

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Curriculum, 2004-05

Developed by Rain Zohav, Education Director Beth Chai Family School

Part I. What Do We Mean By the Jewish People? Taught primarily by the Rabbi

Goal: The students will see themselves as members of the Jewish people.

Enduring Understandings:

The Jews, like any people, have a country of origin, shared history, culture, beliefs, practices and values.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah marks the occasion when a young person takes on at least some obligations of the Jewish people and is therefore recognized as a contributing member of the community.

Deciding to take into account Jewish values can help us become good people.

Tikkun Olam (repairing the world) is an essential Jewish value (see separate curriculum for more detailed enduring understandings, essential questions, evidence of understanding and learning activities)

It is up to each generation to interpret Jewish living in a meaningful way.

Essential questions:

What does it mean to be a people? Is there a minimum of shared belief, practice, values, experience required to be part of a people?

What is history? Is it more than events and famous people?

What do we mean by shared memories?

Is there a particular way Jews traditionally view our history?

When did the Jews become a people?

What is culture?

Where does religion fit in?

What are basic Jewish values? Are these exclusive to Jews, or do other people share them? All, some?

What are basic American values? Do Jewish values and American values ever conflict?

How do we judge a cultural value?

The students will know:

The Torah and Talmud are basic Jewish texts

The various definitions of who is a Jew.

The difference between foundational myths and historical facts based on physical evidence.

That Jews cherish debate and inquiry

That many important questions that they will learn about in this year do not have one right answer.

Students will be able to:

Use Jewish sources to support their point of view.

Use physical evidence to support their point of view.

Read critically.

Listen to opposing views with respect.

Express themselves orally, in writing, or through the arts.

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Evidence of Understanding;

Students will assess whether various groups and/or individuals are part of the Jewish people such as: the “Hidden Jews” of New Mexico, the emerging Jewish communities in Africa, Jews for Jesus, an individual who does nothing recognizably Jewish and has no Jewish knowledge, but has one Jewish grandparent, a person who loves Jewish food and culture, etc.

Students will also produce a tangible work such as an essay, journal entry, collage, or skit that communicates their own reflection on their relationship with the Jewish people.

Students will share something they have learned this year with the school community at an end of the year assembly.

Learning Activities:

1. An overview of Bar/Bat Mitzvah: Parent and student session. Using Maseket Bar/Bar Mitzvah from Torah Aura both parents and students in separate groups will discuss what changes and what stays the same after a bar or Bat Mitzvah for them in their family and community. What responsibilities will they take on? What privileges will they gain?

2. Bar/Bat Mitzvah at Beth Chai: How does Beth Chai interpret this life cycle and community event? What are the requirements? What are the options for study? Art possibly do some preliminary probing for possible study topics. Tikkun Olam opportunities for the Mitzvah ceremony.

3. Foundational Myths: Bring in the myth of the founding of Rome and the myth of the founding of Jerusalem (The Two Brothers story – available in at least one version from the BJE). What do they have in common? In what ways are they different? What can this tell us about the two cultures? Contrast these to two or more factual sources about the foundations of each city. What are the differences between foundational myths and archeological theories, historical facts that can be verified, etc? What do we gain from the myths? What do we lose if we discount all myths? What do we gain from the more historical accounts? Is history true? Does history include the shared stories of a people and their experiences? Have students (and parents if some are present) share some family stories. How do we know our family histories? Are all the stories true? How can we find out? What happens when we tell a story? What makes a good, memorable story?

4. When did the Jews become a people? Art bring in: an Abraham text or two – Lechi Lach, other reiterations of God's promise, Some passages from Exodus and perhaps the Haggadah that establish the birth of the Jewish people as the exodus from Egypt, some texts that propose the acceptance of the ten commandments as the beginning of the Jewish people, Texts that propose Jewish people hood began when we entered that Land of Israel, at least one archeological article about the possible origins of the Jewish people. Have the students read several of the texts and then discuss the question. They need not arrive at an answer, but should refer back to the enduring understanding about the elements of people hood to make their case.

5. The texts of the Jewish people's stories, Torah, Talmud: Using various texts from Torah and Talmud, students will attempt to derive some shared Jewish beliefs, practices and values. Perhaps each student should be given one text to work with and then share, or they should work in pairs. Art bring in a variety, especially at least one example of conflicting values, belief, practice, or unresolved controversies. Suggested texts: the ten

commandments, the Talmudic discussion between R. Eliezer and Akiba about cross examining witnesses in a murder case, the cities of refuge, the rebellious son – both Torah and talmudic commentary, Abaya, some of the instructions for priest, kashrut, holiday observances. What values do we still have today? What passages seem relevant? Not Relevant? Why preserve minority opinions?

6. Overview of A Traditional Service

A major part of Jewish practice are the religious services. We have added this lesson at the request of parents and students in order for our students to have some idea of what is going on when they are invited for instance to a friend's bar or bat mitzvah. The fact that we are explaining the service in no way implies that we endorse a religious view of the world. Please be sure to use the language as it is written, especially to make it clear that the students are learning about traditional Jewish beliefs and practices, not being asked to accept these beliefs and practices.

The materials were compiled from: *Teaching Tefillah*, published by A.R.E. *Siddur Sim Shalom*, a prayer book of the Conservative movements, *Keshet's Guide To Creating Shabbat Services*, a publication of the Reform movement for their youth leaders, and *Or Chadash*, a publication of P'nai Or Religious Fellowship, affiliated with the Jewish Renewal Movement.

Materials for the teacher include: Historic Background of the Siddur, and Basic Elements of a Traditional Service.

Materials for students will include, the Sim Shalom Siddur, Chumashim and/or Tanchim (Torah with commentary, and or Hebrew Scriptures) Handouts from the Keshet Guide with explanations and copies of the following prayers: Barechu, Sh'ma, V'Ahavata, Mi Chamocha, Avot V'Emehot, G'Vurot, Aleinu, and Mourner's Kaddish. These are written in a very contemporary and accessible style, for instance comparing the Baruch to the call and response of a rock concert. They are also a good example of the contemporary Reform movement and can be compared and contrasted to the Conservative translations of the prayers.

It is suggested that the teacher familiarize her or himself with the material beforehand. Please just give a quick summary of the history of the siddur. The **Enduring Understanding** is that it has evolved over time.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE SIDDUR

BRACHOT

The formula that we use that begins, Baruch Ata Adonai... is attributed to the sages of the Great Assembly in the 2nd century B.C.E.

The basic order of the prayers was established by Rabban Gamliel II during the rabbinic period shortly after the destruction of the Second Temple.

Before this writing down of the prayers had been prohibited.

R. Gamliel was the head of the Sanhedrin at Yavneh in the early second century.

Even with this first writing, the liturgy remained fluid for many centuries, with many communities introducing their own prayer.

Other milestones:

8th cent.- R. Yehudah Gaon wrote a responsa (answer to a question about Jewish practice) permitting prayer leaders to use a written text on Yom Kippur. By the 9th cent. This was common.

9th cent. Rabbis of Spain appealed to Rav Amran- head of the Babylonian academy at Sura for a definitive order of prayers. His responsa is considered to be the first Siddur.

Rav Saadia Gaon (882-942) wrote the first Siddur directed to worshippers rather than the service leader.

1475- 1st printed Siddur on a secret printing press in Spain by Juan de Lucena for crypto-Jews (Jews who had to practice Judaism secretly)

1486- Soncino Press publishes 1st Siddur for Italian Jews.

1512- 1st Ashenazic Siddur published in Prague

16th cent.- translation published in Italian, Yiddish and Spanish

Some of these early Siddurim were illuminated and later illustrated with woodcuts. However the practice was discontinued later due to the prohibition against graven images.

Women's devotional prayers began to be published in Europe. They were called T' chinot in Hebrew or tkines in Yiddish. They were written in Yiddish and addressed private rituals or moments in a women's life. They often expressed hopes for the safety of her family.

1761- 1st Siddur with English translations

1819- 1st Reform Siddur published in Hamburg. This Siddur eliminated references to the concept of a personal Messiah, the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem, and the re-establishment of a Jewish national entity in the land of Israel.

1850's- 1st Siddurim published in the United States

1895- 1st official Reform prayer book for Americans published by CCAR

1940- revised Reform American prayer book

1975- new reform prayer book

present- new reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist Siddurim have gender neutral translations and include the matriarchs in the liturgy. The Reconstructionist Siddur eliminates reference to the Jews being a chosen people- easy to spot in the Blessings of the Torah

Then go over the Basics, handing out examples of the prayers as they come up, having the students look up the relevant verses in the Torah and Tanach and discussing as they go along. There may be a tape with the traditional melodies of some of the prayers available. In the Basics of the Traditional Service document are suggested activities and discussion questions. These have an * by them.

Basic Elements of a Traditional Prayer Service

Theme: Thanksgiving for:

Creation, the world, our bodies

Redemption: for being freed from Egypt

Revelation: Being Given the Torah at Sinai

Mystical Interpretation: The 4 worlds (mystical interpretation)

- *Physical - Birkot haShachar*
- *Emotional - P'sukei d'zimra,*
- *Intellectual - Shema and blessings*
- *Spiritual - Amidah.*
- *Intellectual- Torah*
- *Emotional/physical in community with Musaf.*

Birkot Ha- Shachar (Morning Blessings)

At first, many of these blessings were done at home to accompany the various actions one goes through in the transition from sleep to being fully awake. But over time, these blessings were moved to the morning service.

* Ask the students what their morning rituals are. How do they get up and face the day?

Pesukei De- Zimra (Passages of Song)

This is considered a warm up to prayer, which officially begins with the Barchu.

Kaddish and Hatzi Kaddish

These prayers are used to mark transitions to the different parts of the service and are repeated throughout the service. The Reform movement has eliminated many of the repetitions.

Barchu (Call to Worship)

This prayer is considered the call to worship. It is similar to the call to prayer of the muezzin from the mosque's minaret in Moslem worship. It begins community worship, and is traditionally recited only when a minyan is present. Traditionally, the congregation rises, the leader chants the 1st line, the congregation responds with the second line and the leader repeats the second line. (In Sephardic synagogues, the Barchu is recited twice during services- at the beginning, and also just before the conclusion, for late arrivals). The first line is based on Nehemiah 9:5. The second line of the prayer is based on Deut. 32:3

Key words: Barchu- "Bless!" or "Praise!"

Ha M'vurach- "who is blessed or praised"

L/Olam Va'ed-forever

Barchu- comes from the root beit, resh, chaf. There are two possible derivation of this word that share these root letters- berech- knee: we bend our knees to pray, or b'raychah- a pool of water.* Ask your students how they might feel in a desert if they came across a pool of cool, clean water. It is that feeling that Jews reach for in saying brachot and the Barchu.

The prayers that follow the Barchu focus on the images of God the Creator.

K'riat Sh'ma and Its Brachot (The Reading of the Sh'ma and its Blessings)

Shema-

This is the central prayer of Judaism. Every service will have this prayer. It is traditional to cover or close one's eyes when reciting this prayer in order to increase "kavanah" - intention, concentration

- Historical background- The second line of the Shema that begins Baruch Shem Kavod... was first used in the Temple on Yom Kippur in response to the high Priests' pronouncement of the name of God. It was later inserted in the regular service by the Rabbis to emphasize that Jews accept the ultimate sovereignty of God alone, not an earthly ruler such as a Roman emperor or a modern president.

*Introduce students to the history of the Shema in extreme circumstances such as during Rabbi Akiba's martyrdom at the hands of the Romans. (see the Reform machzor Yom Kippur afternoon service for a moving description of this). It was knowledge of this earlier use of the Shema in spiritual resistance that led many victims of the holocaust to recite the Shema as they where dying. Victor Frankel, author of *Man's Search for Meaning*, writes about finding a page from a siddur that had the Shema on it in an overcoat he was given from another holocaust victim and how it gave him strength and faith to carry on. Traditionally, this is often the first prayer a child learns. It is also the prayer traditional Jews say when they go to bed.

Translation:

Shema- Listen! Israel- God is ONE!

V'Ahavta

Historical background- was used in the temple and was firmly fixed in synagogue worship by the 1st century C.E.

*Have students look up Deut. 6:4-9, Deut. 11:13-22 and Numbers 15:37-41

Mi Chamocha

This prayer is a Biblical quotation from Exodus 15:11. It is part of the poem/song sung by Moses and the People of Israel after crossing the Red Sea, to celebrate their escape from Egypt and from the Egyptians pursuing them.

The theme of the blessing is redemption- g'ulah.

This passage often raises the question of could this have really happened, and the question of miracles in general.

*Talk about some of the more “rational, scientific” explanation of the miracle- the Red Sea is really the Reed Sea- the Israelites were able to cross on a sandbar because they were so light with only sandals and simple slave clothing- but the Egyptians got stuck and bogged down with their heavy armor, weapons and chariots, the tide changed and they were drowned.

Or, alternately ask the students if there is anything they have personally experienced that they would consider a miracle. Have them share stories they may have heard from friends and family that might be considered miracles. One way to define miracle is something that is awe-inspiring, it does not necessarily have to imply defying the laws of nature. For example, most parents have a feeling that the birth of their children was miraculous. Talk about the way stories grow and change over time.

Amida (Standing Prayer)

Background- this part of the service which is a series of prayers has three names: the Amidah (standing) because it is said while standing, Tefilah (prayer), and Shemonah Esray(18) because it originally contained 18 brachot in the weekly version.

Historical background- the origins of these prayers are unclear. The Talmud says, “120 elders, among whom there were many prophets, drew up eighteen blessings” (Megillah 17b). The order was not set until the destruction of the 1st Temple. Then Simeon Ha Pakuli and Shmuel HaKatan set the order at Yavneh (Brachot 28b). The themes were determined at this time but the exact wording was not set down until the first Siddurim were written.

This is another central part of the prayer service. It has been an integral part of the service since at least the first century. (Sim Shalom Siddur). It is considered to take the place of animal sacrifice. Since there are linguistic similarities between the word for sacrifice, *korban* and the Hebrew word for closeness or near, *karov*, this is a time when traditionally Jews have felt close to God. It is a time when it is permitted to make personal petitions to God (although not on Shabbat) and meditations.

Body movements: at the beginning of the Avot/Imahot, which begins the Amidah, take three small steps forward and bow when saying “Baruch Ata Adonai”. At the end take three small steps backward. This simulates the etiquette of appearing before a king.

* You might want to have the students practice this if they want to go along with what is happening at a Conservative synagogue. On the other hand, since many of our students do not have a belief in a god, they may just want to stand respectfully.

Some of the key prayers in the Amidah are: Avot/Imahot, Gevurot, and Birkat Shalom.

Avot/ Imahot

Key word: Avot- fathers or ancestors

Imahot- mothers

This prayer has been changed recently to include not only the patriarchs, but also the matriarchs.

Key concept: Traditional Jews begin with our ancestors because they hope that the remembrance of the ancestors good deeds will influence how God thinks about and deals with them.

*Discussion Questions: Can you think of a time when you treated someone from a particular family nicely because you remembered another member of the family doing good? Maybe the mother is kind, but the child is not so nice or vis a versa?

* Why specifically Abraham, Issac and Jacob? The Baal Shem Tov (founder of Chasidism) taught that each of these patriarchs sought and served God in their own way. They did not blindly accept the God of their ancestors. This idea can be extended to include the matriarchs also. It can also be extended to the idea that we all need to find our own way to live an upright life.

* Discuss this excerpt from Marge Piercy's modern version of the Amidah:
We reach back through two hundred arches of hips
 long dust, carrying their memories inside us
 to live again in our life, Isaac and Rebecca,
 Rachel, Jacob, Leah. We say words shaped
 by ancient use like steps worn into rock.

G'vurot – see handout

Sim Shalom – p. 120 in the Sim Shalom Siddur(1998 version) – Peace – a central value of Judaism

K'riat Ha – Torah (Reading of the Torah)

This is the third basic component of Jewish worship. It was instituted so all members of the Jewish community could hear the Torah, which was considered to be the LAW given (or Revealed) at Sinai. It includes a reading from the Prophetic verses (called the HafTorah) and usually a talk on the Torah portion.

Musaf (Additional service for Shabbat)

Since there was an additional sacrifice offered on Shabbat, in Conservative and Orthodox services, there are additional prayers offered on Shabbat. It begins with a Hatzit Kaddish. Repeats the Amidah, and ends with a Kaddish Shalem.

Aleinu

History; This prayer may go back to before 70 C.E. since it makes no mention of restoring the Temple. It first became part of the regular Jewish liturgy as a subsection of the Rosh Ha-Shana Musaf Amidah. Since the 14th century, it has been included toward the end of every service. It is usually described as visionary of a united world. However, some of the actual language is seen as problematic for many Jews. The Reform, Reconstructionist, and Renewal movements have all altered and changed the traditional language, which seems to imply that people who are not Jewish worship false gods.

Mourner's Kaddish

Said in honor of people who have died, this prayer does not mention death, but only praises God, peace and life.

Closing Hymn(s)

Usually Ein Keloheinu and Adon Olam.

7. Other Jewish stories: Chanukkah: – The Chaim Potok story and the Menorah story (Rain has). What modern Jewish experience do these stories refer too? Given the Jewish attitude toward our history (we were there – Exodus, Sinai), what do we make of the Holocaust?

8. Shared history: What are the key events, people, experiences and stories of the Jewish people? Have students generate a list of anything they know already, either from this or previous years. (They should be able to name the immigrant experience, the Golden age in Spain, possibly the Inquisition, expulsion from Spain, exile) Using the historical atlas have the students derive as much as they can. Does their own experience correspond to anything in our history? So what do we mean by a shared history? How has the Jewish people changed over time? How have we been influenced by the surrounding cultures where we have lived? Perhaps bring in pictures of Jews living in various cultures and pictures of gentiles from those same cultures. Have the students try to identify which people are Jews. (Rain can help with this).

9. Jewish culture, - music, (language{s}):

Bring in music from many Jewish communities, (Yemenite, Yiddish, Ladino, Israeli, modern American, cantorial, etc.) music composed by Jews, (Mendelssohn, Irving Berlin, Paul Simon) and some music from surrounding cultures, - Egyptian, modern Christian rock, German, Flamenco. (Rain has or can get from the BJE most of these) Arrange a play list ahead of time with careful notes for yourself as to what is what. Have students listen to cuts from a selection of all this music. For each selection, they should write down their knowledge or best guess if it is Jewish or not. You might prepare a numbered sheet ahead of time with columns, Jewish, Why? Not Jewish, Why?

What makes music definitely Jewish? Religious content? Sung in a Jewish language – Hebrew? Yiddish? Ladino? Judeo-Arabic? Social message?

Have students share and defend their answers, then check for correctness. Second hour – Have students give this same test to adults in the congregation, especially invite the music teachers – Philip Resnik and David Sacks, perhaps the Rabbi at break, and send a special invitation to Celia Feldman, a past Mitzvah student who did her Mitzvah project on Jewish music. Her mother, Rachel Feldman might be willing to take a crack also.

See if some consensus can be reached at the end of class. Time permitting, have students write up a short report or article for the Beth Chai newsletter on their discoveries.

10. Jewish culture – humor:

Why is humor a part of a culture? What functions does humor serve? How does humor reflect and interpret experience? Can one understand the humor of a culture one is not a part of? What specifically Jewish experiences does American Jewish film humor grapple with?

Walter Scott will lead this session.

After viewing clips have students write short answers to at least one of the above questions, giving evidence for their answers.

11. Denominational definitions of who is a Jew. Art bring in each denominations definition of who is a Jew, including a Humanist definition. Have students discuss. What might be the reasoning behind other denominations criteria? (perspective) Would they be considered Jews in all denominations? Why or Why not? How do they feel about this? Would their parents be considered Jews? Can one self – define as a member of the Jewish people? Consider a tactful way of the students surveying members of the congregation as to their background. Perhaps a brief questionnaire during snack? Have students compile their information to get a snapshot of our congregation. What percent would be considered Jewish by the different denominations? What percent would Beth Chai consider Jewish? Where do they fit in the congregation- minority, majority? Remind them that next week they will be determining the Jewish status of others. (evidence of understanding) according to their own criteria.

12. Evidence of Understanding:

Bring in description of many types of possible members of the Jewish people: the “Hidden Jews” of New Mexico, the emerging Jewish communities in Africa, Jews for Jesus, an individual who does nothing

recognizably Jewish and has no Jewish knowledge, but has one Jewish grandparent, a person who loves Jewish food and culture, etc. Students will assess whether various groups and/or individuals are part of the Jewish people, using the definition of the Jewish people, the denominational criteria if they so chose, or their own criteria. Students will share their example and decision with the class. Classmates can ask questions, disagree, challenge, etc.

Time permitting; students will begin work on a tangible project that may be an essay, journal entry, collage, song, poem, or skit that communicates their own reflection on their relationship with the Jewish people.

13. Projects: Students will finish their projects on their relationship with the Jewish people and decide if this is what they want to share with the community or if they wish to produce something else to share with the community about what they have learned this year.