. Whilst sorting through his papers after his death, we found his student ID card, his military registration certificate and his birth certificate. Back then in the Soviet Union, it was compulsory for students, upon completing their higher education, to be sent – or 'assigned' – to various cities for work placements. People of Jewish nationality were not sent to large cities; whilst studying in Moscow, my grandfather was first sent to the city of Perm, where my mother Elena was born, and then to the city of Gomel.

At that time, the so-called Pale of Settlement ran through the territory of the city of Gomel. A fairly large number of people of Jewish nationality lived in the city, comprising a significant number of specialists in various fields. Just as the organisation where my grandfather was working was preparing to relocate to Minsk, an order came from the Ministry of Industry not to take people of Jewish nationality with them. These facts confirmed that there was discrimination and that opportunities to developprofessionally were denied.

At that time, party organisations wielded considerable influence over matters of employment and beyond. It was only because the other employees of this engineering bureau signed a petition addressed to the party organisation, together with the management and the managing director, that my grandfather was able to be transferred to the branch in Minsk.

My mother, Elena Gordon, can be considered part of the second generation to have faced anti-Semitism. It all began with teasing about her surname at school and the offensive nickname given to all people of Jewish nationality. In Polish, a Jew is called a 'Zyd'. This word found its way into the Russian language and came to be regarded as offensive. That is why, after moving to Poland, I found it rather unpleasant for quite some time to be called that in Polish. Although the people at the time meant no harm towards me.

My mother was a student in the 1970s, a time when the Jewish population was given their first opportunity to leave the USSR for Israel. Special agencies such as the KGB (Committee for State Security) took note of this and kept an eye on students to monitor the mood within these communities. Each group had a year representative or class monitor who looked after the students and helped with bureaucratic matters involving the dean's office. Many years later, at a reunion of former classmates, the dean admitted that the Security Committee had asked him to observe and report on what the students in these groups were saying, particularly those of Jewish nationality.

When my mother applied to university, she initially enrolled for a completely different degree program. On the day the results were displayed in the university corridors, my mother saw her surname underlined in red pencil with the word 'Zydowka' written above it. Later, when she went to submit her documents, the staff at the Dean's Office strongly advised her to withdraw her application, citing her ethnic background and claiming that the other students were opposed to her studying there. She had to withdraw her application and apply to another university.

PERSISTENT PREJUDICE: WHAT THE DATA SHOWS TODAY

This is not only a historical story. Recent research indicates that antisemitic attitudes remain widespread in the region today. The Anti-Defamation League's Global 100 Index, conducted with Ipsos and released in January 2025, found that 46 percent of people surveyed across 103 countries and territories hold antisemitic attitudes, that one in five respondents worldwide had not heard of the Holocaust, and that less than half recognised its historical accuracy. Notably, the pollsters reported that data collection in Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus was itself periodically disrupted by the ongoing war, which is a reminder of how difficult it can be to even measure attitudes in this region reliably.

More specific sources also point in the same direction. The World Jewish Congress describes antisemitism in Belarus today as 'somewhat widespread, if not latent', and notes that the Belarusian government has generally taken an indifferent stance towards antisemitic incidents, rather than actively combatting them. Similarly, scholarship published by the Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy (ISGAP) argues that social antisemitism across the post-Soviet region developed and persisted independently of official state policy, even after state-sanctioned antisemitism was formally abolished in 1990. This means that the repeal of a law does not necessarily lead to the end of prejudice. The same research estimates that between 700,000 and 1,000,000 people across the former Soviet Union identify with the Jewish community or have Jewish heritage today, making the post-Soviet region home to one of the largest Jewish populations outside Israel. Analysis from the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies (BESA) has tracked the continued political instrumentalisation of antisemitism in post-Soviet conflicts, whereby it is invoked selectively for strategic advantage rather than being confronted consistently. The October 2023 mob attack on arriving passengers at Makhachkala Airport is cited as a stark recent example of how quickly latent hostility can turn into open violence.

Taken together, this data confirms what my family's experience suggests: that the prejudice addressed by this project is not confined to archives. It is a live and measurable phenomenon, shaped by, but no longer dependent on, the legal structures that first created it.

MY VISION: CULTURAL REINTEGRATION THROUGH EDUCATION AND RESTORATION

My response to this history has two parts, which I refer to as 'education' and 'restoration'. The first part is a strategy of 'cultural reintegration', which involves presenting the history of Jews in the former Soviet Union as more than just a history of victimhood or imposed 'otherness'. It should also be seen as forming the basis of the region's scientific, cultural, and intellectual life. Jewish scholars, physicians and scientists played a key role in the very institutions – such as universities, academies and laboratories – that often excluded them. Telling this fuller story is a way of countering the myth of the 'rootless cosmopolitan'.

Specifically, I would like to help organise educational sessions led by Jewish organisations in schools and universities across the region, even in places where building a fully coordinated regional platform remains difficult for the time being. This aligns with my own understanding of Jewish identity as something realised through educating others and imparting knowledge – a task I am already familiar with as a language tutor, and which I will continue in my future career in biotechnology. The work of the generations before me, who were denied the same opportunities without a fight, has shaped this career path.

As a Matanel Program fellow, I see it as my responsibility to shift how people outside of Israel think about Jewish identity, moving away from the reflexive association with politics and current events and towards a fuller appreciation of a community with a rich intellectual history, which has finally been recognised as having the right to be understood as rooted rather than rootless.

CONCLUSION

The word "cosmopolitan" was once used to suggest that Jews in the Soviet Union belonged nowhere. This project argues the opposite: that Jewish communities in Belarus and across the former Soviet Union have deep, specific, documentable roots – in the towns of the former Pale of Settlement, in the universities their children fought to enter, and in the families, including my own, who carried that history forward quietly until now.

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Pluralism as a Value for Risk Management within Jewish Civilisation

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There is an old Jewish joke: every Jew has three synagogues - the one he belongs to, the one he does not belong to, and the one he would never set foot in. Ask a Jew in Warsaw what he thinks of the community across town and you will hear something between polite distance and frank disapproval. The community across town returns the favour.

I have been travelling between Jewish communities for several years now - Litvak Orthodox in Warsaw and Chisinau, Sephardic in Lisbon, Reform in Portland, Chabad in Palo Alto - and the same pattern shows up everywhere. Some Reform synagogues forbid microphones and smartphones during prayer; others run full sound systems. The Sephardic shul in Lisbon, in its gravity and pace, reminded me far more of a Litvak service in Chisinau than of anything I saw in San Francisco. Same denominational label, same theological family, opposite buildings. And each community is quietly convinced that its own way is the sensible one.

So here is the question that has been following me around. How does a people that has never agreed on anything - open the Talmud to any page for proof - persist for three thousand years through every conceivable attempt at its destruction?

My answer has two parts. Diversity kept us alive. The Covenant kept us one people. Or, to use an older word for covenant: Responsibility.

> *"You stand today, all of you... to enter into the covenant of the Lord your God." -Deuteronomy 29:9–12*

"All of you." The covenant is not addressed to a collective that has sorted out its internal differences. It is addressed to the whole arguing assembly, and it binds them by giving every member the same standing before the same obligation. The differences stay. The obligation is shared.

THE THREATS ARE REAL

Any serious discussion of Jewish survival has to start with history, though the Torah got there long before modern risk analysis:

"Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations. Ask your father, and he will tell you; your elders, and they will say to you." - Deuteronomy 32:7

Physical violence is the most visible threat. Pogroms, Inquisition, Holocaust, and - within living memory - the 1968 campaign that emptied Poland of most of its remaining Jews. With each year of my life these events convince me less that human nature has reliably changed. Avraham Infeld, the veteran Jewish educator, said something similar to us during the Matanel fellowship program.

Assimilation works slower and quieter. No mobs, no decrees - just integration, intermarriage, and cultural absorption doing their work across generations. American Jews debate today whether this is the greater danger, and they are not the first to ask. Rome posed the question. The European Enlightenment posed it again. What remains of Jewish identity after the ghetto walls come down?

Then there is a simple catastrophe. The destruction of the Second Temple scattered the people across the ancient world. The great earthquake of 4125 AM hit the communities of the eastern Mediterranean. The Black Death tore through European Jewry already weakened by persecution, and 1492 scattered the Sephardim from Iberia to the Ottoman lands. A community gathered in one place, practising in one way, can be erased by one event.

No single communal strategy survives all of these threats equally well. A closed, bounded community - Warsaw Chabad today, where a visitor presents identification before the door opens - resists assimilation well. It is also visible, isolated, and easier to target. An open community - Reform in Portland, or Chabad in Palo Alto, where the door is open to whoever walks in - weaves itself into civic life and builds alliances, and then has to work much harder to stay distinct across generations. The locked door and the open door are answers to different questions. Neither is the wrong answer.

Antisemitism sits apart from this list, because it ignores the list. It lands with indifference on the observant and the secular, the integrated and the insular, the Ashkenazi and the Sephardic, the Zionist and the diasporist. The Jew accused of dual loyalty in France is not asked first which synagogue he attends, or whether he attends at all. Whatever our internal quarrels, the outside world does not honour our distinctions - a fact with a certain clarifying power. This shared exposure, what Jonathan Sacks called keeping faith through all the dark nights of history, binds Jews in a way no denominational agreement could. But a people bound only by its enemies has no answer to what it is for. That answer has to come from somewhere else. It does - I will get there.

DIVERSITY AS CIVILISATIONAL STRATEGY

Nassim Nicholas Taleb has a word for systems that grow stronger under stress rather than merely enduring it: antifragile (Antifragile, 2012). A monoculture is efficient in good conditions and shatters in bad ones. An ecosystem

with many variants absorbs the shock, because no single shock kills all the variants at once.

Jewish history ran this experiment, at terrible cost. The Holocaust devastated European Orthodoxy; it has not fully recovered even today. Continuity through that period came from elsewhere - from Reform and secular communities in the Americas that had drifted far from Eastern European tradition, and from the Socialist Zionists building something entirely different in the Land of Israel. These were not copies of one another. They were different bets on what Jewish life should be, placed by people who often disapproved of each other. Many Orthodox authorities of the time saw the American and Zionist paths as fragmentation, as assimilation in slow motion. Then the catastrophe came for the centre, and the periphery carried the people through.

And here I want to be fair to those authorities: they were not wrong. Assimilation was and is a real danger - the wheel has turned, and it is now the challenge that communities across the whole spectrum are scrambling to address. The diversifiers were right and the warners were right. They were answering different threats on different timescales.

The Sephardic expulsion tells the same story from an earlier century. What felt like pure catastrophe in 1492 seeded communities in Thessaloniki, Istanbul, Amsterdam, Livorno - each of which developed its own practices while holding to a common liturgical tradition. Five hundred years later you can still tell them apart. Dispersal saved them.

Concentration would not have.

But stop here and the argument has a hole in it. A portfolio is not a person. If diversity were the whole story, there would be nothing to distinguish a civilisation from a scattering - many communities drifting apart, each optimising for local conditions, until nothing connects them at all. Risk management explains why diversity is valuable. It does not explain why the diverse parts still belong to one another.

ONE CORE, MANY PRACTICES

I am not arguing for moral relativism, and the distinction matters. Unity contains some necessary degree of diversity, while uniformity denies it. Confusing the two is the source of much communal misunderstanding.

What the diverse parts share is stated in the most universal text in Jewish practice, repeated multiple times each day across every denomination:

שמע יִשְׂרָאֵל | יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ | יְהוָה אֶחָד

Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad | "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One."

A Jew reciting the Shema accepts his allegiance to the civilisation, recognises the broader tribe, and affirms that only God ultimately governs - and that God is undivided. Read through the lens of pluralism, each phrase carries weight:

שַׁמע יִשְׂרָאֵל
Hear, O Israel

The address goes to all people recognised in their local communities as Jews. Not a subset. Not those who practice correctly. The whole of Israel in its diversity

יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ
The Lord is our God

An admission of limits: we do not fully comprehend the divine; our interpretations are partial, our rulings provisional

יְהוָה אֶחָד
The Lord is One

Unity, not uniformity. Final authority belongs to God - not to any denomination or court claiming to speak for Him

Take the last two lines together and something follows. If human understanding is partial and final authority is God's alone, then no human court can claim to have closed the argument. The Talmud is the monument to this principle. When the academies of Hillel and Shammai reached contradictory conclusions on hundreds of legal questions, the tractate Eruvin (13b) records the divine voice declaring אלו ואלו דברי אלהים חיים | elu v'eilu divrei elohim chaim | "these and these are words of the living God." Pirkei Avot (5:17) adds that a מחלוקת לשם שמים | machloket l'shem shamayim - a dispute for the sake of heaven - endures and produces good. Not because all positions are equally correct. Because within the covenant, honest disagreement generates rather than destroys - the parties argue under a shared obligation, before an authority neither of them owns.

Within the covenant. That qualification carries the whole weight, and history shows what happens without it. The dialectical idea - thesis, antithesis, synthesis, in the framework associated with Johann Gottlieb Fichte - is structurally close to the Talmudic machloket: opposing positions producing something greater than either. In the century that followed, that same generative framework, cut loose from any ethical anchor, was bent into an engine of nationalism and eventually of violence in the very land that produced it. The idea was not the problem. The missing core was. Torah supplies exactly what a bare dialectic lacks - obligations that hold no matter who wins the argument. צדק צדק תרדף | tzedek tzedek tirdof | "justice, justice shall you pursue" (Deuteronomy 16:20). לא תַעמֹד עַל דַּם רֵעֶךָ | do not stand idle before the blood of your neighbour (Leviticus 19:16). ואהבתם את הגר | love the stranger (Deuteronomy 10:19). בצלם אלהים | every human being created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). These are the floor beneath every legitimate disagreement. With the core present, pluralist argument produces Talmud. Without it, something else entirely.

Isaiah Berlin spent a career on this distinction. Pluralism: many genuine values, sometimes incompatible, each real and carrying moral weight. Relativism: all values are just subjective preferences, grounded in nothing beyond

culture. The Jewish tradition is pluralist in Berlin's sense. Hillel and Shammai argued with such ferocity because both sides believed the thing they argued about was real. So do the communities quarrelling today. These are not preferences. They are different, serious, accountable responses to shared obligations.

THE COMMUNITIES AS EVIDENCE

Through this frame, my travels stop being a collection of curiosities. The locked door in Warsaw reads its environment correctly: Jewish visibility in this part of Europe has historically invited danger, and a community that survived here learned caution. The open door in Palo Alto reads its environment correctly too - openness there is safe, and the outreach mission depends on it. Reform communities that refuse amplification are holding a deliberate line between contemporary life and a tradition shaped by caution; the ones running sound systems have made a different calculation about integration. The Lisbon Sephardim, closer in spirit to Orthodox Warsaw than to American Reform, carry five hundred years of memory about what public Jewish life in a historically hostile Catholic country costs.

Trouble starts when a community mistakes its local adaptation for the universal answer - when Warsaw decides Palo Alto is naïve, or Portland decides Warsaw is paranoid. The Chief Rabbi of Poland, himself an American citizen, once reminded me that American Jewry contains plenty of poor communities; this correction rarely crosses the Atlantic. The myth of uniform American Jewish wealth takes one visible, prosperous node for the whole network Same error with different registers.

THE MICRO CASE: POLISH JEWS

Survival strategies are double-sided, and the community I know from inside shows both sides at once. For those building Jewish life in Warsaw, identity often has less to do with denomination or observance than with testimony. These families survived the Shoah. They survived 1968. To be Jewish in Warsaw today is, for many, to be walking proof that the project of erasure failed - a local, concentrated version of what Simon Rawidowicz saw in the whole people: every generation of Jews has believed it might be the last, and this perpetual fear of ending has driven extraordinary care for what gets passed on (Israel: The Ever-Dying People, 1986).

There is tremendous moral gravity in this. There is also a trap, and Avraham Burg named it. Burg - former Speaker of the Knesset, son of a survivor - argued that when survival trauma becomes the primary marker of identity, a community turns permanently reactive: defined by what it escaped rather than what it wants (The Holocaust Is Over; We Must Rise From Its Ashes, 2008). A people whose deepest answer to "why are you Jewish?" is "because they tried to kill us and failed" depends on the threat continuing The same insufficiency as antisemitism-as-glue, wearing different clothes. And when the generation that remembers passes - what then? Warsaw is working on that question

right now, quietly and seriously: rebuilding institutions, investing in education, making Jewish life here something with positive content rather than only historical witness.I consider it one of the most important experiments in Jewish continuity running anywhere. It deserves recognition from communities that never faced anything like it - not the bemused condescension that distance sometimes produces.

THE MACRO CASE: ISRAEL AND DIASPORA

The largest expression of Jewish diversity is the split between Israel and the diaspora, and no honest account can walk around it. Yuri Slezkine described Zionism as the moment Jews attempted the transition from Mercurian existence - stateless, specialist, intermediary - to Apollonian existence: territorial, sovereign, willing to exercise what I would call Brute Power (The Jewish Century, 2004). For two thousand years Jews held the middle position in European societies. Never the sword, always the ledger and the letter. The Fifth Column accusation was always available for exactly this reason: statelessness made Jews look like they served everyone's interests, and therefore no one's. Ruth Wisse has argued that this weakness itself made Jews perpetual scapegoats, and that sovereignty was a necessary correction (Jews and Power, 2007).

Sovereignty corrected some things and opened others. Israel now carries the full moral weight of state power - military decisions, territorial control, the burden of holding rather than seeking protection. Hard problems, and two thousand years as specialists and advisors prepared none of us for them. Meanwhile the diaspora keeps doing what Israel cannot: building bridges into surrounding societies, maintaining presence in dozens of countries, sustaining the distributed network that has always been the insurance against any single catastrophe. Neither is the correct answer to how Jewish civilisation should organise itself. They are the locked door and the open door again, at the scale of the whole people.

THE PRESCRIPTION

The tribe of Israel was never a religion in the conventional sense - a fixed creed with a fixed liturgy run by a fixed hierarchy. Jew, Judaism, Israel: different names for the same thing, a people defined by covenant and custom, by an argumentative relationship with a text and with God. The name Israel itself - given to Jacob after his night of wrestling - means one who struggles. Reformation is not an event that happened to Judaism at some point; it is what Judaism has always been doing. Every generation of rabbis reinterpreted the law for its conditions. Every diaspora community bent its practice around its geography and its century. The Talmud is the record of an argument nobody won, preserved because the tradition understood that a final victory would be the end of it. Demanding uniformity - one denomination, one practice, one political posture - does not protect this tribe. It misunderstands what the tribe is.

What I am asking for is more modest than friendship, and harder: a conscious ego detachment. Hold the conviction that your community's path genuinely matters. Hold, at the same time, the recognition that other communities are running strategies the whole people needs - including communities whose customs you do not share, whose practices you would not choose, whose interpretations you might contest.

I am not calling for Chabad to reach out warmly to Reform, or for secular Israelis to embrace the Orthodox. Honestly, I doubt friendship is available there. The secular-Orthodox conflict in Israel is not merely theological; it is civic, legislative, daily. If it resolves at all, the resolution will require a structural metamorphosis in how the Jewish state accommodates the full range of Jews it contains - and that metamorphosis will not come from warmth. It will come from the reluctant recognition that the other side is a necessary node in the same network, hedging threats your side cannot.

Where does plain tolerance start? With the things that already bind every community regardless of denomination. Antisemitism first - the one threat that ignores our internal distinctions. Communities that agree on nothing about prayer already share this interest; coordinating responses requires zero theological compromise. Education second. Everyone across the spectrum is chewing on Burg's question - what comes after survival as the answer to "why be Jewish?" - and the answers being tried in Warsaw, Portland, and Lisbon are worth knowing about even without formal cooperation. Parallel experiments, same problem. Israel third, and here the disagreements are real and I will not pretend otherwise. But turning Israel into a litmus test for authentic Jewish identity - from either direction - is communal self-harm. It destroys the network from inside.

The core is not up for negotiation: the covenant and its obligations, the thread that says b'tzelem Elohim of every person. What is up for negotiation is the assumption that your community holds the only valid response to the threats we all face. Hillel's students preserved Shammai's rulings. Not out of agreement - out of the understanding that truth held by others has value even when it contradicts your own. Three thousand years of arguing, and still here. That is not an accident.

CONCLUSION

There is a moment in every Jewish service I have attended, in every country, that is structurally identical. Words are said that were said in the desert, in Babylonian exile, in medieval Spain, in the Warsaw Ghetto - and are being said right now in communities that would not recognise each other's practices in any other respect.

Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad.

Each community made its choices under its own history, its own geography, its own encounter with violence, assimilation, and catastrophe. Choices locally rational and globally necessary. The locked door in Warsaw hedges what the open door in Palo Alto cannot; the open door

sustains what the locked door cannot. Jewish civilization needs the full range - communities, denominations, practices, postures - a system more resilient than any of its parts. And it needs the core that keeps those parts from becoming strangers: the covenant addressed, from the beginning, to all of you.

I am not asking anyone to embrace anyone. Plain tolerance would already be a lot: recognising other communities' right to exist as they are, and dropping the mutual contempt that weakens the whole network. Not a grand synthesis. Communities aware of each other's necessity, across every disagreement about what it means to be a Jew.

The Lord is One. Israel is many. Both are necessary, and neither contradicts the other.

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The Two-Way Bridge: Rebalancing Israel-Diaspora Relations Through Reciprocal Engagement

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"Instead of visiting the Western Wall, they visited Ellis Island. Instead of hiking in the Negev Desert, they took a day trip to a Habonim-Dror summer camp. Instead of basking in the sun on the Tel Aviv beach, they watched clips of the Three Stooges mocking the Nazis. And instead of Birthright, a 10-day trip meant to acquaint American Jews with Israel, a cohort of Israeli graduate students participated in a 10-day trip to get to know American Jews." (Sales, 2016)

A critical challenge currently facing the global Jewish community is the inherent asymmetry in Israel-Diaspora engagement. While substantial infrastructures, such as Birthright, successfully bring global Jewish youth to Israel, opportunities for young Israelis to experience Jewish life abroad remain limited. The limited programs that do facilitate overseas travel for Israelis often entail highly competitive and stressful selection processes, rendering these experiences an exclusive privilege rather than a standard educational opportunity. Consequently, a significant portion of the young Israeli demographic is systematically filtered out, leaving them disconnected from the nuanced realities and rich identities of global Jewish communities.

To address this imbalance, there is a pressing need for accessible and inclusive reciprocal engagement models, often conceptualized as a "Reverse Birthright". The primary objective of this initiative is to shift the current paradigm from a one-way directional flow to a genuine partnership. The theoretical and practical foundation for such an initiative is strong. Former Israeli President Reuven Rivlin's 2018 General Assembly address explicitly advocated for a "Reverse Birthright" to modernize the social contract between Israel and the Diaspora. Furthermore, applying Joseph S. Nye Jr.'s concept of "Soft Power" frames this community diplomacy as a vital tool for reciprocal relationship-building. Existing sociological research on the Israeli-participant component of Taglit-Birthright further highlights the limitations of current models and the necessity for outward-facing exchanges.

A compelling existing model of this concept is the Ruderman Program for American Jewish Studies at Haifa University, a master's degree program created by the

Ruderman Family Foundation. The program seeks to strengthen ties between Israel and U.S. Jewry by educating students on American Jewish history, religion, and culture. A central component of this curriculum is a ten-day trip to New York, explicitly billed as a "reverse Birthright." Unlike the mass-scale approach of the traditional Birthright model, this program focuses on cultivating a smaller cohort of "future leaders." Participants engage deeply with the Diaspora experience by visiting historical sites like Ellis Island and the Tenement Museum, meeting with leaders across all major Jewish denominations, and exploring American Jewish cultural touchstones. This immersion allows Israeli students to recognize the value of American Jewry's pluralism and understand the unique communal structures that sustain Jewish identity in the Diaspora.

The operational framework for broader "Reverse Birthright" initiatives should build upon models like this, fostering profound, sustained interactions rather than superficial encounters. Whether implemented through physical travel delegations or structured online collaborative modules, programs must prioritize deep, meaningful discussions between young adults from disparate cultural backgrounds. To ensure a diverse cohort of participants, recruitment strategies must utilize broad digital marketing campaigns designed to reach individuals who might not conventionally seek out Diaspora engagement, emphasizing the inherent value of global perspective-building. Ultimately, establishing a standardized, scalable framework will allow Israeli organizations to seamlessly adopt and fund these essential programs. By systematically evaluating program outcomes through rigorous metrics and qualitative feedback, stakeholders can demonstrate long-term impact and catalyze a systemic increase in opportunities for Israelis to engage meaningfully with the global Jewish world.

The goal is:

Make it a two-way street: Shift the relationship so it goes both ways, meaning young Israelis get to travel and learn from Jewish communities in other countries.

Learn about Jewish life abroad: Help Israelis understand the history, the different types of religious practices, and how Jewish communities operate outside of Israel.

Build real friendships: Go beyond casual small talk by making sure young adults from different backgrounds have the chance to have deep, meaningful conversations with each other.

Open the doors for everyone: Replace stressful and highly competitive application processes with a more open system, so experiencing global Jewish life becomes a normal opportunity for many Israelis, not just a lucky few.

Create a program that can grow: Build a clear, easy-to-use model that Israeli organizations can fund and adopt to create even more of these travel opportunities in the future.

How will we measure if the program has reached its goals and is successful?

Pre- and Post-Program Surveys: Participants will complete surveys designed to measure shifts in their perceptions of global Jewish peoplehood. This will help quantify the program's impact on their personal identity and connection to the Diaspora.

Engagement Tracking: We will track the frequency and depth of ongoing communications between Israeli and Diaspora participants after the formal program ends to assess long-term bond formation.

Qualitative Feedback: Conducting exit interviews to gather nuanced insights on the quality of the discussions and the effectiveness of the online and in-person modules.

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President Reuven Rivlin's 2018 Address: A speech at the General Assembly advocating for a "Reverse Birthright" to update the relationship between Israel and the Diaspora.

Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics by Joseph S. Nye Jr.: An international relations theory book used to explain community diplomacy and building two-way relationships.

Sociological Studies on Birthright (Sasson, Mittelberg, Hecht): Research focusing on the "Mifgash" (encounter) element of Birthright, showing why outward-facing programs for Israelis are needed.

The Times of Israel Article: "Reverse Birthright gives Israelis a look at America's Jews," which highlights the Ruderman Program for American Jewish Studies at Haifa University as a real-world example.

The Jewish People Policy Institute (JPPI) Survey Data: Statistical data showing how open and connected Israelis feel toward Diaspora Jewish communities.