Making Magic: Ritual in Reform Jewish Education

Daniel Kirzane

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Graduate Rabbinical Program
New York, New York

May 2014 / Iyyar 5774

Advisors: Lawrence Hoffman and Jonathan Krasner

Abstract

The field of ritual and the field of education share goals in common. Both rituals and education seek to order, orient, and transform, and these overlapping goals allow the wisdom of one field to be applied to the other. This rabbinical thesis examines the place of ritual in Reform Jewish education, drawing from field research at a Reform day school and a Reform supplementary school. It suggests that rituals—both liturgical and non-liturgical—are already present in effective Jewish education and that thoughtful attention to "ritual form" can help educators expand upon current successes. The project explores theoretical background first to ritual and then to Jewish education and subsequently relates these concepts to field research observations and analysis. The conclusion offers practical suggestions for Jewish educators who wish to incorporate ritual more consciously into their practice.

Chapter 1: Approaching Ritual

The Hebrew Bible formalizes elaborate systems of sacrifice; Aristotle concludes that poetry emerges from the human "instinct of imitation;"[1] and the Confucian classic *Yili* outlines the "etiquette and rites" that constitute proper human behavior. These are only three of myriad examples of ancient and modern attempts to understand how human beings bring order to their lives, orient themselves in relation to other people and ideas, and transcend their own experience to transform as people. It would be simple—even proper—to consider each ancient and modern quest for truth in the context of its unique time and place, separating them according to cultural context and personal assumptions and distancing them from our own milieu. However, exploring the commonalities among diverse approaches to profound connection can lead to insights deeper than any one of them can provide in isolation.

The concept of "ritual," difficult to define but often recognizable in experience, can include the practices of Israelite priests, Greek philosophers, Chinese sages, and many more. What is meant by "ritual" often depends upon context and perspective, and ritual's component interactions between perspective, symbol, drama, and more defy simple categorization. Rather than offering a definition, Ronald Grimes suggests a cluster of qualities that one may "find in ritual action."[2] They include:

> performed, embodied, enacted, gestural (not merely thought or said)
> formalized, elevated, stylized, differentiated (not ordinary, unadorned, or undifferentiated)
> repetitive, redundant, rhythmic (not singular or once-for-all)
> collective, institutionalized, consensual (not personal or private)
> patterned, invariant, standardized, stereotyped, ordered, rehearsed (not improvised, idiosyncratic, or spontaneous)
> traditional, archaic, primordial (not invented or recent)
> valued highly or ultimately, deeply felt, sentiment-laden, meaningful, serious (not trivial or shallow)

[1] Aristotle's *Poetics*, Section 1, Part IV.
[2] *Ritual Criticism.* Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1990. p. 14.

condensed, multilayered (not obvious; requiring interpretation)
symbolic, referential (not merely technological or primarily means-end oriented)
perfected, idealized, pure, ideal (not conflictual or subject to criticism and failure)
dramatic, ludic [i.e., playlike] (not primarily discursive or explanatory; not without special framing or boundaries)
paradigmatic (not ineffectual in modeling either other rites or non-ritualized action)
mystical, transcendent, religious, cosmic (not secular or merely empirical)
adaptive, functional (not obsessional, neurotic, dysfunctional)
conscious, deliberate (not unconscious or preconscious)

Such a varied and nuanced list of qualities makes it difficult to "hold onto" ritual in a helpful sense, especially for ritual designers. It is impossible to state clearly, "This is a ritual, and here is why." However, a qualitative approach to identifying ritual frees practitioners from false constraints in their attempts to formulate meaningful ritual experiences. It can be easy to assume that ritual is one thing and not another and therefore to limit one's interpretive range about the possibilities of ritual experience. For this reason, I have found it helpful to consider ritual descriptively rather than prescriptively. In place of Grimes' lengthy series of characteristics, I propose three primary qualities of ritual that encompass key functions of ritual experience. These three functions are straightforward enough to incorporate into regular practice, and they serve as the background for this project. They are:

(1) Ritual orders.
(2) Ritual orients.
(3) Ritual transforms.

The degree to which a given act orders, orients, and/or transforms is the degree to which it may be understood as a ritual. Naturally, some acts are more ritualistic than others, so according to this formulation, an "ideal" ritual accomplishes all three tasks at once: ordering, orienting, and transforming. As I shall suggest, these elements are serial: a ritual tends not to transform unless it also orients, and it cannot orient unless it first orders.

Ritual orders

Starbucks advertises its pumpkin spice latte each fall with the tagline, "Take comfort in rituals."

starbucks.com

Starbucks marks the onset of autumn by making its familiar drink available, and this warm, sweet beverage transforms the cold gray of October into the soothing brown of comfort. Even more, Starbucks capitalizes on the classic habit of drinking a cup of coffee in the morning ("morning Joe"), creating an environment in which a cup of Starbucks coffee can be an integral component of a person's day. In short, Starbucks hopes that drinking coffee becomes a *sine qua non* of a "good morning" and therefore that customers will choose their drinks as part of their regular morning activity.

Similarly, the cosmetics company Rituals also endeavors to suggest that bodily hygiene has a vital place in the life of a spiritually and physically healthy person and that their products are well-suited for regular incorporation into such an ideal lifestyle. Their website relates:

> The Hammam is one of the oldest cleansing traditions in the world. This steam bath experience from the East purifies both body and soul. This ancient custom inspired us to create a modern Hammam collection for your home. Enriched with revitalising Rosemary and Eucalyptus, the products cleanse, soften, and nourish the skin. Close your eyes and feel the warmth of your own personal wellness ceremony.[3]

[3] "What is Hamam?" Available: https://uk.rituals.com/en-gb/hammam/hammam.html.

uk.rituals.com

The company claims that use of its products, such as the Hammam Hot Scrub, should be a regular part of a person's daily life.

These advertising campaigns appeal to popular notions of rituals of regularity while tapping into a deep wellspring of authentic human experience with rituals that order time. Though these products themselves are not ancient traditions, they nevertheless reflect and appeal to the intrinsic connection that people feel toward the observance of time-based rituals.

The prevalence and prominence of rituals that order time can be observed in Judaism's regularly occurring holidays that occur specifically at particular times of the year. The lights of Hanukkah are kindled during the darkest part of the darkest month; the harvest festival of Sukkot is celebrated during the season of reaping in the land of Israel; and the commemoration of redemption at Passover—originally including the sacrifice of a young goat—coincides with the oncoming of spring. Additionally, special liturgy marks the first day of a new month, and every week is consecrated with a sabbath at its conclusion. Even the day itself is divided by ritual: distinct prayers are reserved for the morning, afternoon, and evening services.

The presence of ritual at distinct moments—coffee in the morning, *mincha* in the afternoon, a bedtime story at night—is significant in its ability to define and demarcate the time in which it appears. In other words, *davening mincha* (praying the afternoon service) is a sure sign that it is afternoon time. This does not mean that afternoon cannot "happen" without the ritual; nevertheless, when a familiar actor encounters the ritual, she knows what "time" it is by virtue of the ritual itself.

In this way, ritual orders time. In signifying particular moments, rituals divide time into "digestible" chunks, helping individuals to put themselves into context and to manage their life's activities in a meaningful and productive way. Without this differentiation, each moment would be as important—or unimportant—as the previous one. There would be no times of particular significance, and planning for the future would be haphazard at best. As Lawrence Hoffman teaches, "Ritual helps us minimize our dependence on chance. It arranges our life into relatively small packages of moments that matter."[4] Rituals contour days, weeks, months, and years, helping us navigate our passage from time to time.

In addition to time, rituals likewise serve to order space. A common Russian custom is to wash one's hands upon arrival at another's home, and there is a Japanese tradition of removing one's shoes upon entering a home. Some Christians cross themselves when passing a church, and some Jews rinse their hands upon exiting a cemetery. Each of these rituals marks a place as different from all other places, designating a spatial order. The function here is the same as with temporal ordering. Just as moments in time need to be bundled and identified, so do points in space. Just as an undifferentiated flow of time could leave human beings adrift in a series of uninterpreted experiences, an undifferentiated expanse of space could likewise strand humans in

[4] *The Art of Public Prayer, 2nd Edition: Not for Clergy Only.* Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths Publishing, 1999. p. 17.

a geographic sea of uncertainty. Rituals offer a means of naming distinct purposes for different places, creating a necessary order in the areas of our lives.

The effect of this ordering is to produce a reliable system that provides both borders and boundaries in an individual's or community's life. In other words, rituals "represent and maintain enduring relations among the elements they include, keeping them 'in order,' and thus establishing or constituting order as opposed to disorder or chaos."[5] This ordering has two primary components: (A) a ritual marks a moment or place, naming it and distinguishing it from other points, and (B) a ritual designates what the moment or place is *for*, signifying its meaning to the person or persons who encounter it. Rituals put the world into an order that makes sense, constructing a narrative meaningful to those who participate in it.

It is possible, though, that a ritual might be deficient in the second of these functions, the signatory element, while still serving as a demarcation of time or space. The morning cup of coffee, for example, or one's daily hygiene procedure carries minimal significance even as it helps to define "morning time." As we shall see, the signifying component of ordering enables *orientation*, which is, in turn, the precursor for *transformation*. Without this component of signification, an ordering ritual is simply a *routine*. Thus, only in this regard are "morning routine" and "morning ritual" synonymous. On its own, routine provides helpful—even necessary—functions in daily life, making order out of a potentially undifferentiated mass of hours or meters. However, routine alone is limited in its ability to achieve the full impact of "ritual."[6]

---

[5] Rappaport, Roy. *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. p. 169.

[6] It should be noted that, while I have described order here exclusively in the realms of time and space, rituals can also designate other orders as well. Giving birth, changing one's name, and declaring someone guilty are examples of such rituals.

Ritual orients

Ritual's establishment of meaningful order allows for individuals and communities to orient themselves. For the purposes of this analysis, orientation here refers to "finding oneself in relation." In other words, rituals divide and designate time in a way that makes sense, and within that structure, individuals and communities manifest and live according to guiding ethics and beliefs. As Roy Rappaport teaches, "Ritual performance … *establishes*, that is, it stipulates and accepts, the conventions in respect to which conventional states of affairs are defined and realized."[7] Tom Driver further elucidates the point: "[Rappaport's] suggestion is that societies rest upon shared understandings of world and reality that are constituted ritually, through shared performance, long before they come to be expressed conceptually in words."[8] Thus, the order established by ritual in turn creates a grid onto which an individual or community can plot a course for itself.

For Mircea Eliade, the orienting effect of rituals is paramount. Using a spatial metaphor, he teaches, "In the homogeneous and infinite expanse, in which no point of reference is possible and hence no *orientation* can be established, the hierophany reveals an absolute fixed point, a center. … Nothing can begin, nothing can be *done*, without a previous orientation."[9] Eliade's "hierophany" is a sacred piercing through the mundane, an interrupting of undifferentiated space and time – in other words, a ritual encounter. Once a ritual has marked a time and/or place as a significant, human beings can thereafter orient themselves in relation to that significance. An autumn festival inaugurates a season of harvest, creating a time distinct from the summer that came before. In response, an individual or community will *act* according to the behaviors that

---

[7] *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1979. p. 194
[8] *Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual*. BookSurge LLC, 2006. p. 147.
[9] *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1959. p. 21, emphasis in the original

harvest will require. They will organize themselves to gather food and begin the process of storing the food for the winter. Likewise, the dedication of a new house of worship transforms the building from a construction site to a communal—perhaps even holy—place. Once this order is established, people will dress differently upon walking through the doors. Worship services will be conducted within rather than hammering and nailing, and community members will congregate freely inside rather than keep their distance. Thus, once a ritual has established a temporal and/or spatial order, it empowers (even encourages) individuals to behave differently in relation to the significance of the newly designated time and/or place.

According to this approach, human decisions are made in relation to an order established through ritual. The way we perceive the world to be divided up affects our understanding of how it is appropriate to behave. Some might understand this function as a sort of "social control," though Peter Berger points out that even healthy societies must operate with certain norms with which "all" agree to comply: "No human construction can be accurately called a social phenomenon unless it has achieved that measure of objectivity that compels the individual to recognize it as real. In other words, the fundamental coerciveness of society lies not in its machineries of social control, but in its power to constitute and to impose itself as reality."[10] The claims that rituals make imply certain responses, and effective rituals evoke shared beliefs and actions in those who experience them.

For example, if a society's rituals create an ordered system in which sleep is a state of uncertainty and fear while in contrast, wakefulness is a state of security and power, then individuals operating within that order will cherish alertness and decry inertness. This may result in a society that honors those who sleep little, that offers hymns of gratitude upon waking,

[10] *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1967. p. 12.

and that considers those in comas to be dead. Similarly, if rituals create an ordered system in which the primary division is "our group, chosen and special" versus "everyone else," then individuals will orient their behavior in such a way as to protect and exalt the group even to the detriment of those outside the community. Worldview stems from a perception of order and, in turn, inspires individuals and groups to behave in certain ways.

According to Emile Durkheim, such orientation according to an order is an essential component of religious (and human) life. Durkheim teaches that human life is predicated on the ability to live together in groups; there can be no human life without society. Thus, he writes: "Reality … is society. … [I]t awakens that feeling of support, safety, and protective guidance which binds the man of faith to his cult. It is this reality that makes him rise above himself. Indeed, this is the reality that makes him, for what makes man is that set of intellectual goods which is civilization, and civilization is the work of society."[11] In order for society to be preserved, Durkheim argues, distinct groups must hold together separately from other groups. This is done through the generation of unique patterns of behavior, which derive from systems of division (orders) that each group professes. He writes:

> Society is possible only if the individuals and things that make it up are divided among different groups…. Thus, society presupposes a conscious organization of itself that is nothing other than a classification. That organization of society is naturally passed on to the space it occupies. To forestall conflicts, a definite portion of space must be assigned to each individual group. In other words, the space must be divided, differentiated, and *oriented*, and these divisions and *orientations* must be known to all.[12]

Thus, the orienting function of ritual is foundational to society. By creating expectations of behavior for particular groups, human beings can organize and coordinate their activities to ensure mutual flourishing.

---

[11] *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields. The Free Press, 1995. Originally published in 1912. p. 420-421.
[12] *Ibid.* 444, emphasis added.

In order to create these productive societies, human beings use rituals to demarcate boundaries. As rituals assign meaning to particular times, spaces, and other orders, groups of people develop particular behaviors that create necessary boundaries. Thus:

> There can be no society that does not experience the need at regular intervals to maintain and strengthen the collective feelings and ideas that provide its coherence and its distinct individuality. This moral remaking can be achieved only through meetings, assemblies, and congregations in which the individuals, pressing close to one another, reaffirm in common their common sentiments.[13]

And furthermore, "Each civilization has its own *ordered* system of concepts, which characterizes it."[14] In other words, the practices of individuals and groups that designate particular meanings to given places and circumstances—practices which we understand as rituals—establish the foundations upon which societies can develop normal behaviors. For Durkheim, the orienting function of ritual is absolutely essential to harmonious human life.

To summarize, the orienting function of ritual enables individuals to come together as groups and to establish productive societies who engage meaningfully with their world. People orient themselves toward one another, strengthening relationships among members of their group. As well, they orient themselves toward common concepts and ideals, establishing "right" practices appropriate for their group. In this way, ritual serves as a foundational element in forming human community.

Ritual Transforms

As we have seen, some rituals serve to order, demarcating boundaries and signifying the meaning of those boundaries. Additionally, some rituals also establish individuals' and groups' orientations toward one another and toward shared concepts in order to form community. Beyond these functions, rituals also have the ability to *transform*, facilitating a process in which

[13] *Ibid.* 429.
[14] *Ibid*. 437, emphasis added.

one is different person at the end of a ritual than at its beginning. For Tom Driver, drawing from Arnold Van Gennep, this transformation is the apex of ritual function: "The aim of religion is not simply intellectual understanding; it is also, and primarily, transformative action."[15] In his assessment, ritual can help individuals develop into better people and create a better world through changing their relationships with one another and their surroundings. To Driver, transformation is the ultimate goal of rituals, built upon the foundational steps of ordering and orienting.

The transformative function of ritual may be understood through the lens of communitas, a concept developed and articulated by Victor Turner. Communitas is foundational to Turner's understanding of society and has, in turn, affected numerous thinkers following him. Roy Rappaport summarizes Turner's concept, explaining communitas as "a ritually-generated state of mind and society very different from the rationally-dominated organization and mode of thought prevailing in mundane time."[16] In this "state of mind and society," individuals relate to one another in a wholly unique way, drawn away from the meaningless chaos of the mundane and thrown into what Ronald Grimes identifies as a Buberian "I-thou ethos."[17] Within the unique moment of an I-Thou encounter in which an aggregation of individuals transforms into communitas, the rules and expectations of normal life are suspended, allowing for individuals and communities to become what they were not previously.

As described above, the orienting function of ritual, as expressed by Durkheim, is to help establish and maintain a social structure. However, no structure is perfect, and human communities constantly change in order to come ever closer to their vision of the ideal. Individuals and communities strive to transcend the limitations of their previous existence and

[15] *Liberating Rites* 169.
[16] Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion* 226.
[17] *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1982. p. 149.

approach the possibilities of their dreams. Thus, social structures, while necessary, impede human goals of reaching for the ideal.

Transformation is a process of change, through communitas, by which individuals and communities overcome and surpass their impeding particularities. For Turner, the difference between this process and orientation is stark: "For me, communitas emerges where social structure is not."[18] Individuals in communitas

> are not segmentalized into roles and statuses but confront one another rather in the manner of Martin Buber's "I and Thou." Along with this direct, immediate, and total confrontation of human identities, there tends to go a model of society as a homogenous, unstructured communitas, whose boundaries are coterminous with those of the human species. Communitas is in this respect strikingly different from Durkheimian "solidarity," the force of which depends upon an in-group/out-group contrast.[19]

In other words, communitas serves as model of ideal interpersonal relationships that unite rather than divide. During an experience of communitas, the structures of society are put aside and one person can relate to another as an equal without distractions such as background and class.

This frame of mind and relationship is essential for the progress and continuation of human community. It cannot be merely spontaneous and unplanned, for societies cannot be based on random experiences of unity. Rather, cultivated and prepared experiences of communitas provide a framework for the ongoing transformation of individuals and communities. Rituals, which help create solidarity among groups, can also be used to effect these I-Thou moments in which lasting transformation can occur. Both the structure produced by the orientating function of ritual and the transcendence empowered by the transformative function of ritual contribute to productive and meaningful human activity. Turner summarizes this idea:

---

[18] *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969. p. 126.
[19] *Ibid*. 132.

> Spontaneous [unsustained] communitas has something "magical" about it. Subjectively there is in it the feeling of endless power. But this power untransformed cannot readily be applied to the organizational details of social existence. It is no substitute for lucid thought and sustained will. On the other hand, structured action swiftly becomes arid and mechanical if those involved in it are not periodically immersed in the regenerative abyss of communitas. Wisdom is always to find the appropriate relationship between structure and communitas under the *given* circumstances of time and place, to accept each modality when it is paramount without rejecting the other, and not to cling to one when its present impetus is spent.[20]

In other words, both the orienting function of ritual, which Turner associates with "structure," as well as the transforming function of ritual, which Turner associates with communitas, are necessary to human community. It is with this notion that he concludes his work *The Ritual Process*, noting "Society (*societas*) seems to be a process rather than a thing—a dialectical process with successive phases of structure and communitas. There would seem to be—if one can use such a controversial term—a human 'need' to participate in both modalities."[21] Thus, groups of people must engage both in orienting rituals as well as transforming rituals, striving to maintain themselves as distinct while working to foster universal relationships among all human beings.

How, precisely, is this transformation accomplished? Consider the dual aspect's a human in community: *persona* and *identity*, or as Don Seeman terms them, "social position" and "subjectivity."[22] In brief, one's persona may be understood as the way in which others see her while one's identity is the way in which a person sees herself. The orienting function of ritual helps define a person's social position, creating her persona. The way she acts in public, the way her community treats her, the expectations society has for her are all conditioned through

---

[20] *Ibid*. 139.
[21] *Ibid*. 203.
[22] "Ritual Practice and its Discontents" in *A Companion to Psychological Anthropology: Modernity and Psychocultural Change*, ed. Conerly Casey and Robert B. Edgerton. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, pp. 358-373. p. 369.

solidarity rituals. The transforming function of ritual fashions a person's identity, helping her to see herself in a new way in relation to the context of her group. Some rituals effect only one of these essential functions, laying the groundwork for a community's expectations of a person (persona) without fostering within that person a self-identity consistent with those expectations. Other rituals have the reverse disjunction, resulting in a person seeing herself differently than the rest of her purported community sees her. Ideally, however, both persona and identity align. An ideal ritual of transformation such as the Bar or Bat Mitzvah ceremony, for example, transforms a child into a Jewish adult in the eyes of the community as well as in the eyes of the celebrant. In short, orienting rituals create personas, transformative rituals generate identities, and ideal rituals achieve both.

As was mentioned above, one's perspective on oneself is integrally connected to one's perspective on the world. As Peter Berger notes, human beings are "world-builders," literally making the world out of the stuff of their culture.[23] Thus, when rituals transform, they change not only a person's identity but also concomitantly her worldview. In a real sense, then, rituals change the world. It is in this way that ritual "work" can be understood as magical.

A truly transformative ritual changes the way a person understands the world and therefore allows for the transcendence of assumptions that had previously been considered incontrovertible. Thus, Ronald Grimes describes his understanding of magical ritual: "If a ritual not only has meaning but also 'works,' it is magical. Insofar as it is a deed having transcendent reference and accomplishing some desired empirical result, a rite is magical."[24] In other words, from the eyes of a person experiencing a transformative ritual, the world appears to work differently at the end of it than at the beginning because she herself is different at the end of it.

[23] Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* 6-7.
[24] Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* 45.

For example, a person's influence over others may be increased as she assumes a role of authority; a person's expectations about the weather may change as she considers the season now to be different; or a person's awareness of an illness may dissipate as she understands herself to be healing. Naturally, this kind of work is not measurable in the same ways that scientific work is measurable. As Driver cautions, "We must cease looking at magic and science as two means to the same end and realize instead that they are different means to different ends."[25] Magical ritual generates a real—if not physical—change in the world first by creating an order out of chaos, next by pushing individuals to orient their practice and understanding according to that order, and finally by transforming a person's identity and therefore her worldview.

Such transformation can occur on many scales. Some rituals, such as the inauguration of a national leader or a coordinated effort among warring neighbors to make peace, are grandly effective and produce significant and recognizable results. Others, such as a coming-of-age ceremony or a ritualized confession, move only a small number of people. And even the humblest of rituals, such as calling a loved one by a nickname or purchasing holiday presents, may have lasting, transformative effect. Humans, as "ritualizing animals," regularly encounter opportunities for dynamic change throughout their lives, drawing from the magic of ritual the ability to spark growth and to achieve transcendence.[26]

Components of an Ideal Ritual

The functions of ritual we have explored—ordering, orienting, and transforming—are cumulative. At their base, rituals order. Only following a meaningful organization of time, space, or other dimensions can a ritual orient its participants toward one another and/or toward common concepts. And this structure must be in place in order for transformation to occur in a

[25] Driver, *Liberating Rites* 175.
[26] *Ibid.* 13.

lasting and significant fashion, bringing people closer to their ideal values. As self-reflective practitioners seek to create rituals that order, orient, and transform, it may be helpful to consider what elements contribute to the successful achievement of these functions. Briefly, I propose that four ingredients are necessary for a transformative ritual experience:

(A) a plausibility structure,
(B) living options,
(C) meaningful content, and
(D) an affirmative community.

These factors are necessary ingredients in constructing ideal ritual experiences.

A plausibility structure

Peter Berger argues in *The Sacred Canopy* that human beings are unique creatures insofar as their "world" is not biologically preprogrammed into them. Rather, humans spend their lives engaging and reengaging with others in the generative process of "world-building." He writes, "Man does not have a given relationship to the world. He must ongoingly establish a relationship with it."[27] Groups of human beings together create cultures which in turn sustain societies, and individual persons craft their world in the context of the shared ideas and experiences of their fellows. While an individual may exercise imagination and innovation in the way she understands the world, she still acknowledges the difference between her own fantasies and the "reality" of the culture and society in which she takes part. In other words, human beings both create and are subject to broader social norms.

These social norms—which are variable across cultures and mutable over time—provide a framework for what any individual person may realistically expect to encounter in her daily life. Acknowledging the *possibility* of difference is not the same as expecting the *reality* of difference. That is, a person may engage with an idea without internalizing it as relevant to her

[27] Berger 5.

own life. For example, while mainstream residents of North America may be able to imagine a system of household servitude and surrogate motherhood through handmaids, they cannot truly understand biblical stories in which women's servants bear children for them with their husbands; indeed, they would be shocked to encounter a family that practiced such "family values" and would almost certainly label them as abnormal. "That is simply not what we do," they might be expected to reply. At the same time, we may recall that our Middle Eastern ancestors contemporary to the narratives related in the Bible would likewise balk at our modern notions of individuality and nuclear family structures. We are all human beings conditioned by our societies to expect certain norms of behavior.

A set of such expectations constitutes a "plausibility structure." A society's plausibility structure is its array of cultural norms that delineates what may be considered both expectable and acceptable. Berger offers the following description:

> Worlds are socially constructed and socially maintained. Their continuing reality, both objective (as common, taken-for-granted facticity) and subjective (as facticity imposing itself on individual consciousness), depends upon *specific* social processes, namely those processes that ongoingly reconstruct and maintain the particular worlds in question. Conversely, the interruption of these social processes threatens the (objective and subjective) reality of the worlds in question. Thus each world requires a social "base" for its continuing existence as a world that is real to actual human beings. This "base" may be called its plausibility structure.[28]

In other words, a "social base" sets the stage for processes that both maintain and reconstruct worlds. As described above, the maintenance of worlds can be accomplished through the orienting function of ritual, and the reconstruction of worlds can be accomplished through the transforming function of ritual. In order for either of these activities to take place, the world to be maintained or reconstructed must be "possible" given a society's plausibility structure.

[28] *Ibid*. 45.

A given ritual's effectiveness relies on its consistency with a society's social norms. A ritual actor must be aware of what is considered *possible* in her society in order to maintain realistic expectations. And if such a ritual designer wants to create a certain orientation or transformation not currently enabled by a culture's social norms, her initial step must be to work to change its plausibility structure. This is the first ingredient of an effective ritual.

Living options

Within the bounds of given social norms exist a wide variety of potential ritual effects. These effects, when considered possible within a society's plausibility structure, may be considered "living options," a term coined by William James in his 1896 essay "The Will to Believe."

According to James, living options are choices among "live hypotheses." James explains what is meant by a live hypothesis:

> Let us give the name of *hypothesis* to anything that may be proposed to our belief; and just as the electricians speak of live and dead wires, let us speak of any hypothesis as either *live* or *dead*. A live hypothesis is one which appeals as a real possibility to him to whom it is proposed. If I ask you to believe in the Mahdi,[29] the notion makes no electric connection with your nature,—it refuses to scintillate with any credibility at all. As an hypothesis it is completely dead. To an Arab, however (even if he be not one of the Mahdi's followers), the hypothesis is among the mind's possibilities: it is alive. This shows that deadness and liveness in an hypothesis are not intrinsic properties, but relations to the individual thinker.[30]

Thus, a live hypothesis is a proposal that could potentially be accepted as true given a person's surrounding plausibility structure. Accordingly, a living option (where an "option" is "the

[29] An Islamic figure taken to be the future successor of Mohammed and eventual redeemer.
[30] "The Will to Believe" in *William James: The Essential Writings*. New York: Statue University of New York Press, 1984. p. 309.

decision between two hypotheses") "is one in which both hypotheses are live ones."[31] In other words, a living option is a choice among live hypotheses.

An American coronation—even one broadcast on live television—will not create an American Queen. Likewise, and more relevantly, a Bar Mitzvah ceremony will not result in a young man who considers himself obligated to *mitzvot* (commandments) if that is not the plausibility structure current in his social group. The same applies for rituals of healing, atonement, community bonding, studying, and so on. Rituals must propose living options to their participants in order to be effective. And similarly to considerations of plausibility structure, if a ritual designer desires to effect a transformation that is not currently a live hypothesis for herself or her community, she must first attend to the basic social assumptions that can enliven the possibility of recognizing the ritual effect. Rituals can only work when the effect is both conceivable and acceptable.

Meaningful content

In order to effect a change that is considered a living option within a person or community's plausibility structure, the content of a ritual must be meaningful to those who encounter it. What is meaning? Lawrence Hoffman posits a response:

> Meaning is not a quality of any single entity so much as it is an attribute that an entity has by virtue of its connection to another entity. … Meaning is a relative thing, the importance that a given piece of data has against the backdrop of other data. Things seen in isolation have no meaning at all.[32]

In other words, something is meaningful if it is relevant, if it relates to the values and hopes of an individual or community. Meaningful content, then, connects an individual or community to an

[31] *Ibid.*
[32] *Broken Tablets: Restoring the Ten Commandments and Ourselves*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1999. p. 53.

experience or concept they deem significant. This assessment of significance emerges generally from a plausibility structure and more specifically from societal and cultural values.

Content is the *stuff* of ritual, its words, materials, and actions. An ineffective ritual might seek to engender change toward a living option consistent with a plausibility structure but do so with language or technology that is distant from the potential participants. In contrast, effective rituals address their participants' values and hopes in ways that make sense, forging connections between big ideas and individuals who encounter them. While little can be done—at least in the short term—to affect plausibility structures or to generate new living options, considerable work can be accomplished in the realm of meaningful content within extant social patterns. Therefore, this dimension of ritual activity is one of fruitful focus for much ritual design.

An affirmative community

Finally, an effective ritual can take place only in the context of an affirmative community, a group of connected people who acknowledge and support the ritual work. As was mentioned previously, human beings must by their nature experience both solidarity and transformation in community. Even in rituals focused on an individual, therefore, a chorus of affirmation is required to make real the change induced by ritual. To return to an earlier analogy, this reflects the importance of *persona*, the externality of a person's role as experienced and reflected by those around her. As Peter Berger writes:

> The individual is socialized *to be* a designated person and to *inhabit* a designated world. Subjective identity and subjective reality are produced in the same dialectic (here, in the etymologically literal sense) between the individual and those significant others who are in charge of his socialization. It is possible to sum up the dialectic formation of identity by saying that the individual becomes that which he is addressed as by others.[33]

[33] Berger, *Sacred Canopy* 16.

Rituals, therefore, cannot work in a vacuum. An individual quest for transformation—perhaps through exploring nature or reading books—may change a person's opinions or perspective, but true transformation is not complete unless it is acknowledged by others. Idiosyncratic self-development is a condition of human existence and even a valuable one; however, it is not a goal of ritual transformation, for it evades structures of communal solidarity and lacks the feedback required to know that one has changed relative to something or someone else.

Affirmative communities, then, are essential to effective ritual. Like meaningful content, these communities can be fostered by ritual designers, who can inspire and inform people in relevant concepts and behaviors while allowing them to build relationships of trust and familiarity with one another.

Summary

Rituals order, orient, and transform. They create intelligible systems out of otherwise apparently random collections of spaces and events; they foster a common sense of community wherein accepted values and expected behaviors are shared; and they rejuvenate individuals and communities, bringing them closer to their ideal visions of themselves. Careful designers can create ritual experiences that *work*, that magically changing the worlds of individuals who encounter them through changing their self-identities in relation to what is around them. To do so, four elements are required: a plausibility structure, living options, meaningful content, and an affirmative community. With these foundations in place, ritual can realize its fullest capacity.

As we shall see moving forward, education also orders, orients, and transforms. It likewise succeeds only in the presence of a plausibility structure, living options, meaningful content, and an affirmative community. The overlap of ritual and educational goals creates a common space of theory and practice in which the language of one field can be applied to

another. In this project, I will suggest that lessons from the field of ritual can aid educators in reaching their goals, and I will explore examples wherein this phenomenon can be observed in Reform Jewish education. Ultimately, ritual and education will be shown to be different modes of approaching similar human processes, processes which are intrinsic to the human condition and foundational to the achievement of human potential.

Chapter 2: Approaching Jewish Education

Since Richard Stanley Peters launched the modern field of philosophy of education in the 1960s, scholars have concurred that education—like ritual—defies precise definition. Nevertheless, practitioners and learners alike know education when they experience it, and the better we understand what makes learning learning, the more effectively we can teach.

Harry Schofield suggests that two primary camps have emerged in the philosophy of education: "naturalists" argue that "education should merely 'let the child develop'" while "formalists" teach that "education [is] a discipline and that children learn what is good for them … and are *made* into specific people by their education."[34] The primary tension here revolves around the question of whether the process of education is valuable in-and-of-itself or whether the value of education lies in the potential future activity it empowers.

R. S. Peters and John Dewey fall into the naturalist camp. In attempting to offer a brief synopsis, Peters suggests that "education [is] about developing the mind, human reasoning and understanding, as fully as possible, for its own sake."[35] In other words, true education develops the individual not for any particular purpose but rather for the simple reason that development itself is a virtue. This approach coheres with the philosophy of John Dewey, who likewise taught that education is an unfolding of human potential for no particular external or future benefit. Dewey writes: "Cease conceiving of education as mere preparation for later life, and make it the full meaning of the present life."[36] Together, Peters and Dewey, pioneers in the field of education, agree that education provides for a learner's self-actualization.

---

[34] *The Philosophy of Education: An Introduction*. Barnes and Noble, 1972. p. 32.
[35] Robin Barrow, "Was Peters Nearly Right About Education?" In *Reading R. S. Peters Today: Analysis, Ethics, and the Aims of Education*. Ed. Stefaan E. Cuypers and Christopher Martin. Wiley-Blackwell: Oxford, 2011." pp. 6-23. p. 20.
[36] "Self-Realization as the Moral Ideal" in *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 2, No. 6 (Nov. 1893), pp. 652-664. p. 660.

In the formalist camp are scholars such as E. D. Hirsch. Hirsch has argued that society functions through brevity of communication. Were two people to fully explain everything they tried to say to one another, verbal exchanges would take far too long to achieve any fruitful results. Thus, small packets as well as large bundles of information can be quickly communicated through summary phrases such as "pinch hitting," "no-vote," or "9/11." In order to function effectively in society, a person must retain and use shared vocabulary with her neighbors, and the historical, theoretical, and functional significance of this vocabulary should be acquired during her formal education. In short: "We have a duty to those who lack cultural literacy to determine and disclose its contents."[37] Thus, while Peters and Dewey propose that education should make room for students to grow into the people they already have the potential to become, Hirsch argues that education should provide students what they lack in order to equip them for future success in a society that demands specific sets of knowledge.

A similar tension arises in approaches to Jewish education. To what extent is the goal of Jewish education to craft Jewish experiences which are meaningful to those who experience them, and to what extent should Jewish education prepare learners for future Jewish encounters? Or from another angle: How much must Jewish education include specific fundamental components, and how much must it attend to learners' personal stories and journeys? And underlying these topics is the challenging and foundational question to which we shall return in the Conclusion: What is Jewish education *for*?

Schofield's scheme of the "formalist" vs. "naturalist" divide can be translated into the Jewish educational landscape. In my analysis, "formalist" learning in a Jewish context can be understood as *chinuch*, preparation, while "naturalist" learning is *Torah lishmah*, learning for its

[37] Hirsch, E. D. *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*. New York: Vintage Books, 1988. p. 26.

own sake. While a heuristic oversimplification, the *chinuch* vs. *Torah lishmah* divide can be discovered in a variety of approaches to Jewish education today.

Of course, as in most binary models of this nature, the actual ideal draws from both camps. As will be discussed below, education—like ritual—has a tripartite goal structure: order, orient, and transform, and both *chinuch* and *Torah lishmah* are critical in achieving these goals.

Varied and competing visions of Jewish education underlie myriad projects across North America, and many of them contribute to the conversation of the relative value of *chinuch* and *Torah lishmah*. In the following pages, I will explore several such visions and their underlying principles. Subsequently, I will offer an analysis of these approaches in a ritualistic frame of the ordering, orienting, and transforming functions, demonstrating how all of them contribute to rich, meaningful, and fruitful Jewish education.

Chinuch

Classically, pious Jewish life has been characterized by careful observance of mitzvot, God's commandments. Accordingly the Rabbis canonized as part of the *Shema*, Judaism's most central prayer, Deuteronomy 6:6: *These words which <u>I command you</u> today shall be upon your heart*. In the Middle Ages, Jewish mystics further taught that observance of a mitzvah affects the very cosmos, bringing God's presence closer to unification with the physical world. This concept persists today in modern movements such as Chabad, which seeks to empower Jews to perform traditional mitzvot, as well as more liberal movements, which regularly engage in social action projects under the auspices of *tikkun olam*, the mitzvah to repair the world. It is not surprising, then, that Jewish texts throughout history, from the Torah to the Mishnah to the Mishneh Torah and beyond have focused on observance of mitzvot.

The underlying principle of mitzvot-centered education is that human beings are created to love, honor, and serve God. Traditional Jewish faith holds that God has communicated with human beings about *how* to fulfill this purpose. Mitzvot, delivered explicitly in Israelite scripture or derived from the divinely sanctioned process of rabbinic interpretation, represent concrete ways to live out God's will for human beings. The full system of these ways for living out God's will is known as *halakhah*, derived from the Hebrew word "to go." Learning the details of mitzvah practice and the overarching framework of *halakhah* is a necessary requirement to their right fulfillment; therefore, Jewish children, in advance of becoming adults, must be instructed in mitzvot by word and by deed. This process of acculturation into a system of *mitzvot* is referred to by the Rabbis as *chinuch*.[38]

Centuries of rabbinic postulation about *chinuch* can be traced back to interpretations of the simple statement of Mishnah Sukkah 3:15: קָטָן הַיּוֹדֵעַ לְנַעְנֵעַ חַיָּב בַּלּוּלָב, "A minor who knows [how] to wave [a lulav] is obligated in the [mitzvah of waving] the lulav." (One may ask: How can one teach a child to know how to wave a lulav? Rashi replies: לחנכו, "To educate him.").

From this brief statement of the Mishnah, the Rabbis of the Gemara conclude also that a minor who knows how to wrap a *tallit* is obligated to do so, that the father of a minor who can care for *tefillin* must procure *tefillin* for him, and the father of a minor who can speak must teach the child to recite *Shema* (Sukkah 42a). This list of obligations upon a minor (who theoretically is not obligated to perform any mitzvot until the age of majority) is understood by Maimonides as a rabbinic endorsement of intentional habituation of children to the mitzvah norms of Jewish life. Thus in Tzizit 3:9, Maimonides writes:

[38] I am indebted to Don Seeman for sharing his research on the topic of *chinuch* in an unpublished manuscript on the mitzvah to educate according to Maimonides.

נשים ועבדים וקטנים פטורין מן הציצית מן התורה, ומדברי סופרים שכל קטן שיודע להתעטף חייב בציצית **כדי לחנכו במצות.**

> Women and slaves and minors are exempted by the Torah from *tzizit*, but a minor who knows how to wrap [himself in a *tallit*] is obligated in *tzizit* by Scribal decree **in order to educate him in mitzvot**.

In Hilkhot Shofar, Sukkah, and Lulav 7:19, he similarly concludes:

קטן היודע לנענע חייב בלולב מדברי סופרים **כדי לחנכו במצות.**

> A minor who knows how to wave [the *lulav*] is obligated in *lulav* by Scribal decree **in order to educate him in mitzvot**.

These examples illustrate Maimonides' assertion that *chinuch* is an obligation for parents to prepare their children to observe mitzvot and an obligation for children to observe mitzvot of which they are capable.

Chinuch, then, is steadfastly formalist (rather than naturalist) training. This process of habituation is based on the assumption that certain knowledge is essential to right life and that adults and children alike are obligated to cultivate that knowledge in children. Only in this way can a newly-adult Jew be ready to assume the considerable mantle of responsibility that comes with Jewish adulthood.

Considered from a contemporary lens, this approach bears resemblance to the ideas of E. D. Hirsch. Hirsch argues that individuals must fluently converse in symbols, facts, and figures essential to their culture in order for them personally and for their society collectively to thrive. Accordingly, he stridently champions the proliferation of "cultural literacy," which he defines as "the network of information that all competent readers possess."[39] For Hirsch, cultural literacy is critical in today's world: "The complex undertakings of modern life depend on the cooperation of many people with different specialties in different places. Where communications fail, so do

[39] Hirsch, *Cultural Literacy* 2.

the undertakings."[40] In other words, without a common language, individual members of society cannot productively live together.

In a Jewish educational setting, this emphasis on cultural literacy might translate into a focus on cultivating in learners access to an essential "dictionary" of sorts that the Jewish community as a whole might grant to be central. Schools and informal programs would at minimum guide learners toward fluency in some basic concepts and practices that are essential to North American Jewish life. Michael Rosenak, who summarizes his ideology in the essay "Educated Jews: Common Elements" in *Visions of Jewish Education*, agrees that ideal Jewish education endeavors to accomplish universal Jewish literacy. He writes that educators aim "to initiate the young into the language of a culture by way of its most cherished literatures, including and perhaps particularly those formative literatures called sacred or 'classic.'"[41] Likewise, Rosenak's use of Ahad Ha-Am's "common sacred vocabulary" and his own description of "common cultural language" suggest that Rosenak supports a Hirschian emphasis on cultural literacy in Jewish education. [42]

However, there is critical distinction between Hirsch and Rosenak. For Hirsch, participation in one's particular culture is the ultimate end of education: "To teach the ways of one's own community has always been and still remains *the essence of the education of our children*, who enter neither a narrow tribal culture nor a transcendent world culture but a national literate culture."[43] Indeed, "Mature literacy alone allows the tower [of Babel] to be built."[44] Hirsch aspires to build the Tower of Babel, which for him symbolizes effective cultural

---

[40] *Ibid.*
[41] Rosenak, Michael. "Educated Jews: Common Elements." *Visions of Jewish Education*. Eds. Seymour Fox, Israel Scheffler, and Daniel Marom. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003. p. 180.
[42] *Ibid*. 193.
[43] Hirsch, *Cultural Literacy* 18, emphasis added.
[44] *Ibid*. 2.

production, and seeks to establish a common language that will enable people cooperatively to construct it. Put another way, Hirsch imagines a world in which culture is the ultimate good.

Rosenak, however, serves a higher purpose. For him, *Yirat Shamayim* (fear of Heaven)—rather than cultural production—is the "educational ideal."[45] Through this "character ideal,"[46] one may discover "the high road to the palace of ideal human existence and self-realization."[47] Human beings are fully actualized in their awareness of and encounter with the divine, and it is this ultimate transcendence that Jewish education hopes to empower. Rosenak argues for teaching common cultural language as a *tool* for Jews to live together as a Jewish community, in a "spiritual proximity" that can magnify their shared expression of *Yirat Shamayim*.[48] Because Jews are diverse—and because for the sake of Heaven they must come together—Jews must learn Jewish cultural literacy in order to communicate with one another. We must find ways to speak with one another in order to honor God and walk in God's ways, not—as Hirsch would suggest—so that we can achieve greatness within our society. For Rosenak, particular cultural expression is a derivative of diverse society and needs to be honored (and sometimes attended religiously); but it is not the purpose of education and should not distract Jewish educators from their ultimate concerns.

Rosenak's conception of Jewish cultural literacy as a tool toward achieving communal *Yirat Shamayim* represents in my view a laudable vision for Jewish education. Embracing the traditional model of *chinuch*, Rosenak underscores the importance of striving for divine values, an ancient yearning inherent to Jewish life. In this model, *chinuch* is necessary though not sufficient; practice of particular behaviors and articulation of particular beliefs are means to a

[45] *Roads to the Palace: Jewish Texts and Teaching*. Berghahn Books: Providence, RI, 1999. p. 106.
[46] *Ibid*. xv.
[47] *Ibid*. 87.
[48] Rosenak, "Educated Jews" 183.

higher end. This end could not be reached in an authentically Jewish way without engagement with mitzvot in some way, making *chinuch*—preparation for participating in active Jewish life—indispensible in Jewish education.

The Role of Continuity

Michael Rosenak has endeavored to translate the preparatory concept of *chinuch* into a workable model for Jewish education today. He advocates for the creation of a general and widely applicable "core curriculum," acceptable in a variety of denominational and non-denominational contexts. Nevertheless, my informal observations—as well as my formal observations of Reform Jewish schools—reveal a Jewish educational landscape that returns again and again to the same targets of habituation, focusing a narrow range of mitzvot that fails to address the diversity of North American Jewish identity, belief, and practice. Regardless of background or professed ideological commitment, many educational institutions prepare their students for Jewish life by teaching them to read prayers aloud, participate in volunteer projects, research famous Jews, celebrate the State of Israel, cook and consume Jewish food, etc. The trappings of the past, often characterized by traditional mitzvot, become the goals of the future.

An acute image of this educational phenomenon of turning one's educational vision toward the past is the common emphasis in today's Jewish community on "Jewish continuity." Concerns about the perpetuation of the Jewish people underlie much of Jewish education today and have done so for over two decades. The resource guide *What We Now Know about Jewish Education* recaps the genesis of this trend in its opening paragraph:

> Shortly following that publication [*A Time to Act* (1990)], the 1990 National Jewish Population Study claimed an intermarriage rate of 52% for recently married Jews, prompting a focus on Jewish education as *the* way to address

> Jewish continuity and to revitalize, strengthen, and deepen the knowledge and commitment of Jews to Judaism.[49]

What does "commitment of Jews to Judaism" look like? As seen again and again in sociological studies, Jewish "commitment" is often measured by metrics such as observing holidays (attending a Passover seder, lighting Hanukkah candles, etc.), eating kosher food, affiliating with a Jewish institution, and publicly demonstrating approval of the State of Israel. And as the passage above demonstrates, each of these familiar commitments has been subsumed under the metonym of endogamy. Thus, when seemingly high intermarriage rates were observed in the 1990s, many Jews panicked that the hallmarks of Jewish life were in danger of disappearing.

When *Visions of Jewish Education* was published a decade later, the same anxieties abounded, and Jewish education continued to be seen as the antidote to flagging Jewish commitment. Isidore Twersky writes plainly in that volume, "Judaism is in the midst of a historical crisis."[50] Michael Meyer notes, "American society has never been more accepting of Jews nor American religion of Judaism than they are today. However, in each case the result has been potentially devastating for Jewish survival."[51] And Menachem Brinker warns, "many Jews are in the process of losing their Jewish identity. Jewish education has the Sisyphean task of stopping or at least checking this process."[52] These snapshots represent samples of much of the discourse around Jewish education in the 2000s, which strongly emphasized the dire condition of the contemporary Jewish people and the necessity to address the current condition with expediency and effectiveness.

---

[49] Goodman, Roberta Louis. "Preface" in *What We Now Know about Jewish Education: Perspectives on Research for Practice*. Ed. Roberta Louis Goodman, Paul A. Flexner, and Linda Dale Bloomberg. Torah Aura Productions: Los Angeles, 2008. pp. 3-9. p. 3.
[50] "What Must a Jew Study – and Why?" in *Visions of Jewish Education*, p. 48.
[51] "Reflections on the Educated Jew from the Perspective of Reform Judaism" in *Visions of Jewish Education,* p. 152.
[52] "Jewish Studies in Israel: Liberal-Secular Perspective" in *Visions of Jewish Education,* p. 98.

Today, nearly 25 years after the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, the same tropes continue to be heard. The recent publication of the Pew Research Center's "A Portrait of Jewish Americans" (2013) inaugurated renewed attention to the issue of Jewish continuity. Considerable discussion focused on the Pew Foundation's assessment that 22% of Jews identify as "Jews of no religion." The authors of the study explain their concern:

> More than 90% of Jews by religion who are currently raising minor children in their home say they are raising those children Jewish or partially Jewish. In stark contrast, the survey finds that two-thirds of Jews of no religion say they are *not* raising their children Jewish or partially Jewish – either by religion or aside from religion.[53]

Jerry Silverman and Michael Siegal respond to this finding in *The Jewish Daily Forward*: "The study clearly demonstrates that we stand at an urgent crossroads for American Jewry."[54] Additionally, at the November 2013 Jewish Federations of North American General Assembly in Jerusalem, Jay Sanderson, president of the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles, said:

> We are at a moment that, frankly, if the Jewish federations don't seize, there won't be a community for us to raise money in. It's time for us to recognize that what got us here isn't going to get us there. So all the answers that we think we have and all the programs that are working, clearly are not working enough. The Pew study shows us we have more work to do.[55]

And Daniel Gordis states simply, "The Pew numbers are devastating."[56] These individuals represent a trend frequently encountered in conversations about Jewish education: Jews are in danger of disappearing, and only through Jewish education can our community reverse alarming trends and sustain itself for the future.

---

[53] "A Portrait of Jewish Americans." Available: http://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey.
[54] "4 Things To Do About Pew Survey Findings on #JewishAmerica." Oct. 24, 2013. Available: http://forward.com/articles/186111/-things-to-do-about-pew-survey-findings-on-jewis/?p=all.
[55] Quoted in Sam Sokol's "Jewish leaders spar over assimilation at GA meeting in Jerusalem." *The Jerusalem Post*. Nov. 12, 2013. Available: http://www.jpost.com/Jewish-World/Jewish-News/Negativity-and-hope-spar-at-GA-meeting-in-Jerusalem-after-Pew-report-on-assimilation-331425.
[56] "Cognitive Dissonance" in *The Jewish Review of Books*. Jan. 6, 2014. Available: http://jewishreviewofbooks.com/articles/673/cognitive-dissonance.

Jewish life and literature in North America have for centuries worried about diminishing Jewish commitment and identity, and these recent examples continue to contribute to the North American Jewish culture of fear for survival.[57] These stark depictions of high stakes create an atmosphere of crisis, a crisis from which Jewish education can rescue the Jewish people. The commonly articulated concerns about continuity suggest that the very existence of Judaism hangs in the balance, and the survival of the Jewish people can and must be preserved through the efforts of Jewish education.[58]

This orientation toward Jewish education has several results. The most pronounced effect that focusing on continuity has produced is a deepening of commitment to Jewish education and a proliferation of innovative ideas designed to enrich the Jewish experience of North American Jews. Driven by a passion to preserve a culture and a people that they deeply love, investors, teachers, parents, community leaders, and students themselves have undertaken to strengthen and improve Jewish educational offerings in North America over the past several decades. In the Reform Movement, this trajectory has contributed to the establishment of a new arm of the Union for Reform Judaism, the Campaign for Youth Engagement (CYE). The CYE clearly states its commitment to continuity in bold letters on its main web page: "The Campaign for Youth Engagement is a focused, strategic effort to leverage the full strength and talent of every corner of the Reform Movement to engage and *retain the majority of our youth* by the year 2020." [59] This new initiative was featured on the front page of the *New York Times*,

[57] Circa 1910, for example, Samson Benderly would exhort, "Do you recognize that Judaism is not carried in the blood stream, and that it is, therefore, not transmitted automatically from generation to generation, but only through the instrumentality of education?" in Krasner, Jonathan. *The Benderly Boys & American Jewish Education*. Brandeis University Press: Waltham, MA, 2011. p. 14.
[58] Not all voices engaged in this conversation take such a strident position. These alternative perspectives will be discussed below.
[59] "Youth Engagement." Avaialble: http://urj.org/cong/youth, emphasis added.

demonstrating the currency that programming spurred by concern about continuity can have.[60] Few would argue that such educational advancements are not valuable contributions to the Jewish world. Therefore, concerns over continuity undoubtedly have advanced communal efforts in positive and helpful directions.

However, a less appealing side effect of focusing on continuity has been the amplified emphasis on numbers. Because many are worried that the total count of Jewish bodies will decrease in the future, institutional and communal leaders are encouraged by physical numbers of Jews retaining their connections to established Jewish institutions. For example, NEXT is a program of the Birthright Israel Foundation that reimburses Birthright Israel alumni for hosting Shabbat meals; a qualifying meal, according to their rules, must seat at least five guests. In Jewish philanthropy more generally, recipients of grants must demonstrate that their efforts encountering acceptable numbers of individuals; even while developing qualitative measurements of the effect of Jewish education, Renee Rubin and Matt Grossman affirm, "one cannot overlook the importance of quantitative outcomes."[61] And in proposal after proposal, the word "more" appears repeatedly (more Jews, more engagement, more retention, etc.), underscoring the common drive to multiply the number of Jews encountering meaningful Jewish experiences. This focus on numbers privileges *p'kudei ha'am*, the numbers of the people, over *yirat Shamayim*, the fear of Heaven toward which they strive. In suggesting that Jewish educational programs are conducted in order to increase the numbers of people participating in Jewish life, advocates fail to address the ultimate concerns that underlie enduring and transcendent Jewish values.

---

[60] Cf. Laurie Goodstein's "Bar Mitzvahs Get New Look to Build Faith," *The New York Times*, September 3, 2013. Available: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/04/us/bar-mitzvahs-get-new-look-to-build-faith.html?_r=0.

[61] "Beyond Counting: The Importance of Depth and Scalability." Available: http://ejewishphilanthropy.com/beyond-counting-the-importance-of-depth-and-scalability.

Similarly, concerns about continuity have crystallized the formalist nature of *chinuch* and expanded that outlook to Jewish life writ large. That is, an emphasis on continuity is an emphasis on the *future*. Just as classical *chinuch* is predicated on the notion that children must be habituated to certain behaviors in order to prepare them for right life as adults, so does concern for Jewish continuity operate under the assumption that action must be taken now in order to assure right Jewish life in the future. From the perspective of continuity, drawing on the assumptions intrinsic to *chinuch*, the vibrancy of today's Jewish community is virtually immaterial compared to the potential health of tomorrow's Jewish world.

It is in this vein that leaders and laypeople alike have adopted the rallying cry, "Will your grandchildren be Jewish?" Jack Wertheimer notes:

> The last time the organized American Jewish community focused on what was then called the challenge of Jewish "continuity," a question making the rounds was "Will your grandchildren be Jewish?" At the time, the question was derided as a hysterical overreaction, but we now know the answer. In over a million cases so far, they already aren't.[62]

Wertheimer underscores the common anxiety felt today that our Jewish life means nothing if our grandchildren will not mimic it. The prevalence of this fear contributes to the educational result of institutions focusing exclusively on a future modeled on the past. Religious schools, Hillels, and 20s and 30s programming constantly face the question not only of how many people come to their offerings but how many people are likely to *come back*. And in the realm of formal Jewish education for children, the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education's 2007 report "What Difference Does Day School Make?" concludes its final paragraph with: "Day schools are successful in launching students from these backgrounds into trajectories of secular academic

[62] "Intermarriage: Can Anything Be Done?" in *Mosaic*, September 2013. Available: http://mosaicmagazine.com/essay/2013/09/intermarriage.

success and Jewish communal engagement."[63] These words leave the reader of the report with the optimistic sense that not only does Jewish day school provide a myriad of benefits to school children during their school years (as had been detailed in the report) but, more importantly, these benefits will remain into the foreseeable future. In all of these examples, a concern about continuity is a concern about the future, and education seen through this lens looks to the next year and the next generation to evaluate its success.

To summarize, today's common discourse on Jewish continuity has three identifiable outcomes: substantial support for Jewish educational endeavors, a focus on participation numbers, and a formalist emphasis on the future. Each of these outcomes contributes fruitfully to the field of Jewish education; however, in my opinion, they make up only part of the potential picture. Jewish life is not valuable only insofar as today's forms can be secured for the future, and the numbers of Jews in any given place at any given time can be considered significant only in relation to the Jewish ideals that these Jews embody through engagement with mitzvot. In short, continuity is not the end of the Jewish story.

Several leaders in today's Jewish community seek to make this voice heard, disputing the claim that Judaism is in crisis and insisting that mitzvot can be experienced and encountered in a variety of ways without "giving up the game" of Jewish life. Bethamie Horowitz, for example, argues that more important than the formalist question "How Jewish are American Jews?" is the question "How are American Jews Jewish?"[64] She suggests that the most essential elements of Jewishness are not found in the conservation of traditional modes of practice but rather in the exploration of what Judaism *means* to the contemporary Jewish community. Additionally, Sarah Bunin Benor responds to the Pew study not with fear but with optimism, noting that its report on

[63] Available: http://www.peje.org/docs/200705_peje_impact_of_day_school.pdf.
[64] Cf. Bethamie Horowitz, "Reframing the Study of Contemporary American Jewish Identity." *Contemporary Jewry*, Association for the Social Scientific Study of Jewry (ASSJ). 2002: 14-34.

the Jewish *present* is quite positive regardless how people may interpret its impact on the future. She suggests that the qualities of life that lead to the Pew results should be celebrated rather than regretted, for they reflect a strong and active Jewish population engaged with the world around it:

> Instead of bemoaning or even debating the numbers, an alternative response to the survey would be to marvel at the fact that so many Jews still marry other Jews. We live in an age of acceptance: Not only are Christians willing to marry Jews, many (an estimated 800,000) feel so connected to Jews or Judaism that they tell a phone interviewer that they are Jewish, even if neither of their parents is Jewish. Why don't the vast majority of Jews marry non-Jews? I would suggest it is because synagogues, schools, youth groups, Hillels and other Jewish organizations are creating opportunities for Jews to get to know other Jews.[65]

To Benor, today's sociological reality is an outcome of positive developments in the position of Jews in modern North American society. And, J. J. Goldberg—though himself focused primarily on numbers—reminds readers that one cannot know about Jewishness solely through asking questions about familiar practices consistent with traditional mitzvot: "We know a great deal about what non-religious Jews don't do or believe, but very little about what they do. Nearly all the survey tools for measuring Jewish behavior describe religious rituals. Non-religious Jews obviously score low."[66] In other words, Goldberg asserts that non-religious Jews are Jewish in ways that often do not look familiar—perhaps even recognizable—to religious Jews. Therefore, again returning to Bethamie Horowitz, it is imperative to remember that there are many ways to be Jewish, and a Jewish community can be healthy and vibrant and look very different from healthy, vibrant Jewish communities of the past.

---

[65] "Pew Study Finds a Vibrant Jewish Community." *Jewish Journal*, Oct. 10, 2013. Available: http://www.jewishjournal.com/cover_story/item/pew_study_finds_a_vibrant_jewish_community.
[66] "Pew Survey about Jewish America Got It All Wrong." *The Jewish Daily Forward*, Oct. 13, 2013. Available: http://forward.com/articles/185461/pew-survey-about-jewish-america-got-it-all-wrong/?p=all#ixzz2uYGRDrCd.

To conclude, while *chinuch* is ancient and essential, its preparatory nature cannot sustain an entire people day to day. In today's landscape, the philosophical and practical roots of *chinuch* have sprouted into programmatic trees designed primarily to ensure continuity; however, if our institutions spend all their time preparing for the future, they may lose the forest of living Judaism for the trees of its concerns over tomorrow. Thus, in addition to formalist *chinuch*, a naturalist focus on the present is also essential to Jewish education.

Torah Lishmah

One classical model of naturalist Jewish learning is *Torah lishmah*, Torah for its own sake. The concept of *Torah lishmah* proposes that Jewish learning is valuable in and of itself. There is no motive to studying Torah; it itself is a virtue. This is not dissimilar from other values (such as making peace or praying with sincerity), which are themselves reasons to behave without needing further motive. One studies Torah simply because it is good to study Torah.

Rabbeinu Asher ben Yehiel (1250-1328), known as the Rosh, draws a helpful distinction between *actions* which are for the sake of God and *learning* which is for the sake of learning. He starts with the saying of Rabbi Elazar ben R. Tzadok in the Babylonian Talmud, Nedarim 62a: עשה דברים לשם פעלם ודבר בהם לשמם, "Do things for the sake of their Maker, and speak in them for their own sake." The Rosh comments as follows:

> **לשם פעלם**: לשמו של הקב"ה שפעל הכל למענהו.
> **ודבר בהם לשמם**: כל דבורך ומשאך בדברי תורה יהיה לשם התורה כגון לידע ולהבין ולהוסיף לקח ופלפול, ולא לקנטר ולהתגאות.

> **"For the sake of their Maker."** For the sake of the Holy Blessed One who made everything for God's own purposes.

> **"And speak in them for their own sake."** All your speech and discussion in words of Torah [*divrei Torah*] shall be for the sake of the Torah, in order to know

> and understand and to increase comprehension and analysis, not for contention or to pride oneself.

With this commentary, the Rosh suggests that observing practical mitzvot is a behavior done for the sake of God while learning Torah is a behavior done for its own value. In applying this teaching to our present scheme, we may relate the Rosh's teachings about "doing things" (action) to *chinuch* and about "words of Torah" (study) to *Torah lishmah*.

The first of the Rosh's two points—that following mitzvot is for the sake of God—relates to the outlook of a passage in the Babylonian Talmud (Makkot 23b-24a) in which mitzvot are shown to be pathways to higher moral action. This text opens with a *d'rash*, a sermon, of Rabbi Simlai:

> Six hundred thirteen precepts were communicated to Moses: three hundred sixty-five negative precepts, corresponding to the number of solar days [in the year], and two hundred forty-eight positive precepts, corresponding to the number of the members the human body.

With this poetic imagery, Rabbi Simlai gives body to the ephemeral claim of the Rabbis that God authored תרי"ג (613) mitzvot. Simlai suggests that the sum total of God's commandments constitutes both the grand movement of the planets as well as the inner workings of living beings. In other words, the mitzvot point *beyond themselves* to their Maker.

From this starting place, the anonymous composers of the Gemara introduce a parade of scriptural figures who reduce the number of mitzvot down from 613. Drawing on Psalm 15, David is shown to condense Jewish life into eleven principles. Isaiah brings the number to six, and Micah famously negotiates down to three: *Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God* (Micah 6:8). Isaiah rejoins again with a mere two: *Observe justice and do righteousness* (Isaiah 56:1), and both Amos and Habakkuk proffer a single commandment to summarize all of Judaism: *Seek me and live* (Amos 5:4) and *The righteous one by his [God's?]*

faith shall live (Habakkuk 2:4). This carefully constructed and exquisitely expressed passage serves as a beautiful and powerful reminder that mitzvot are not evaluated on the basis of their execution alone. Rather, they are important only insofar as they inspire relationship with God (Amos) and a life of faith (Habakkuk). Thus, as the Rosh has observed, mitzvot are in service of God.

Clearly, mitzvot so conceived are essential to Jewish life and learning, and proper, fruitful *chinuch* will help students engage with them sincerely. Thus, effective educational endeavors will engage learners in mitzvot which bear contemporary relevance and meaning for them (see considerations below on elements of effective education). Many such endeavors in the Reform Movement have already found success in connecting students with the Jewish value of *tikkun olam*, repairing the world, a broad category which applies to individual acts of *g'milut chasadim* (actions of kindness), of *tzedakah* (charity), of social action (volunteering), and of social justice (advocacy). Each of these has an important role to play in Jewish education, which does well to prepare students to understand these virtuous deeds in a mitzvah-focused orientation. In this way, *chinuch* need be not only about learning the intricacies of repeating Jewish behaviors but also in active engagement in learners' surrounding society and the larger world.

Thus, the Rosh's assessment of "doing things for the sake of their Maker" applies in the realm of *chinuch*. The second category of engaging with words of Torah, "speaking in them for their own sake," applies in the realm of *Torah lishmah*, in which learning is sought and accomplished for its own sake. *Torah lishmah* is focused on the here-and-now, acknowledging the inherent benefits of Jewish engagement.

Torah lishmah is a classical category lauded first by Rabbi Meir in Pirkei Avot (6:1): *Everyone who engages in Torah for its own sake* (lishmah) *merits many things.* A series of rabbis further extols the virtues of *Torah lishmah* in the Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 99b:

> Rabbi Alexandri said, "All who engage in *Torah lishmah* make peace in the household above as well as the household below. … Rav said, "It is as if such a person built the palace above and the palace below." … Rabbi Yohanan said, "Such a person protects the entire world." … And Levi said, "Such a person even draws closer redemption."

Clearly, the classical rabbis found engaging in Torah for its own sake a valuable enterprise. *Torah lishmah* is not done *for* these rewards; rather, the subsequent benefits of studying Torah accrue of their own accord in conjunction with present-focused learning.

At its heart, the *Torah lishmah* component of Jewish education contends that the experience of education is in and of itself important. What takes place in the classroom, in the sanctuary, in the rabbi's study, in the kitchen, etc. is valuable regardless of what may emerge from it in the future. *Divrei Torah*, matters of learning, are each treasured for their own divine source, not for where they may bring those who engage with them in the future.

This process of learning wherein the learning itself is the main goal largely follows Dewey's naturalist educational vision. In his treatment of Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin (1749-1821), a student of the Vilna Gaon and a pioneer in *Torah lishmah*-driven education, Harvey Shapiro highlights this connection:

> In his interpretation, R. Ḥayyim emphasizes that inquiry, effort, and desire are integral to the learning process and that, within that process, the ideal of *Torah lishmah* ("Torah for its own sake") is intimated. Analogous to Dewey, he situates struggle and effort at the center of the learning experience, viewing the educational "good" as one of action rather than attainment. Dewey's discourse, again, is helpful as he articulates how religious reward and educational attainment are not simply results of effort; they occur primarily "in the midst of effort," kindling desire for further inquiry. So too, for R. Ḥayyim, ideals such as *devekut*

> or *kirvat elohim* ("attachment" or "closeness to God") are experienced in the intellectual effort, intimated in the flux of struggle.[67]

This analysis highlights the affective result of *Torah lishmah*-driven learning. The student has an experience, perhaps even a religious experience, through the learning itself, and it is that discovered experience that brings meaning to the learning. The learner's emotional transformation is valuable to no one but herself, and it bears no utility for the future. The purpose of study is experienced through the action of study.

In short, *Torah lishmah* education can be considered education with the following characteristics:

1. Learners engage in the study voluntarily.
2. Learners' motivations are directed at the learning or the experience itself, not for a future goal.
3. Educators as well bear no expectation as to a *particular* outcome from study.
4. The learning is considered meaningful to those who engage in it.

Much adult education in North American synagogues follows this model. Congregants gather to dive into Jewish literature, to bolster their understanding of Jewish history, to connect to conceptions of the soul, and so on. Programs like the Hebrew University's Florence Melton School of Adult Jewish Learning or Hebrew College's Me'ah formalize adults' desire to connect to Jewish texts, and synagogue and JCC programs of Torah study, brunch and learns, lecture series, concerts, and readings likewise create contexts for people to engage with Torah for its own sake. Critical to each of these endeavors is students' expressed eagerness to learn: No one can be forced to attend Tuesdays at Temple.

Of course, many adults, as well as children, seek out voluntary learning experiences even when they hope to "get something out of it." For example, Basic Judaism classes, while voluntary, are often highly focused on *chinuch*, preparing learners to behave in Jewish ways in

[67] *Educational Theory and Jewish Studies in Conversation: From Volozhin to Buczacz*. Lexington Books: Lanham, MD, 2013. p. 93.

the future. I seek to note here the converse: while voluntary learning can be either *chinuch* or *Torah lishmah*, non-voluntary learning cannot be considered *Torah lishmah*, for the learner does not approach the material for its own sake. Nevertheless, even mandatory learning can come to be valued and embraced of its own accord.

This would seem to be the ideal trajectory of children's Jewish education: while young learners may be forced to start their education, they come to appreciate it and choose it for themselves, finding it personally meaningful. This may be seen most clearly in ideal *Torah lishmah*-driven Jewish education for children approaching Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Certainly many unwilling thirteen-year-olds submit themselves to parental and peer pressure by leading or participating in a Shabbat service to celebrate their attainment of Jewish majority. However, there is potential for more. Young people can experience their Bar or Bat Mitzvah ceremony as *what Jews do*, and insofar as they value being Jewish, they also can value their becoming Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Such persons can participate in their ceremonies with full hearts, though they may be hard-pressed to explain *why* such a ceremony exists. In this model, the Bar and Bat Mitzvah celebration is simply part of the fabric of Jewish life. Earlier years of study are spent with an eye toward the future, but the service itself, conducted with the knowledge and skill attained during religious school preparation, as well as the concomitant celebration afterward can be for students an experience of *Torah lishmah*.

The *Torah lishmah* orientation to Jewish education can infuse many parts of children's learning in addition to the Bar or Bat Mitzvah service. However, this approach may potentially contend with some elements of *chinuch*-oriented motivations, which often suffuse Jewish education for children. Thus, *Torah lishmhah*-focused worship experiences can be designed and experienced for the purpose of worshiping, rather than the *chinuch*-driven goals of attaining

t'fillah skills. *B'rachot*, blessings, can be learned because it is important to give thanks to God—not because Jewish adults often feel ashamed by ignorance of basic Jewish rituals and therefore seek to protect their children from feeling the same embarrassment in the future. Shabbat can be celebrated as families and as communities because Jews are commanded to rest, and Tanach can be studied because it contains the words of the Ever-Living God. A *Torah lishmah*-driven approach embraces mitzvot differently than a *chinuch*-driven approach, acknowledging primarily that there is *intrinsic value* in observing mitzvot beyond any future benefit that may accrue. This value is acknowledged as personally meaningful to those who engage in the Jewish activity, and the utility of the mitzvah—the consideration of its "impact" or "effect"—is disregarded. In short, the primary question of *Torah lishmah*-driven education is not be "How does this prepare a learner for Jewish life?" but rather "How does this enact Jewish life?"

In today's Jewish landscape, *chinuch* is the primary mode of Jewish education, largely due to the community's concern over issues of continuity. Unfortunately, this landscape fails to incorporate the equally important elements of *Torah lishmah* learning, underscored and valued by Jewish teachers and learners for centuries. Acknowledging the importance of *Torah lishmah* learning therefore is an important step in the development of Jewish education today, and from this awareness, best practices can emerge to guide educators in creating rich learning environments that honor both the values of *chinuch* as well as *Torah lishmah.*

A Ritualistic Vision of Jewish Education

The foregoing discourse has explored visions of Jewish education primarily through a dialectic between formalist (*chinuch*) and naturalist (*Torah lishmah*) approaches. As with most seeming dilemmas, both camps have much to contribute to Jewish education in North America today, and my own vision for Jewish education incorporates each of them.

It seems to me that the ideal of education—both for children and adults—is naturalist. *Torah lishmah* represents the epitome of Jewish learning, drawing from the religious principle that engagement with the ancient and ever-renewing principles of Judaism is an enterprise valuable in and of itself. Just as mitzvot are designed to align human beings with the Divine Will without being themselves equal to the Divine Will, so do experiences of Jewish learning—multifarious in their forms and contexts—bring learners into renewed relationship. This relationship binds the learner to the material she studies and the concepts behind it, to fellow students as well as teachers, and to the Source of wisdom from which all learning springs. Ultimately, a learner in an ideal *Torah lishmah* situation **transforms** through the process of learning.

However, it would be impossible to structure all Jewish learning as *Torah lishmah* (just as it would be impossible for every ritual to be transformative). Judaism is rich with deep and complex layers of meaning, and fundamental pieces of particular knowledge are required to unlock the mysteries that transform lives. For instance, one cannot study Mishnah without operative knowledge of Tanach. The same holds for Jewish practice: Many customs and traditions require mastery of certain skills and concepts in order authentically to observe them. For example, one cannot conduct a traditional prayer service without basic literacy in Hebrew and liturgy. Accordingly, Jewish education must prepare people to incorporate Jewish practice into their lives and to engage sincerely with challenging and provocative Jewish ideas. Through proper *chinuch*, learners are able to **orient** themselves within a Jewish tradition and as a part of the Jewish people.

And on the most basic level, Jewish education must be able to distinguish itself as distinctly Jewish. Michael Rosenak's core curriculum must by its nature look different from E.

D. Hirsch's. Certain common ideas and experiences—spanning history, philosophy, language, literature, and custom—draw together Jewish people and principles into a shared cultural space. Insofar as we claim that Torah is by its nature valuable, so too can we claim that Jewish people, practices, and ideas bear intrinsic value. Therefore, it is both essential and good that Jewish education establish an **order** that can be used to signify the particular Jewishness of its subject matter.

And thus we have returned to the basic rubric laid out in our treatment of ritual. As we discussed in the previous chapter, ritual orders, signifying to those who experience the ritual a particular place in space, in time, and/or in society. Ritual also orients, establishing for participants a relationship to people and ideas that can guide their own behaviors and beliefs. And finally, ritual transforms, temporarily or permanently altering a person's view of herself and the world around her.

Similarly, Jewish education orders. It marks particular ideas or practices as Jewish, flagging them as appropriately "in-bounds" for sincere engagement in authentic Jewish life. Jewish education orients, constructing a framework for Jewish decision-making and providing the tools necessary to make informed choices about Jewish life. And ultimately, Jewish education transforms, carrying a learner out of the status of recipient and into the role of self-motivated student of Torah in relationship with people, ideas, and God.

Additionally, just as four elements were earlier presented as necessary for transformative ritual, so do these elements also form the foundation of transformative Jewish education. Four ingredients are necessary for a transformative educational experience:

(A) a plausibility structure,
(B) living options,
(C) meaningful content, and
(D) an affirmative community.

Plausibility Structure

The Mishnah famously opens with the question מֵאֵימָתַי קוֹרִין אֶת שְׁמַע בְּעַרְבִית, "From when do we recite *Shema* in the evening?" (B'rachot 1:1). This question is utter nonsense to someone who does not understand at least (A) the concept of obligation, (B) the concept of Jewish prayer, (C) what "*Shema*" is, and (D) what the Mishnah itself is and what it seeks to do. And even if a learner is familiar with these basic concepts, the question has no *relevance* for her unless proper recitation of *Shema* is important to her life. Thus, a plausibility structure that contains this background information and that rests on social norms inclusive of Hebrew prayer, Jewish history, etc. is a precursor to meaningful engagement with the Mishnah's opening question.

As this example illustrates, there are some claims and aims of Jewish education that defy some aspects of modern North America's common plausibility structure. Jewish educational systems must first acknowledge this disjunction and prepare to overcome it; else, their efforts will invariably fail. As was mentioned in Chapter 1, a plausibility structure is essential to the way a person understands—even constructs—her world, and Jewish education cannot flourish if its foundations are built outside the social norms of its students.

Two approaches that practitioners can take toward addressing the necessity of a plausibility structure in effective Jewish education are to minimize difference and to change the norm. Minimizing difference involves emphasizing the harmony that already exists between students' current plausibility structure and that of the content and concepts educators seek to teach. While a meaningful recitation of the *Shema* may seem foreign at first glance, educators

may be able to relate the *Shema* to other analogous practices such as reciting the Pledge of Allegiance or wedding vows. The second approach, changing the norm, is considerably more difficult. In this approach, educators endeavor to broaden or alter learners' plausibility structure to become more in line with the plausibility structure that originally gave birth to particular Jewish concepts and practices. Thus, educators may cultivate a culture of exclusive unity that highlights the distinction of Jews from other peoples. Within this framework, educators could then underline the *Shema*'s function as a public declaration of unique relationship: "Hear, *Israel*: the Eternal is *our* God." To accomplish this, practitioners would draw on the transformative and orienting functions of ritual to change and maintain their students' worldviews.

In either case, an awareness of students' plausibility structures vis-à-vis the implicit plausibility structures behind Jewish concepts and behaviors is an essential first step to effective Jewish education. Only by paying careful attention to where students are in relation to the goals and expectations of the class can collaborative and effective learning be maintained.

A living option

Unfortunately, educators sometimes present Jewish life and learning in a way that is not viable in students lives. For example, an educator might say, "We host two seder meals every year because we live outside the land of Israel." However, some students may be part of families that host one or zero Passover seder meals each year, and they may lack a sense of distinction between Jews in Israel and Jews outside of Israel. Therefore, the option of hosting two seder meals may not be tenable for some students as it is based on foreign social norms.

Within the context of a learner's plausibility structure, educators must offer their students living options. The Jewish behaviors and beliefs they describe should be "within reach" for their students in order for them to connect meaningfully to those practices and concepts. Of course,

what is "living" for one student varies from what is "living" for another, so openness to various practices and cultural expectations is critical to wide engagement of diverse learners. As well, similar to approaches toward students' plausibility structures, options may become "living" when educators make use of transformative and orienting rituals to enliven them. For example, Jewish summer camps have had great success cultivating *t'fillah* (prayer) as a living option among its learners through emotionally powerful worship experiences among friends. When students perceive what they learn as something that *could* apply to them—even if not yet—then the possibility of successfully embracing that content dramatically improves.

Meaningful Content

Within the bounds of a plausibility structure and living options, education thrives in the field of meaningful content. Just as content is the "stuff" of ritual so is it also conceived of as the "stuff" of education. Learners engage with ideas and inspirations, making new connections between their lives and the world around them. In a conducive context, almost any content can be made meaningful by educators who are in tune enough with their learners to understand the points of relevance between a person's current situation and the material being explored. This is perhaps the most well-developed area of education in general as well as Jewish education in particular.

The importance of *meaningful* content cannot be overstated. Again, "meaning" is understood as the connection that a person makes between his or her own "world" and a new experience or piece of information. Education can only happen if the learner can *relate* to the content. This does not mean that all curricula need to have their starting-place in the students' personal experiences; on the contrary, it is laudable to introduce new experiences and information to students who have never encountered them before. However, for *presentation* to

become *education*, the content must transcend *delivery* and attain *meaning*. In other words, a teacher's presentation of material—even a living option within an appropriate plausibility structure—will fail to be educational if the students cannot integrate that material into their own lives. Therefore, the success of education cannot be evaluated on how much material has been *covered* but rather on how much has been *understood*. Benchmarks are met not by teachers but by students, for only when content is meaningful does it contribute to true education.

An affirmative community

Finally, Jewish education can succeed for almost every learner only in community. Jewish autodidacts are rare in the breadth of Jewish history. To support communal learning, the Rabbis established models of learning in pairs, *chevruta'ot*, and in study houses, *b'tei midrash*, that have for centuries guided Jews to learn in groups. Joshua ben Perachia is noted for instructing עֲשֵׂה לְךָ רַב וּקְנֵה לְךָ חָבֵר, "Make for yourself a teacher, and acquire for yourself a friend" (Pirkei Avot 1:6). Only in a place where a person feels supported by a teacher and/or accompanied by fellow learners can meaningful Jewish education take place.

Therefore, it is essential for educational practitioners to develop learning communities in which learners and teachers alike feel welcome and respected. Attention must be paid to teacher-student relationships, to student-student relationships, and to the atmosphere of learning throughout the session, school, or institution. As Rabbi Halafta ben Dosa teaches:

> עֲשָׂרָה שֶׁיּוֹשְׁבִין וְעוֹסְקִין בַּתּוֹרָה, שְׁכִינָה שְׁרוּיָה בֵּינֵיהֶם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר אֱלֹהִים נִצָּב בַּעֲדַת אֵל (תהלים פב א).
>
> "Ten who sit and engage in Torah, the Shechinah is among them, as it is said, *God stands in the community of God* (Ps. 81:1)."[68]

[68] Pirkei Avot 3:6. A community (עֲדָה) is made up of ten people. See Mishnah Sanhedrin 1:6.

Indeed, Rabbi Halafta's adage applies with any number of people who sit together to engage in study.[69] Therefore, following the rabbinic role model, practitioners can bring divine connection into their learning spaces with attentive care for cultivating a community that supports and engages in its study of Torah.

Conclusion

I have outlined two primary models for approaching Jewish education. The first, *chinuch*, is a preparation for future engagement in mitzvot. The second, *Torah lishmah*, is an embrace of Jewish life and learning in the present. I have suggested that the Jewish community's intense concern over "continuity" has prompted many educational enterprises to focus principally on *chinuch*, resulting in an emphasis on rehearsing familiar mitzvot and failing to admit innovative expressions of Jewish identity. I therefore propose that Jewish education in North America today may become richer with a stronger emphasis on *Torah lishmah*, concomitant with a satisfaction with learning and doing without future goals in mind. I maintain that both *chinuch* and *Torah lishmah* are essential to Jewish education, but because of the preponderance of emphasis on the former, I advocate for a reinvigoration of the latter.

These conclusions overlap with a ritualistic approach toward Jewish education.[70] Jewish education and ritual alike order, orient, and transform. It is for this reason that considering the place of ritual in educational practice can enrich the enterprise of Jewish education. The coming chapter will demonstrate though firsthand observations ritualistic components of Jewish education, detailing the ways in which thinking about Jewish education ritualistically can highlight successful practices. Ultimately, in the Conclusion, I will propose that adopting a

[69] *Ibid*.
[70] Indeed, only in thinking of education through the lens of ritual did I develop the *chinuch*/*Torah lishmah* dialectic.

"ritual form" in Jewish education can not only diversify and enrich Jewish education but also magnify the potential for Jewish education to bring foundational Jewish ideals and values to life.

Chapter 3: Observations in the Field

Introduction

Ritual and education share many functions and forms. They order, orient, and transform using the common bases of (1) a plausibility structure, (2) living options, (3) meaningful content, and (4) affirmative communities. In order to expand upon these theoretical postulates, I conducted field research in two Reform Jewish schools, observing in particular the ordering, orienting, and transforming elements of Jewish education. In identifying and naming these ritualistic techniques and experiences, I have hoped to highlight best practices which advance the ultimate goals of education. My contention is that the language of ritual can support educators in their work, and I intend to demonstrate that educators already utilize ritual, often unintentionally. The following observations clarify what "ritual in Jewish education" looks like and how it can be replicated in similar settings.

The Schools: Congregation Shem Tov and the Lazarus School

Congregation Shem Tov (CST) is a mid-sized suburban Reform congregation. Its twelve-grade religious school program is coordinated by a full-time director of education and a full-time assistant director. The senior rabbi, Miriam Isaacs, has contributed significant vision to the curriculum and structure of the synagogue's education programs, and CST's other rabbi (Mark Hecht) and cantor both interact regularly with the school.[71]

A defining characteristic of this religious school program is its commitment to art and ritual. Dance and art instruction are regularly integrated into students' learning at CST. As well, at least once each year, students in every grade level create a summative piece of artwork and/or participate as a class in a Jewish ritual. For example, fourth-grade students—whose curriculum

[71] All names of institutions and individuals have been changed.

explores the diversity of Jewish cultures from different places in the world—create spice boxes for use in their annual *Havdalah Hispanica*, a *havdalah* ritual drawing from Sephardic customs that parents and children celebrate together. Seventh-grade students study Jewish traditions and lifeways with a focus on life cycle rituals, and their learning includes field trips to relevant locations such as a *mikveh* (ritual bath) and a funeral home. And most grades come together to observe sacred occasions such as Hanukkah, Pesach, and Yom Hashoah. Rabbi Isaacs insists that art and ritual are integrated into students' lives every year, and the entire educational staff endeavors to bring this vision to life.

The Lazarus School is a suburban Reform Jewish day school with approximately 300 students in Kindergarten through eighth grade. Approximately one-third of the families are affiliated with Reform congregations, one-third are affiliated with Conservative congregations, and one-third are unaffiliated. The school is affiliated with the Reform movement and holds a Reform approach to Jewish life, and the regular Jewish rituals, including *birkat hamazon* (blessing after meals) and *t'fillah* (prayer services), follow Reform traditions.

As an independent school in an area with many other private schools competing for student enrollment, Lazarus dedicates considerable resources to its "secular studies" (curricula in science, English literature, mathematics, social studies, etc.) in addition to its Jewish studies curriculum. However, these curricula are not entirely segregated in the school; Lazarus instructors and administrators infuse Reform Jewish values into diverse facets of life at the school. For example, an eighth-grade math class studies the equations of circles inscribed in squares and squares inscribed in circles with reference to a relevant Talmudic discussion (Sukkah 7b). The school's full-time Social Justice Coordinator weekly reads a book without overt Jewish content to the first-grade class, asking them to identify the "mitzvah hero" of the

story. And fourth-graders learning about the sun and the moon are reminded of the lunar-solar calendar that guides the Jewish months.[72] In many ways, Lazarus lives up to the term "Jewish school," as learning in a variety of topics takes place in a rich and expansive Jewish environment.

Both Congregation Shem Tov and the Lazarus School are excellent resources in the study of ritual in Jewish education. Educators in both schools thoughtfully and intentionally design curricula intended to transform learners, and the environments of both schools are conducive to a ritualistic approach to education. I first visited the Lazarus School as an informal observer through a Jewish day school class offered by the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. My initial exposure to the careful Reform education conducted at the school inspired me to return to Lazarus for additional study. Congregation Shem Tov was recommended to me by several sources as a rich environment for the study of ritual in education, for CST has a well-trained and effective staff committed to innovative Jewish education. I visited each venue on two separate occasions, sitting in on classes, speaking with educators, and observing the ambient environment. Each school is an exemplar of its kind—day school or religious school—in considering education from a ritual perspective.

Overview

The following observations are meant to illustrate ritual at work in Reform Jewish educational settings. They are organized in the following manner:

I. First, I will discuss educational **rituals that order**, which may also be referred to as routines, drawing from examples in both CST and Lazarus.

[72] As well, "secular" lessons are fully applicable in Jewish studies settings. For instance, a Kindergarten class learning about Jacob and Esau also took the opportunity to learn about opposites. And a seventh-grade Jewish studies class examining the topic of medical ethics turned its attention to the philosophical form "narrative ethics."

II. Then, I will highlight educational **rituals that both order and orient**, with a note about rituals that orient "out of order."
III. Third, I will describe educational **rituals that order, orient, and transform**. In my view, these are the pinnacle of educational experiences.
    Note: Within each of the three foregoing sections, I will describe rituals *in the classroom* as well as broader *curricular* or *large-scale* rituals.
IV. I will also briefly consider **rites of passage**, which are a special class of ritual that fulfills all three ritualistic/educational functions, and I will relate observations of the Lazarus School's first-grade rite of passage, the "*siddur* ceremony."
V. Finally, I will also make note of ***t'fillah***, a Jewish ritual incorporated centrally into both schools.

Through these observations, I hope to demonstrate that many educators already succeed at thinking about education ritualistically while offering models for educators to emulate in their own growth in this field.

I. Rituals that Order (Routines)

The first and most basic function of ritual is to order space or time. To this extent, rituals reframe a seamless flow of moments, objects, and senses into a concrete event that has meaning. Many rituals do much more than this important ordering, but some function solely in this way. A ball drops in Times Square, designating 00:00:00 on 01-01 as the first moment of a new year. An alarm sounds, making morning into "time to get up." The curtain falls, signaling that the play has ended.

In common parlance, rituals whose function is purely to order are routines. Most routines have the potential to gather more ritual elements and therefore to become "more ritualistic." However, even this basic function is an essential and valuable part of human life.

In education, routines are commonly used to demarcate time and space. Often, they facilitate a schedule, occurring at transition points when students need to move from one place or frame of mind to another. As well, the very nature of attending school is routine, signified

especially by terms such as "Sunday School." The following routines give order to the educational experience, signifying the time and space in which learning is to be done.[73]

Classroom Routines

CST: Students enter the fifth-grade classroom. They find seats at one of three large tables. Their teacher informs them that the students will be learning their last "short prayer" today, one that they already probably know. "It should be so obvious!" she says, and a student suggests that they will learn the *Barchu*. The teacher affirms this as the correct answer and begins to distribute a worksheet. She tells the students that the first part of the worksheet is a "do now" that they will complete as a game.

This opening is familiar to the students. They know that they can sit where they want and arrange themselves with friends for easy group work. They are familiar with the phrase "do now" as a marker of an activity that opens class time together. They await the game instructions with no further need to be told what to do.

Lazarus: The lights go out in the art room. This signals that class is about to end, and when the lights come back on, the second-grade students commence with clean-up. They place their finished or unfinished sculptures (spice boxes for *havdalah*) on a shelf at the side of the room, and they put their supplies in clearly-marked bins. Students line up at sinks to wash their hands while "clean-up inspectors" verify that each work table is tidy. The teacher slowly counts down from ten, and as she nears one, the students race, giggling, to complete their clean-up. When she reaches zero, a specially designated "helper" rings a bell. With the teacher's guidance, the class counts down again as the teacher makes her way to the front of the room where the "Smiley Spectrum" is located. When the class reaches zero, the teacher informs them, "Today's

[73] The rituals described in this section order time and space. Generally speaking, though, Jewish education has an overall ordering effect of articulating discretely Jewish ideas and behaviors. This function of Jewish education—establishing religious, cultural, and national orders for Jewish learners—is worthy of its own study.

Smiley Spectrum is 'Wow!'" After praising the students on their good behavior, the clean-up inspectors move from table to table, dismissing each one in turn. The students follow their primary teacher out of the art room, with the clean-up inspectors bringing up the rear.

This rather elaborate clean-up and dismissal routine has several components. Signals include the lights turning out, two countdowns, and the ringing of a bell. Several activities are contained in the routine including cleaning up the space as well as the students, ensuring that the room is ready for the next group, issuing an evaluation, and exiting the room. At each step, the students know what is expected of them—presumably, specific roles are assigned at an earlier point and are remembered for future execution. Some of these ritual components have elements of orientation: students in this class have a value of cleanliness, and the Smiley Spectrum communicates the value of happiness. As well, the designation of students with special roles creates an orientation of responsibility one-for-another. Nevertheless, the primary value of this ritual is one of ordering time and space so that one class can leave at least as clean as they arrived and another class can come into an art room ready for their own use.

Curricular or Large-Scale Routines

CST: Students arrive to Congregation Shem Tov and are greeted by parents and staff in the main hallway. They make their way to their classrooms, where they are greeted by teachers and collect their *t'fillah* binders, which contain the prayers for the weekly service. Class by class, they make their way into the sanctuary, where they are greeted by the associate rabbi. Sitting with their classmates and teachers, the students chat with one another while waiting for the service to begin.

This routine establishes an order for the entire school, and like the previous routine, it also carries some orientational weight. The process of arrival, movement to the classroom,

leaving behind of supplies brought to school, collecting one's *t'fillah* binder, and walking to the sanctuary serves as a transitional border between the mundane goings-on of the outside world and the sacred task of prayer and Jewish learning. This process orients students toward *t'fillah*, encoding a connection between prayer and study, though the bulk of that process of orientation occurs through the ritual of *t'fillah* itself. This introductory routine that inaugurates learning for the entire school establishes an order that lays the foundation for the work that the rest of the school day aims to accomplish.

Lazarus: The school day begins with students in their classrooms. The loudspeakers activate—a rare occurrence—and the voice of two or three children can be heard: "Good morning, Lazarus! Today is the first day of Kislev, the third month in the Jewish calendar."

This routine takes place only on *Rosh Chodesh*, the first day of a new month, and it was a recent addition to the Lazarus community at the time of my observation (Kislev 5774). Without any further commentary or ritual, it serves simply to announce the new month, similar to the role of *birkat hachodesh*, the blessing announcing the upcoming month that is incorporated into Shabbat morning prayer. As no other liturgical mention is made of the new month during Lazarus' normal complement of *t'fillot*, this announcement serves as the school's primary indication of the onset of a new month.

Summary

The routines described above demonstrate the ordering function of educational rituals. Dividing time and space into meaningful units, these rituals enable learners to move comfortably between zones by establishing familiar processes that students know to expect. These rituals are the most basic in function, though their form can be fairly complex, serving as the foundation for orienting and transforming rituals in other contexts.

II. Rituals that Order and Orient

Beyond the end of simply demarcating a time or place, rituals can also provide those who experience them with an orientation toward people and/or ideas. This function of ritual operates in two dimensions: It establishes a moral or social code which participants in the ritual learn are appropriate for them, and it forges or strengthens relationships among the participants in the ritual. Through this ritual function, a person can direct her life toward a particular moral course and can direct her self toward others in sacred relationship.

These rituals create a social order or social norm out of which a classroom or school "society" may be formed. Students internalize communal values, acknowledging them as normative, and they form friendships and other relationships that characterize their learning experience. This process creates what Durkheim refers to as solidarity and is primarily responsible for the cohesion of groups of students and teachers into a unified learning community.

Classroom Rituals

CST: In the classes I observed, I did not encounter rituals I would interpret as ordering and orienting.

Lazarus: A middle school English class is discussing Mildred Taylor's novel *Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry*. As I sit down for my observation, the teacher explains to me that students in this class don't raise their hands to speak. Rather, they "wait until there is space for them to speak." This process is facilitated by the students' assumption of roles, which I presume are rotated periodically. A "Speaker of the House" sets the agenda for the conversation, "Journalist 1" and "Journalist 2" are each expected to report on a different event that took place in the assigned reading, and the "Psychologist" offers a character analysis.

Conversation begins when the teacher invites "Journalist 1" to share her observations, and students offer their responses to the event. Occasionally, a student will raise his or her hand to be acknowledged; often, however, the expectation that students will speak when there is "space for them" guides students to engage in conversation with one another. Often, students direct their comments to one another while from time to time they address the teacher.

This ritual designation of roles has a clear ordering function: to facilitate classroom dialogue. Specific individuals are called upon to act in specific ways at specific times, and the familiarity with and expectation of this order establishes a steady flow of conversation. Additionally, one effect of this order is to direct students toward one another. They respond directly to the comments of their peers, exhibiting values conducive to dialogue: respect, interest, and eagerness. The group forms solidarity as a mutually respectful community of learners.

Curricular or Large-Scale Rituals

CST: The second grade curriculum focuses on Torah stories. About every other week, students illustrate a segment of "parchment" as a representation of a Torah story that the class has recently studied, and at the end of the year, these segments are sewn together by parent and teacher volunteers into a "*sefer Torah*" for each second-grade student. Each student receives his or her *sefer Torah* at a culminating service at Shavuot. In anticipation of this, the entire second grade comes together one Sunday morning with students' parents to make Torah mantles. Children sit with their parents at round tables in the atrium, taking materials from long communal stations set up by their teachers. Parent volunteers sew the Torah mantles together after each one is decorated. At the conclusion of the program, the Torah mantles are set aside to be collected later by the second grade teachers.

This ritual is an annual tradition and serves as a temporal marker that the school year is almost over and that Shavuot is nearing. While the internal mechanisms of the ritual—the actual sitting and decorating Torah mantles—are rather unstructured, the placement of the ritual in the calendar is fairly fixed. This is what may be termed an "open-script" ritual, in which the basic components such as time, duration, and goal are known in advance while the actual execution of the ritual relies on the creativity and initiative of those who participate in it.

As well, this ritual has two primary functions of orientation. First, it strengthens the familial relationships in the congregation. Children and their parents work together on Torah mantles, and families sitting side-by-side often help one another, talking in a friendly manner throughout. In this way, the ritual serves as an opportunity to reinforce social bonds in the community. Additionally, the task at hand—fashioning of a ritual object—orients the participants toward the Jewish value of honoring Torah. Families experience first-hand the care and ingenuity that goes into creating artwork for a *sefer Torah*, potentially enhancing their appreciation for the artwork on the congregation's own Torah scrolls. As well, having

contributed to a physical ritual object to be used during Shavuot services potentially increases a family's sense of commitment to the observance of Shavuot and sense of affirmation of its ascribed meaning of honoring Torah. Thus, this annual tradition not only serves as a temporal marker along the timeline of the second grade but also generates a context for the strengthening of relationships and the celebration of the importance of Torah.

Lazarus: The Lazarus School is a place where five core values are respected: *Ruach*, *Kavod*, *Kehillah*, *Tzedek*, and *Limmud* (spirit, honor, community, justice, and learning). These values are painted onto—sometimes even chiseled into—many of the walls at Lazarus, transforming the building itself into a reminder that behavior in this space is guided by those principles. These values are invoked ritualistically at various times and in various contexts at the Lazarus School. For example, I observed a Jewish Studies teacher asking her class, "Which Lazarus value does this text uphold?" As well, Kindergartners in *t'fillah* regularly sing the song "The Values We Choose," written by a Lazarus staff member, which lists and describes each of the school's core values. The placement of the values on the walls of the hallways, the classrooms, and the lunch room designates Lazarus as a special space characterized by special Jewish values, and regular invocation of these values orients students and faculty alike toward embracing them as normal modes of life at the school.

Summary

The rituals described above help create both a community as well as a community atmosphere. The orientation of learners and teachers alike is toward one another as well as toward shared communal values. Some of these rituals—such as invocations of the Lazarus School's core values—are specific to the individual school community, while others orient learners within the broader Jewish context. Even if students do not directly come into contact

with, for example, *t'fillah* or a public Torah reading outside of the context of their school, they nevertheless cultivate an awareness and appreciation that these elements are part of Jewish life. Thus, students affirm their solidarity with the Jewish community on personal, interpersonal, and broader communal levels.

Note: Rituals that Orient Without Order

My observations at CST and Lazarus, as well as anecdotal experience more generally, reveal instances in Reform life where rituals seem to orient but do so "out of order." Commonly, these are Shabbat rituals performed on days other than Shabbat. Their intent seems to be to orient students toward common traditional practices of Shabbat by familiarizing them with *b'rachot* and certain behaviors marked for Shabbat. However, the content of the ritual (for example, sanctifying the day of Shabbat) does not match the context (for example, a weekday afternoon). This is a classic example of *chinuch*, preparation. Students develop skills to be used at a later time, and the attainment of those skills is divorced from their meaning in the present moment. Such learning is occasionally necessary, though practitioners should take care to attend also to *Torah lishmah*, present-focused ritual learning.

CST: Each Sunday, the second grade enjoys challah and grape juice as part of their snack during their school day. Teachers and parents distribute grape juice to every student, and the community joins together in the blessing ending with *borei p'ri hagafen* (Creator of the fruit of the vine), which customarily is said during Kiddush, the sanctification of Shabbat or a holiday. Following the blessing, students drink their grape juice. Then, the community says the blessing ending with *hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz* (Who brings forth bread from the earth), each person taking a piece of challah to eat. While these *b'rachot* do not specifically mention Shabbat, the

use of challah, a bread generally reserved for Shabbat, marks this clearly as a Shabbat practice. The intent apparently is to generate an appreciation for Shabbat even outside of the day itself.

Similarly, the afternoon *t'fillah* at CST seems oriented toward a Shabbat morning service. The *nusach* (musical form) of the central prayer matches the one used on Shabbat, and blessings commonly said only in the morning are recited despite the late hour. In both cases, the rituals seem to function primarily as *chinuch*, preparing students to engage with them at a later and more chronologically appropriate time. Most of the prayers themselves are "timeless," of course, appropriate for Jewish worship at any hour. Nevertheless, I observed few elements of a *Torah lishmah* orientation, noting mostly indications that students were meant to be learning how to pray *later*.

Lazarus: Similarly, Shabbat rituals at Lazarus must by nature take place out of the context of Shabbat. While I did not observe such a ritual personally, an art teacher described to me the eventual use of the spice boxes the second-grade students were making. She explained that the spice boxes would be used at a family *havdalah* program to be held in the coming weeks on a Tuesday morning; the spice boxes would then be taken home for future use on Saturday nights. In this way, the school facilitates a *havdalah* experience in the middle of the week, a time that ordinarily would not be appropriate for the ceremony separating Shabbat from the rest of the week. Thus, like Shabbat rituals at CST, this kind of ritual functions primarily to orient students and their families toward common Shabbat observances without maintaining the established order generally reserved for those rituals. In both cases, *chinuch* rather than *Torah lishmah* is the operative focus.

III. Rituals that Order, Orient, and Transform

Ideal educational rituals order, orient, and transform, advancing the goals of education through the functions of ritual. Of course, not every ritual can achieve all three functions, and not every educational experience must be a ritual. However, the very rarity of these pinnacle rituals adds strength to them. In all my observations, I observed only one classroom ritual that I believe achieves all three ritual functions; nevertheless, its simplicity demonstrates that these rituals do not need special setup or complex preparations in order to be effective. Ultimately, as I shall describe in my conclusions, Jewish education is at its best when it reaches for its goals of through rituals such as these.

Classroom Rituals

Lazarus: First-grade students enjoy their snack during a break period in the middle of the day. Their teacher moves to a chair, which faces a small carpet, and announces to the students, "I want to see nineteen poets sitting on the carpet." The students throw out the trash from their snack and take seats on the carpet, and the teacher affirms, "We have nineteen poets sitting on the carpet." Throughout the poetry lesson, both teachers in the classroom refer to the students as poets: "Poets use ingredients to make a poem," and "Poets don't erase; they work with their first ideas." For this period of time, the students become poets.[74]

Order: The ordering function of the initial call is primarily temporal. Though the teacher has not announced "It's time for poetry," she nevertheless demarcates the time as now "poetry time" instead of "snack time." During this time, students know that they work on poetry, and they know that this time will end at a given point, giving way to yet another area of focus. The call to poets serves to change the quality of the time from one of freedom (snack) to structure

[74] The teacher of this class informed me that this pedagogical method is promoted by Lucy Calkins in her *Units of Study for Primary Writing: A Yearlong Curriculum (K-2)*. See http://www.unitsofstudy.com/default.asp.

(poetry), and repeated references to the students as poets continues to affirm that the time is set aside for this particular task.

Orient: Naming students as poets carries with it concomitant expectations that teachers have of students and that students have of themselves. As mentioned previously, teachers instruct the students in the art of poetry not with direct commands (e.g., "Make sure you use a lot of different images in your poem") but with general statements about the proper behavior of poets (e.g., "Poets use ingredients to make a poem"). The teachers in this way establish expectations about what poets value, and since the students themselves are poets, they, too, are expected to act according to these values.

Transform: Through this ritual, students become poets; they are not merely children writing poetry. They are invited to adopt the practices and values of poets, assured that these practices and values are naturally theirs. Poetry time will come to an end, and the teacher will later call for nineteen scientists to be seated on the carpet; nevertheless, for the time being, they engage in the art of poetry not as imitators but as authentic practitioners. Moreover, assuming the role of a poet can prepare a student psychologically as well as practically to develop this skill later in life, laying the foundation for young poets to become adult poets without needing anyone else to name them as such. Thus, the transformation of identity from student to poet affects the students in their present understanding of themselves and their ability to create as well as in their potential to grow into the role of a poet throughout their academic careers.

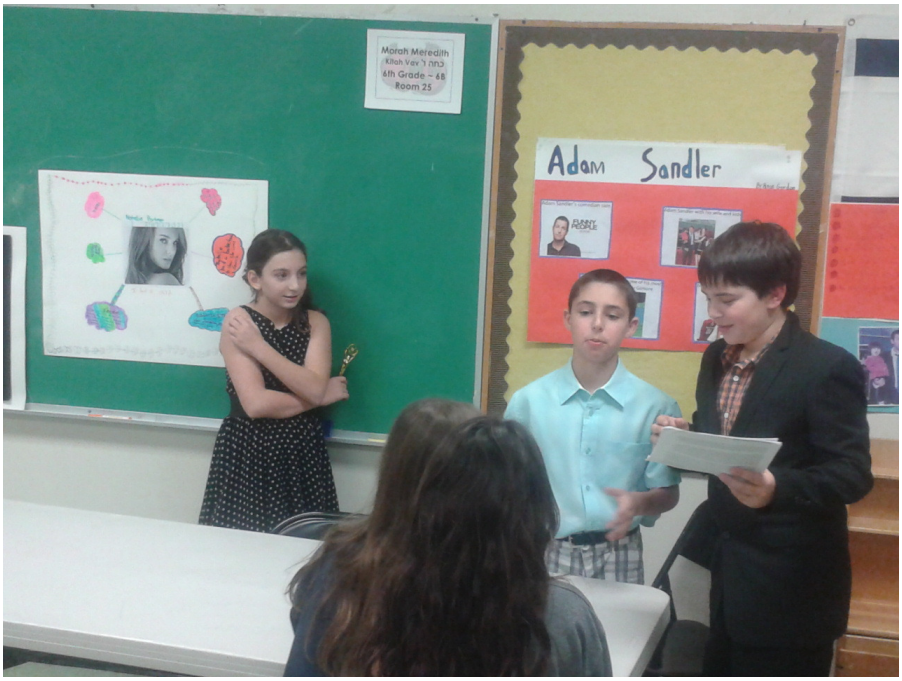
Summary

Classroom rituals like this one are simple and brief, yet they carry with them tremendous potential to advance educational goals. In a single sentence—reinforced by repetitions throughout the day and periodically throughout the curriculum—a teacher is able to achieve all

three ritualistic elements of education. She can order, using her words to establish a time set aside for a particular task. She can orient, enculturating her students in values that operate within and outside the classroom. And she can transform, creating potential in her students' self-perceptions for the exploration and assumption of new identities.

Curricular or Large-Scale Rituals

CST: I enter the sixth-grade "Wax Museum," in which each exhibit displays a poster board of information about a notable Jewish person from modern history. The author of each board stands in front of it, curating his or her exhibit, and approximately half of the students are dressed as the person they have researched. I speak with Albert Einstein, Mark Zuckerberg, Barbra Streisand, and others. Moreover, shortly after I arrive, visitors from other classes also begin to file in. Younger students spread out in the classrooms, speaking to the older sixth-graders about their personalities. In time, every grade will have an opportunity to visit the Wax Museum, the culminating experience of this central sixth-grade unit.



Order: This ritual establishes two primary orders. The first is chronological: the Wax Museum takes place as the culmination of a unit on Jewish historical personalities. The students have been preparing for this day, and afterward, they will move on to a new topic. The ritual, then, demarcates this day as a conclusion. Secondly, the Wax Museum transforms the space itself from a set of classrooms into an operative "wax museum." A visitor does not need to knock at the door just as one does not knock on a passage into a museum wing, and people are free to speak to one another aloud without concern for disrupting others' learning. Thus, the ritual creates a time and a place unlike any other, setting the stage for further ritual action.

Orient: The Wax Museum operates both to orient participants toward one another (relationship) and to orient them to the significance of Jews in modern history (values). Perhaps most evident is the affirmation of relationships among CST students. Younger students travel in groups of two or three (presumably with their friends), and they are constantly engaged in conversation with the sixth-graders. These conversations are rare as most religious school time is spent either in separated grade-level learning or in school-wide *t'fillah* (even in which classes

sit apart from one another). Thus, the ritual forges bonds between students who ordinarily would not have the opportunity to form relationships. Additionally, the entire enterprise is founded on the premise that it is important for Jews to acknowledge the place of other Jews in modern history. Absent from most boards I read were discussions of Jewish identity or the relevance of Jewishness upon an individual's life and work.[75] Nevertheless, the simple Jewishness of these figures is recognized as noteworthy, and the ritual engages students directly with this value.

Transform: This ritual effects a transformation in two ways: The first is dramatic, allowing sixth-grade students to "embody" a notable Jewish figure. In offering to students the opportunity to stand in the shoes of another, the ritual cultivates their ability to look at the world through different eyes. Having "been" Marilyn Monroe, for example—and presumably having absorbed some of the issues relevant to converting to Judaism before marrying the Jewish playwright Arthur Miller—provides a student with new lenses through which to view her own Jewishness.

Perhaps more importantly, the ritual transforms students into teachers. The sixth-grade students who have been researching their character transition from novice to "expert" as they relate their life stories to younger children. As the adage affirms, "You know best what you can teach," and these students cement their knowledge by sharing it with others. Through this transformation, the students also exhibit confidence in speaking on matters related to Judaism, giving them a voice with which they can actively participate in the Jewish educational tradition.

---

[75] An illustrative anecdote: The poster board of "Albert Einstein" bore the following quote, captured in an image available at http://whowasalberteinstein.com/?p=457: "My relationship to the Jewish people has become my strongest human bond, ever since I became fully aware of our precarious situation among the nations of the world." Nevertheless, when I asked the student about Einstein's Jewishness, he replied that being Jewish was not very important to him. I asked about the quote on the board, and he read it to me (as if noticing it for the first time), then said, "Maybe being Jewish was important to him." I believe that the student deduced that Jewishness was not important to Einstein because he turned down the opportunity to serve as President of the State of Israel. Interestingly, the quote on the board originates from the very letter he wrote declining Abba Eban's offer. See the Jewish Virtual Library's "Israel Modern History: Offering the Presidency of Israel to Albert Einstein," available : http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Politics/einsteinlet.html.

To summarize, the sixth-grade Wax Museum is a strong educational model in its embrace of ritualistic elements. First, it creates an ordered, unique time and space. Within that separated setting, people forge relationships among one another while the whole group orients itself around a set of operative values. And the roles established by the ritual enable a transformation that takes participants from one perspective and understanding to a wholly different one. In these ways, a culminating ritual such as the Wax Museum functions as an ideal type of educational experience.

Lazarus: A bus pulls away from the Lazarus School with approximately a half dozen middle school students. They are on their way to a local kindergarten class from another school, where every week the Lazarus students read to and work with an assigned "buddy" or two. The two chaperone teachers ask the students to reflect on their experience with me, to teach me about their unique opportunity to be part of the program. One student notes that working with the kindergarten students upholds the Lazarus values of *limmud* and *kavod*. Another says that their visit is important because it helps kindergartners love to read.

We arrive at the kindergarten school, and the students lead me to the classroom where they work every week. The kindergarten teacher, Ms. L, explains to the Lazarus students that this week, the kindergartners have been focusing on the word "like." After a few minutes, during which the kindergarten students finish their previous activity, the kindergartners run to their Lazarus buddies, who take them to the arrangement of books Ms. L has laid out for them. The small groups of students then spread out around the room.

Lazarus students read to their buddies, and many of them ask their buddies to draw pictures from the story when they are finished reading. A Lazarus chaperone informs me that the

practice of drawing after reading was developed by Lazarus students several months earlier when they were looking for new ways to engage their buddies around book topics.

After approximately 15-20 minutes, the groups gather together on the floor to share their work. One by one, groups consisting of a Lazarus student and one or two kindergarten buddies stand in front of and address their peers. The kindergarten students are the primary speakers, summarizing briefly the books they read with their Lazarus buddies and sharing any artwork or worksheets they completed. One of the Lazarus chaperones asks the kindergarten students if they would recommend their book to their friends; each of them says yes.

At the conclusion of the experience, the Lazarus students help put away materials and return to the bus. They eat their lunch on the bus ride back to Lazarus. (The program requires students to dedicate their recess, lunch, and one elective to this mentoring opportunity.) Again, the students reflect with me about their experiences. One shares that she sees herself as a "role model" for her buddies. Another relates that she had had a hard time with the program last year (her buddy was uncooperative) and chose to return again this year in order to try to have a more positive experience this time.

The bus returns to Lazarus, and the students make their way to their classrooms. The same time next week, they will repeat the process over again.

Order: There are several aspects of this educational ritual that are ordered. Firstly, the experience is reserved only for middle school students. In effect, it is a privilege available only to the oldest grades at Lazarus. Next, it occurs weekly during recess, lunch, and an elective period. This weekly recurrence solidifies the place of the ritual in the Lazarus curriculum; it clearly holds a place of importance to merit such resources on a weekly basis. And naturally, the ritual occurs at the same time and in the same place each week, designating the kindergarten

classroom—filled with groups of young buddies—as special. Ms. L relates to me that her students look forward to the arrival of the Lazarus students all day; their visit is a highlight of the week.

Orient: As suggested by one of the Lazarus students, this literacy project upholds the core values of *limmud* and *kavod*. The students engage in *limmud* through their teaching of others, and they engage in *kavod* in their honoring their buddies with respect. As well, the educational ritual brings the group of students closer together. Some students on this program attend for three consecutive years; students who do so share that their relationship with one other is special within their school. Moreover, those who participate in this program share a common experience with students from different grades who are rarely in the same place at the same time. And perhaps most significantly of all, the relationships formed among the kindergarten students and the Lazarus students is paramount. Both sets of students look forward to spending time with their buddies. Thus, the ritual orients participants toward key values upheld by the school, and it also orients participants toward one another within and between schools.

Transform: Both the kindergarten students and the middle school students transform through this experience. During the sharing period, kindergartners become experts, if momentarily, on the book they have read with their buddy. They stand in front of the class and teach their peers about what they have learned, recommending good books to them. Similarly, and perhaps more powerfully, the Lazarus students likewise transform into teachers. Once a week, they design the learning activities, and they help guide a less experienced reader toward understanding a concept or story. Lazarus students are not allowed to request a different kindergarten buddy; just like teachers, they have to work with the students they have. They make a semester- or year-long commitment to working with the same buddy or buddies week in

and week out, and their departure from their home school and arrival to a new school transitions them from the role of student to the role of teacher. As one chaperone shares with me, "These are transformative moments for sure. There is a lot more going on than just reading – you can see the kids transform before your eyes. You see students look through the lens of a teacher." Many alumni of this program incorporate their experiences into Bar and Bat Mitzvah projects, and many of them also write essays about their experiences for high school applications. Thus, students' transformation from learner to teacher is an enduring one, altering students' ability to perceive themselves as active participants in learning environments.

This weekly opportunity enabled by the Lazarus School is a powerful educational model. It operates within particular boundaries and within those boundaries, carves out an ordered time and space for a special event to transpire. Participants become oriented toward one another and toward the values of their school in a palpable and long-lasting way. And the experience transforms kindergartners and middle-schoolers alike into teachers. Each of these elements advances the goals of education, making this a model curricular offering that mirrors the fundamental elements of ritual.

Summary

These rituals are exemplars of ideal, transformative education. They engage students with meaningful Jewish content, they establish a community of learners, and they help individuals transform the way they view themselves in their world. The large-scale, curricular rituals require considerable preparation on behalf of educators, but the practitioners I interacted with affirmed that results are worth the effort. Because of their intensity, complexity, and expense, such rituals must be rare; as mentioned before, not every ritual can order, orient, and transform. However, these pinnacle experiences can be supported and strengthened by preceding

and follow-up experiences meant to underscore the transformation of the ritual. Not every day can a student experience this ritual, but every student should—in an ideal Jewish educational setting—experience such transformative educational rituals periodically throughout her student life.

IV. Rites of Passage and the Lazarus School's Siddur Ceremony

Arnold Van Gennep teaches, "The life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation [i.e., role] to another."[76] These transitions are difficult, including by necessity a departure from what is known and a trajectory toward the unfamiliar. To compensate for the discomfort caused by these inevitable changes, societies develop practices to guide "passengers" from one status to another. As Van Gennep puts it, "Such changes of condition do not occur without disturbing the life of society and the individual, and it is the function of rites of passage to reduce their harmful effects."[77] Rites of passage, then, are rituals designed to ease the turbulence of transition from one state to another. Involving by their very nature a transformation, rites of passage also qualify as a classification of "ideal" rituals, which order, orient, and transform.

In schools, transitions from one status to another are often felt keenly at significant turning points, particularly at the conclusion of academic years. Students transition from being, for example, a third-grader to a fourth-grader or a middle-schooler to a high-schooler. As was noted in Chapter 1, transformative ritual affects both a person's *persona* in society as well as her self-assessed *identity*. Educational rites of passage, accordingly, (A) indicate to the outside world that a student has attained a new status worthy of recognition while also (B) affirming to

[76] *Rites of Passage*. Routledge: London, 1960. 2-3.
[77] *Ibid*. 13.

the individual that she has fundamentally changed. In this way, students see themselves as "growing up," and teachers and students alike readily accept individuals' new statuses.

At Congregation Shem Tov, such rites of passage are regularly incorporated into the curriculum. Though I did not have the opportunity to observe any directly, I am aware anecdotally of their importance in the school. The second grade class, as noted above, concludes by receiving the Torah scrolls that the students craft throughout the year. Fourth-graders prepare for and experience a "*Havdalah Hispanica*," a ritual which demarcates not only Shabbat from the week but also fourth grade from fifth grade. And of course, the Bar and Bat Mitzvah ceremony, a rite of passage to which much of CST's Hebrew education is dedicated, marks a critical time of transition from CST's religious school program to its more mature high school education. As students pass through each of these rituals, they ease their way toward adulthood one step at a time, guided by their tradition and in solidarity with their peers.

The Lazarus School as well marks passage from year to year. Among the clearest examples of these rites of passages are trips taken in the middle school to places such as Washington, D.C. and, in eighth grade, to Israel. Younger grades as well mark student progress with rituals like the creation of a *Shema* book for kindergartners and a *havdalah* set for second-graders. Additionally, toward the end of the first grade year, Lazarus hosts a "*siddur* ceremony," which is a rite of passage from first grade to second grade, a particularly noteworthy transition in the development of a young reader. I was able to observe this ceremony twice. The first time was during my visit to Lazarus as part of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion's Day School Externship program, and I subsequently also observed this ceremony during my field research for this project. The following observation is from the second of these experiences.

Description of the ritual

Parents and children sit together in the Beit Midrash of the school. As usual, *t'fillah* is led by two Lazarus faculty members, Ms. Zelig and Mr. Nachman, though the inclusion of parents into this morning service is special. Each student holds her own personal *siddur*, or prayer book, that she created throughout her kindergarten year. This *siddur* has been in use all year and is decorated individually for each student. Some parents sing along with their children and the rest of the Lazarus community; the vast majority do not.

Prior to reciting *Shema*, Ms. Zelig invokes last year's family program, which focused on *Shema*. She reminds families that they learned special hand motions to go along with *Shema*, and as the community sings this central prayer, approximately 6-10 (out of about 50) parents make the hand motions. The students, as is their custom, make the hand motions along with the service leaders. Much of the service proceeds in this fashion; a minority of parents sings some songs and participates in some discussions by encouraging their children to speak, though most of the time most of the parents do not participate. *T'fillah* concludes with a new song, "The Values we Choose" (mentioned above), which was composed by Mr. Nachman. Parents and students alike look at the wall where the lyrics of the song are projected; most of the students sing along, and about one-third or one-fourth of the parents do as well. Presumably, the first-graders are reading at least some of the words to this new song, exhibiting a skill they did not possess when they started the grade.

At the conclusion of *t'fillah*, the congregation splits into smaller groups, facilitated by teachers, for the presentation of the students' new *siddurim*. A first grade teacher remains in the Beit Midrash with a group of students and parents. She explains to the group of students and parents that there are two surprises this morning. The first is that the students have made covers

for their *siddurim* but have not shown the designs to their parents. The second is that parents have put "a little bit of secret love" (an inscription) into their child's *siddur*.

One by one, a pair of parents (or, in one-quarter of the cases, one parent whose partner is absent but acknowledged) rises with their child in front of the small assembly. The parents read aloud their dedication of the *siddur*, and the students display the cover they have created. After each presentation, the student sits with her parents, holding her own copy of *Mishkan T'filah*, the Reform movement's prayer book. When all the presentations have concluded, parents sit with their children and "go on a *siddur* hunt." Each family is given a piece of paper with questions about the prayer book (such as "what page number is the *Shema*?"), and parents help their children answer these questions.

Following the *siddur* hunt, parents and children talk quietly among themselves as they wait for every group to finish. The groups make their way back into the Beit Midrash, and Mr. Nachman strums his guitar while talking with families and helping them settle into seats. Ms. Zelig then makes a few personal remarks. She wishes that the first-graders will love their new *siddur* and that they love the love that their parents put into them. She also acknowledges the first grade teaching team, "who I love so much."

Prior to adjourning, Ms. Zelig and Mr. Nachman lead the congregation in a few final blessings. They sing *Shehechiyanu*, a prayer commemorating a new and momentous occasion, and Ms. Zelig encourages the congregation to "pause just for a second and hold this moment. Hold it for as long as you can. Remember the love and the closeness and connection and how lucky we are to be in a community that celebrates this way." Students are instructed to turn to page 100 for the final song: *Oseh Shalom* (The One Who Makes Peace). At the conclusion of the service, Ms. Zelig urges the first-graders to say good-bye to Mr. Nachman, who will be

leaving Lazarus to attend rabbinical school. The students are instructed to leave their *siddurim* on their chairs; their teachers will collect them and bring them to their classrooms. The students then exit with their parents to celebrate with snacks in the *cheder ochel*, cafeteria, for what might be considered—though is not called—a *se'udah*, a festive meal.

This rite of passage is an important ritual in the tenure of a Lazarus student as it marks the onset of English and Hebrew literacy. Students will use their copies of *Mishkan T'filah* for the next two years before a majority of students choose to make use of the school set of prayer books. Thus, the outcomes of the ceremony ripple into the future of the students' personal and academic lives.

Ritual functions

As a rite of passage, the siddur ceremony orders, orients, and transforms. The ordering function is particularly prominent, signaling the conclusion of first grade for students, teachers, and parents. As well, the ritual takes place primarily in the Beit Midrash, which is the fixed prayer space at Lazarus. In this way, the Beit Midrash is designated as a significant location in the minds of students and parents alike.

The orientation of the ritual is twofold. First, parents and children relate in a unique way to one another as they share their "secret love" with one another. It is rare for parents to join their children at school, and this experience strengthens their connection to one another. Additionally, there are Jewish and secular values that are held up as virtues through this ritual which students embrace as members of the Jewish group. First, the *siddur* ceremony takes place during *t'fillah*, marking prayer as a central component of the ongoing development of Lazarus students. Themes of love and prayer are reiterated throughout the service, indicating that they are principles which are essential to the community. And throughout the ceremony, first-graders

are celebrated as new readers, honoring the value of literacy and encouraging students to embrace the practice of reading.

This leads to the transformative power of the ritual. Through weeks and months of planning, the first-grade students have prepared for the moment when they would receive their own copy of *Mishkan T'filah*, a book owned and used by Jewish readers. Finally, they receive their book from the hands of their parents, inscribed with a personal message of their love. Through this act, the students become Jewish readers. Certainly, their reading skill does not change from one day to the next, but the students' self-perception is opened up to include a new self-image. As well, this ritual brings parents closer to their children's growing Jewish identity and literacy, serving as a platform of transformation within the Jewish growth of the family as a whole.

Summary

The Lazarus School's first-grade *siddur* ceremony powerfully orders, orients, and transforms. It serves as a model rite of passage whose impact extends to the whole family—indeed, to an entire grade level community. Such rites of passage can be incorporated into curricula for every age range in any educational program, as is evidenced by CST's robust assortment of concluding rituals. These cumulative experiences draw from and expand upon rituals throughout the year and magnify the educational reach a school can have in the ongoing development of its students.

V. *T'fillah*

In my observations at both CST and Lazarus, many teachers, administrators, and parents assumed that my project on "ritual" would be concerned with Jewish religious rites such as

t'fillah and Shabbat observance. As I explained that these were not my primary areas of inquiry, my interlocutors would often express either eagerness or confusion at the extension of ritual beyond these familiar examples. These common reactions indicate the popular understanding of "ritual" as something both liturgical and identifiably religious.

For this reason, I would be remiss not address my experience of *t'fillah* at both CST and Lazarus. While prayer at each school is unique, they share in common the ritual functions of ordering and orienting; ordinary *t'fillah* at neither school appears transformative.

CST: Students arrive to the sanctuary in their classes, each student carrying a binder. Rabbi Hecht wears a *tallit* (prayer shawl) and stands on the bima, facing the students as they take their seats. After the classes have arrived and before *t'fillah* has begun, the religious school director reminds students to "get ourselves into a less playground-like place." She guides them to close their eyes, to find a moment of quiet in their return to school. Following this, another rabbi from the congregation announces some youth group events.

Four students, presumably pre-selected, immediately take seats on the bima and following the rabbi's youth group announcements, they stand in a line and—together with Rabbi Hecht—recite the *b'racha* (blessing) for putting on a *tallit*. Each of them dons a *tallit*. Aside from this, not a single student wears a *tallit* or a *kippah* (head covering). The men in the sanctuary—of which there are approximately five—each wear a *kippah*; none of the women wears one.

The service begins with *Elohai N'shamah* and continues with *Hallelu*, both of which are unique to the morning service. (Note earlier discussion about ritual that is performed "out of order.") The congregation is instructed to rise, and the four students at the front of the sanctuary then lead the community in *Barchu*, the call to worship. Rabbi Hecht introduces the communal

response with "And we answer them." The community remains standing for the recitation of *Shema* and *V'ahavta*. Before each of the foregoing liturgical pieces, Rabbi Hecht has announced a page number.

After the community takes their seats, the rabbi asks "What words are we going to be reading from the Torah this week?" The rabbi insists, "It's so obvious," and students offer approximately a half dozen guesses, several of which are accurate. The rabbi repeats, "It's obvious," and a student suggests "*Mi Chamocha*." The rabbi affirms that this is the correct answer. After a brief introduction, he leads the congregation in singing that song without announcing a page number.

The rabbi invites the "sixth-grade boys" to the *bima* to lead the congregation in the *Amidah*, the central prayer, because they sang loudly during the *Mi Chamocha*. The rabbi and these boys face the ark as the community continues with the *Amidah*. As has been the case throughout the entire service, very few students look at their binders, and during these prayers in particular, many students stand silently or talk quietly with their neighbors. Following the second blessing of the *Amidah*, the rabbi instructs the congregation to be seated.

The rabbi announces a page number and introduces the Mourner's *Kaddish*. "As we've started to do every week," he instructs, "we say the words of the *Kaddish*, a beautiful prayer that—even if we don't know what the words mean—is very beautiful." He informs students that congregations "everywhere" say this prayer. He invites the congregation to rise and begins to recite the *Kaddish*. Almost every student remains silent while a few follow along. After the *Kaddish* concludes, the rabbi invites the "sixth-grade girls" to lead *Oseh Shalom*, a prayer for peace whose words are identical to the end of the *Kaddish*.

At the conclusion of this prayer, the congregation is seated, and the rabbi invites announcements. The assistant education director announces a new food collection of non-perishable breakfast foods. After clarifying what this means (mostly breakfast cereal), Rabbi Hecht announces *tzohorayim tovim*, good afternoon, "and have a sweet and wonderful rest of your day."

This *t'fillah* experience orders insofar as it happens at the beginning of every CST mid-week religious school session, and it takes place in the sanctuary, a place of prayer. By walking into this space, the students know that they are entering a sacred realm in which they will learn about and engage with their religious traditions. As well, *t'fillah* at CST seeks to orient the students toward the common practices of Jewish prayer through *chinuch*: reciting Hebrew at appropriate times, standing and sitting at appropriate times, witnessing the donning of special prayer garb, etc. are demonstrated to be normative Jewish behaviors. Probably contrary to the wishes of the prayer leaders, few students fully participate in the service, and some remain silent throughout the entire proceeding. This phenomenon, too, has an orienting effect: the students develop and become used to a culture in which prayer is directed by prayer leaders and participation by community members is both optional and dependent upon their individual level of Jewish and Hebrew literacy. As well, they become familiar with a culture in which periodic Jewish prayer in a sanctuary is an expected component of Reform Jewish life. Anecdotal experience suggests that this prayer environment is common in Reform congregations across North America among youth and adults alike. Students at CST, then, are taught and continue to reinforce what constitutes a normative Jewish prayer service in North American Reform congregations.

In these ways, *t'fillah* at CST orders and orients; however, the opportunities for transformation are few. The seeming prayer leaders, the four students who don *tallitot* at the beginning of the prayer service, could see themselves as communal leaders, though I doubt the experience is more than *pro forma* given how directive the rabbi is during the service. I did not observe evidence suggesting that the students wearing *tallitot* saw themselves as anything other than religious school students like their peers in the pews. The same applies for the sixth-grade boys and girls who are invited to lead the congregation in song. Such leadership opportunity hints at the *potential* for transformation without, I believe, achieving that transformation. I believe that these experiences of congregational "leadership" are more like *chinuch* in preparation of leading a Bar or Bat Mitzvah service than actual leadership in the moment.

While I did not observe a transformational *t'fillah* experience, such experiences certainly could take place with some regularity at CST. Indeed, while it would not be possible for transformation to occur every week, special occasions such as holidays and communal celebrations present more opportunities for transformation. These observations indicate that regular *t'fillah* services, then, can serve as an ordering and orienting base of Jewish prayer experience that set the stage for rarer, more transformative experiences. Schools such as CST ideally will take opportunities when available to transcend their ordinary *t'fillah* experience in order to achieve all three functions of educational ritual.

Lazarus: Regular *t'fillah* at Lazarus in many ways mirrors *t'fillah* at CST. *T'fillah* at the day school is divided primarily by grade level, though the Middle School (comprised of grades six, seven, and eight) has *t'fillah* together. I observed several *t'fillah* sessions for younger grades. Words for the prayers in these *t'fillah* sessions are projected onto a wall, and every selection is sung with guitar accompaniment. Each session includes an opportunity for students

to share their own words of gratitude as well. Each song is a few lines long with more English than Hebrew. As well, neither students nor their teachers wear *kippot* or *tallitot*, though the prayer leaders do wear *kippot*. Participation levels are generally high, though it is of interest that aside from *Shema*, no traditional prayer is recited in its fullness in the younger grades.

The following is an observation of a Middle School "*minyan*," prayer service.

A few boys put on *tallitot* upon entering; two in particular work together to remember and recite the blessing. As the service begins, approximately six-in-ten of the students wear *kippot*. This number dramatically increases as teachers walk around with baskets of *kippot* and the faculty prayer leaders encourage students to "take a *kippah*." Another teacher distributes school copies of *Mishkan T'filah*.

The service is led by the Middle School Rabbi, Rabbi Levy, and another faculty member who plays guitar. After the opening song *Mah Tovu*, Rabbi Levy reminds the students of her expectations: "Be on the page that we're on. Mouths open in prayer or closed in respectful silence. Attention to leaders at the front. Be a respectful member of our community." The community continues with *Elohai N'shamah* (incidentally, the same melody used at CST), and following the song, students are instructed not to drum on their prayer books.

The community continues with chanting *Nisim B'chol Yom*, the daily miracles. Rabbi Levy mentions that the morning blessings today are longer than usual because there will not be a Torah reading this week since no student will celebrate becoming Bar or Bat Mitzvah on the upcoming Shabbat. Most students do not participate in the recitation of these Hebrew *b'rachot* (which are absent from *t'fillah* for the younger students), and many students talk with one another during them. More students participate in the following prayers, most of which are begun and conducted without announcement from the service leaders; most of these prayers are

entirely in Hebrew as printed in *Mishkan T'filah*. From time to time, a faculty member will speak to a student who is talking during *t'fillah*, thus helping to enforce an atmosphere of focus and attention to the prayers being led from the front of the room.

Following *Amidah*, Rabbi Levy encourages students to "take a moment for silent prayer and reflection. Be seated when you're ready." When she finishes speaking, most students immediately sit down. Most students are silent, while a few speak to one another. Within a minute, all students are seated and quiet.

After the singing of *Oseh Shalom*, two students present a Bar Mitzvah gift—a *chamsa* with the student's Hebrew name on it—to their classmate who had celebrated his Bar Mitzvah ceremony on the previous Shabbat. It is unclear to me precisely where this gift comes from, though I assume that is purchased by the Lazarus School. Following this presentation, students put their *siddurim* away, and the teachers make a few special announcements, an uncommon occurrence at these *t'fillot*.

Similarly to *t'fillah* at CST, these services both order and orient. The service is a regular part of the Middle School week, though it might be noted that this Monday service does not include a Torah reading even though it is traditional (both in Jewish prayer and at Lazarus) to include in a Monday morning service. I was told that—had a student been about to celebrate a Bar or Bat Mitzvah ceremony—there would usually have been a brief Torah service; absent this occasion, though, more time is spent on the morning blessings, as was mentioned above. As at CST, the *t'fillah* marks the time and space reserved for it as sacred, therefore indicating that different behavior is appropriate.

As such, *t'fillah* at Lazarus orients the students toward a culture of attentiveness and participation during Jewish prayer. Students are told not to talk and are instructed to participate

actively in the service, which is performed mostly in Hebrew. This demonstrates the value not only of Hebrew as a liturgical language but also of each individual Jew expressing prayer in that language. Students are strongly encouraged to wear *kippot*, though no particular mention is made of *tallitot*. There are no signs of *tefillin*, the third ritual prayer garment worn during traditional morning prayer. As at CST, these practices and expectations acculturate students to approach and engage in prayer as it often appears in contemporary North American Reform synagogues. That is, synagogues value (though rarely encounter) full communal participation, and Reform synagogues often encourage the wearing of select ritual items, excluding *tefillin*. Many Reform synagogues pray in Hebrew and English, and the variety of language options that a Lazarus students encounters through her tenure at the school prepares her for both modes of prayer. In sum, *t'fillah* at Lazarus has a strongly orientational function, normalizing students to a North American Jewish religious culture in which they can feel solidarity.

As at CST, opportunities for transformation are minimal in this prayer service. Students remain students, and teachers remain teachers. In both services, I observed most students not participating in the *Amidah* and sitting down immediately thereafter, suggesting a disconnection from this central component of Jewish prayer by a majority of students. If it is possible to observe evidence of a meaningful relationship with God, I did not do so; at Lazarus, as at CST, prayer seems to be a repetitive motion more than a spiritual practice. Thus, ordinary *t'fillah* at Lazarus primarily orders and orients, laying the groundwork for rarer moments of transformation.

Accordingly, it should be noted that the space and form of *t'fillah* are used for some of the most transformative moments that are experienced at the Lazarus School, including the first grade *siddur* ceremony described above. Similarly, I surmise that student participation in *t'fillah*

at CST lays the groundwork for their potentially transformative prayer experiences as they celebrate their Bar or Bat Mitzvah ceremonies and future milestones as Jewish adults. It bears repeating, then, that not every ritual can or should be transformative. Some rituals perform their functions admirably in simply ordering or ordering and orienting, laying the foundations for transformation which, after all, derive part of their effectiveness from their rarity.

Summary

In the foregoing pages, I have summarized my observations at Congregation Shem Tov and the Lazarus School, particularly focusing on ritual aspects of education at these schools. The areas under consideration have been:

I. Rituals that Order (Routines)

II. Rituals that Order and Orient

III. Rituals that Order, Orient, and Transform

IV. Rites of Passage and the Lazarus School's *Siddur* Ceremony

V. *T'fillah*

Through the power of ritual, students are guided through their school days and years, and they find themselves as part of a community that observes shared outlooks, behaviors, and goals. In my experience, educators rarely consider their own work as "ritualistic." I have tried to show that this common perception is incomplete. Educators *do* use rituals to reach their educational goals, and these rituals sometimes do and sometimes do not occur with specifically Jewish contents and contexts. Indeed, as I shall explain further in the Conclusion, the incorporation of ritual language and thought into educators' common practice will, I believe, generally enrich Jewish education.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

The leitmotif of this project has been Order, Orient, and Transform. I have sought to apply this tripartite rubric to ritual and to education, suggesting that approaching both fields from this path is meaningful and fruitful. My concluding thoughts review the mutuality that I perceive in these two fields and then focus on the influence that ritual can have on Jewish education in today's society. In particular, I suggest that attention paid to ritual's *form* and *significance* can open up Jewish education to creative new endeavors that advance Jewish values.

Mutual impact

The model that I have proposed suggests that both ritual and education are two approaches to common human processes of social and personal development. Theorists such as Emile Durkheim and Victor Turner describe rituals as necessary to group cohesion and moral achievement, and scholars such Michael Rosenak and John Dewey argue the same about education. Both ritual and education have real and lasting effects on people's public personas and personal identities, and designers of ritual and educational experiences therefore bear significant potential to impact the lives of others. It is natural that these different realms of human growth are often separated in the normal course of modern life, though I have endeavored to show that they are not as distinct as they might otherwise appear. Ritual and education are different, but their considerable overlaps in function and aspiration lend them easily to mutual application of lessons from one area to the other.

Primarily I have focused on the benefits of considering education ritualistically, and I shall continue to expand upon those thoughts below. I would be remiss not to mention, however, the impact that educational theory and practice can have on ritual. The field of education has developed robust insights into the enactment of "best practices," learning how to reach and

engage learners with a variety of backgrounds and interests. The structures of educational systems have had tremendous success in organizing societies into functional and productive communities of ever-higher achievement, and diverse methods of inquiry and explorations of modes of understanding have enabled educators to impact the lives of virtually every member of North American society. The compelling vision of the growth of the human mind and the successful establishment of diverse schools and other learning environments speak to the longevity and reach of the field of education. Surely any movement with such wide-spread participation and interest is worthy of considerable study and emulation.

In particular, ritual practitioners would do well to learn about the educational system's successes in changing society's plausibility structures. In less than a century and a half, public education has come to be an accepted, nearly sacred, aspect of North American culture, and through the school system, ideas of what it means to participate in North American society have changed and grown. In the same time span, religious movements and other ritual-based social institutions (such as fraternal organizations, amateur sports teams, etc.) have declined in their prevalence and influence. The field of ritual can learn much from education, perhaps most of all its unparalleled capturing of the public's attention and resources.

On a smaller scale, advances in education would be most welcome in the development of Jewish ritual implementation. The educational system has progressed significantly in addressing multiple learning needs, social requirements of individuals with disabilities, bullying, goal-setting, and acculturation into a diverse society. Many Jewish communities remain "behind" comparable educational institutions in their desire and ability to address unique needs, to articulate clear goals and visions, and to enfranchise families. Ritual actors have the potential to be at least as impactful as educators in today's society, but such broad-scale achievement is rare.

Applying the insights of education into the field of Jewish ritual is most certainly a worthwhile endeavor.

My own study, however, has primarily examined the "other direction." I have explored the impact that ritual theory and practice can have on education, in particular Reform Jewish education. To summarize and conclude this project, I suggest that the field of ritual can enrich Jewish educational practice in two primary areas: ritual form (including liturgy) and significance.

Ritual Form

There are many ways that ritual can be incorporated into Jewish educational environments, and the foregoing chapter illustrates several of them. In order to provide discretely practicable suggestions, I will highlight one area in particular which may be of use to educators: ritual form.

Often, the question of "form" in Jewish education is one of "formal" and "informal" education. Put simply, formal education takes place in schools and informal education takes place outside of schools, in environments such as camp, youth group, Israel travel, etc.[78] Various methods of teaching and learning may be applied differently in these settings, and educators account for formal and informal contexts when considering topics such as lesson planning, socializing, and recreation. "Form," then, often refers to the setting of Jewish education which guides appropriate practice.

I propose that ritual can serve as a third "form" of Jewish education. Just as educators create lesson plans that specifically cater to "formal" and "informal" settings, so can they expand their planning to include "ritual" settings. Just as informal educators attempt to take advantage of the freedom associated with being outside of school, and just as formal educators attempt to

[78] Cf. Joseph Reimer and David Bryfman's "Experiential Jewish Education" in *What We Now Know about Jewish Education*, pp. 343-352.

take advantage of the structure associated with being in a school, so can ritual educators attempt to take advantage of the ordering, orienting, and transforming functions associated with ritual experience.

To attend to ritual form, educators may start by asking the question: How can I foster an experience that orders, orients, and/or transforms? As ritual and education both ultimately aim for transformation, transformative rituals should be included at least occasionally in curricula. Educators may find rites of passage, particularly at easily recognized moments of transition such as the completion of a school year, to be straightforward examples of transformative rituals. On the level of individual units or lessons, practitioners can attend to awareness of setting aside special places and times (order) as well as cultivating a shared set of communal values and behaviors that increase solidarity (orientation). Educators may also create opportunities for regular transformative experience such as the method (described in Chapter 3) by which students are called into a new role (e.g., "poets"). On the base level, then, educators may simply pay attention to the rituals in their classrooms and curricula, making space for a ritual form in their education.

As well, educators operating with the ritual form may achieve their goals more effectively in attending to the four elements of effective ritual: a plausibility structure, living options, meaningful content, and an affirmative community. As noted above (Chapters 1 and 2), persons can accept into their lives only what they believe to be possible and relevant; therefore, educators are wise to consider actively "where the learners are." Jewish educators should not expect students to embrace an image of God they find to be unbelievable, for example, nor should they anticipate religious observance that appears arcane and incomprehensible. Rather, educators can either change students' expectations by creating transformative and sustaining

ritual experiences that alter learners' plausibility structures and redefine what they accept as living options, or they can tailor their content to harmonize with students' latent expectations. The four pillars that hold up the ritual form are key ingredients to successful education within it.

Liturgy

I have thus far proposed that educators may enrich the education they design by admitting into their planning an awareness of ritual form. I have attempted in Chapter 3 to illustrate examples of educational rituals that practitioners may incorporate into their own work. In addition to these examples, it may be helpful to think also of the concept of "liturgy" as a tool for developing ritual form.

As was mentioned above, many educators with whom I spoke during my field research assumed that my project on ritual would focus on *t'fillah* and *b'rachot*. These acts of prayer are easily identifiable as rituals, and they are familiar perhaps to all Jewish educators. Though I have attempted to show that many rituals fall outside of these boundaries, it is of course appropriate to consider the place of traditional rituals such as these in education. *T'fillah* and *b'rachot* are examples of "liturgies," and the inclusion of liturgical elements into Jewish education may be attractive to some educators who wish to attend to ritual form.

"Liturgy" has often been used exclusively to refer to discrete texts used during religious worship. However, Lawrence Hoffman suggests a more expansive definition that can guide educational practice. He writes that liturgies are "acted-out rituals involving prescribed texts, actions, timing, persons, and things, all coming together in a shared statement of communal identity by those who live with, through, and by them."[79] Thus, according to Hoffman, liturgy essentially includes *ritual action* with *traditional components* in a *communal context*. *T'fillah*

[79] *Beyond the Text: A Holistic Approach to Liturgy*. Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 1987. p. 3.

and *b'rachot*, as mentioned, are clearly liturgical, though many other examples may also be considered to fit the definition.

Accordingly, some of the rituals described in the previous chapter are clearly liturgical. The first grade *siddur* ceremony, for example, involves ritual action (as previously related), traditional components (most prominently the *siddur* itself), and a communal context (the first grade class who assume identities as new readers). Other rituals technically fulfill Hoffman's broad definition but perhaps less evidently so. For example, Congregation Shem Tov's Wax Museum involves ritual action (assuming and presenting the identity of a famous Jewish person), traditional components (restricting the activity to discussing only Jews and highlighting personal statements and texts reflecting on their stated Jewish connections), and a communal context (the sixth grade students as older students teaching younger peers). And some rituals described in the previous chapter—such as the "do now" exercise at CST or the classroom discussion technique utilized in the middle school English class at Lazarus—are not liturgical or are liturgical only in a very expansive sense.

Generally speaking, educators with whom I spoke tend to be most familiar with traditional liturgies that are recognizably Jewish through their inclusion of Hebrew language and/or prayer. These rituals indeed have potential to order, orient, and transform in an educational context, and Jewish educators may find that including more of them in their practice enriches their work. For example, teachers may open a lesson with the recitation of the *b'rachah* for studying Torah.[80] *T'fillah* can be incorporated into day trips taken by schools, and ceremonies such as *havdalah* and blessings over lighting the Hanukkah candles can be incorporated into special evening programs. And new liturgies, such as the blessing for

[80] בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לַעֲסֹק בְּדִבְרֵי-תוֹרָה.
Blessed are You, Eternal our God, Sovereign of the universe, who has sanctified us with Your commandments, commanding us to engage in words of Torah.

performing acts of *tikkun olam* incorporated into Dan Nichols' song "L'takein (the Na Na Song)," may be embraced for any number of occasions.[81] In each of these cases, traditional texts of various kinds can be combined with ritual actions in an educational context to create opportunities to connect learners to one another in a Jewish way and to embrace some of Judaism's greater values.

Naturally, the same careful planning appropriate for any other ritual is important in implementing these new liturgies as well. Blessings said with incomprehensible words (in Hebrew or unfamiliar English) are not meaningful content; nor is a separation between a mundane Sunday and a holy Saturday meaningful for a person or community that has not recognized Shabbat. Attention to the elements of effective ritual is especially important when designing rituals using ancient Jewish traditions and texts which emerge from a social and historical context very different from our own. Therefore, while classical and creative liturgies can be excellent sources of orientation and transformation for today's Jewish learners, both children and adults, it is essential to engage in them within appropriate contexts and with fitting expectations on the part of both the learners and the educators.

Ultimately, whether ritual form includes traditional Hebrew blessings or practices which do not appear to be religious at all, this mode of educational thinking can diversify and deepen the offerings of today's Jewish educational system. Many educators already incorporate ritual into their regular practice, and in drawing their attention to the effects of these rituals, practitioners may find inspiration in continuing to meet their goals of communal solidarity and

[81] The blessing and translation written for this song are בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁנָּתַן לָנוּ הִזְדַּמְּנוּת לְתַקֵּן אֶת הָעוֹלָם , "Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, for giving us the opportunity to repair the world." © 1996 Dan Nichols, E18hteen and Rabbi Ron Klotz. Available: http://static.squarespace.com/static/50550cd6c4aad0824d1ea95f/t/50666287c4aa71efcf502073/1348887175652/L'takein%20Chord.pdf.

personal transformation. Paying careful attention to the ordering, orienting, and transforming elements of Jewish education can establish a ritual form conducive to rich, effective education.

Significance

Rituals connect people to orders, communities, and even destinies beyond themselves. Through ritual, individuals can see themselves as part of a larger whole: they are unique elements in a vast web of people and things; they are single members of a broad community; they are a snapshot within the greater framework of their entire lives. In other words, ritual helps people take part in "something bigger."

In the field of education, one "bigger" question, raised in Chapter 2, is "What is Jewish education *for*?" Perhaps Jewish education is meant to delineate what is authentically Jewish from what is not Jewish and to communicate this distinction to members of Jewish communities. Perhaps Jewish education creates Jewish communities. Perhaps Jewish education is a means through which persons become self-actualizing Jewish adults. Regardless how an educator might answer this fundamental question for herself, rituals can help her students engage with the deeper meaning behind lessons and experiences. Rituals bring us into conversation with one another around the abiding values of our tradition and help us become new people through personal growth and discovery, connecting us with a heritage and future history-to-be-born in which any Jewish learner can take part.

Because of its ability to address deep questions of meaning and value, ritual helps bring out the *significance* of Jewish education. It is difficult to answer a young student's question, "Why do I have to go to Hebrew School?" with a straightforward explanation. However, when a student shares a moving *t'fillah* experience with her friends at school or at camp, or when a confirmand receives a personal blessing from her rabbi, or when a young person steps into the

Land of Israel for the first time, the importance of Jewish education becomes manifest. Rituals say what words cannot, communicating intrinsically the abiding worth of Jewish life and living.

Therefore, ritual form not only has the potential to diversify Jewish educational practice, it also has the capacity to translate educational experiences into profound understandings of values and commitments. Through ordering, rituals help learners recognize the possibility of a "bigger picture." Through orienting, rituals help learners participate in a community and to internalize that community's values. And through transforming, rituals help learners and communities know themselves and bring themselves closer to their own ideal image. Ultimately, this may be the greatest value of ritual in Jewish education and the strongest reason to consider ritual form when designing educational experiences.

Final thoughts

Jewish education is rife with rituals. Indeed, rituals suffuse all of life, for without them, human beings would be unable to make sense of their myriad experiences, to form and sustain supportive communities, or to transcend their limitations and grow to embrace new possibilities. Therefore, in one sense, my project has simply focused attention on an element of education that has always been present.

On the other hand, I also believe that the power of rituals to order, orient, and transform can be harnessed more regularly and channeled into more personally meaningful Jewish education. In particular, I suspect that today's community may focus disproportionate concern and attention on continuity and, consequently, on preparatory *chinuch*, and I believe that a thoughtful embrace of a ritual form in education can help educators strike a healthy balance between *chinuch* and *Torah lishmah*. Ideal rituals not only orient us into a structured community in which we adopt the roles of a persona within that community but they also open learners to

new living options, helping them to erase former self-restrictions and to create new identities of self-driven learning beyond the structures of the past. By reaching for ritual's transforming function, educators can transcend the boundaries of a *chinuch* that attempts to replicate the past in the future, fostering dynamic, self-reliant Jewish learners who see themselves as new stewards of what it means to live as Jews in today's world.

Jewish educators from time to time search for the "magic bullet" of Jewish education. This artillery metaphor seems to refer to an intention to "kill" threats to Jewish continuity, especially attrition rates following Bar and Bat Mitzvah ceremonies. However, we need not turn to language of violence, nor even to language of aiming in one particular direction. Rather than a "magic bullet," let us search instead simply for magic. Magic is the work of effective ritual, through which the world is changed in the transformation of identity. It empowers us to remake Jewish people and Jewish communities, striving for a vision of human life and community consistent with ancient and ever-renewing Jewish values.

The power of transformative ritual is already latent in our Jewish educational system, and we have the ability to bring it to the forefront of our efforts. Indeed, many inroads already exist. For example, in Summer 2013, the UJA Federation of New York's Jewish Education Project sponsored a professional conference at the Disney Institute in Orlando, Florida, hoping to inspire in youth professionals, educators, clergy, and lay leaders an appreciation for and skills to create Jewish educational magic.[82] Like these adventurous Jewish educators, practitioners across North America have before them endless potential to cultivate meaningful learning, using ritual to change lives. Embracing ritual form and the significance of the Jewish values it evokes, we have the power to make our formal and informal learning settings places of magic. They, like

[82] Cf. "Creating Magical Learning Experiences." Available: http://www.thejewisheducationproject.org/news/Creating-Magical-Learning-Experiences.

Disneyland, can be places where "you leave today and enter the world of yesterday, tomorrow, and fantasy."[83]

[83] A plaque bearing this quote, attributed to Walt Disney, sits at the gate of Disneyland in Anaheim, California.