



THE INSTITUTE FOR EXPERIENTIAL JEWISH EDUCATION

The Jewish Pedagogies Project Concept Paper

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A NEW WAY OF THINKING FOR AN AGE-OLD APPROACH

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[1] Background and Goals of the Jewish Pedagogies Project

It is the belief of M² that Judaism contains rituals, customs, and mitzvot relevant to the world of Jewish education. Through such rituals, customs, and *mitzvot*, we learn how to think, act, grow, and live a Jewish life reflecting a tradition that puts education and praxis at the center.

The purpose of the Jewish Pedagogies Project is to identify several rituals, customs, and mitzvot that are ***pervasive in the Jewish tradition, educational in nature, and can be developed into educational practices*** within a variety of settings in the world of education.

The Jewish Pedagogies developed from this project will serve the field of Jewish education by aspiring to the following goals:

1. To ensure that not only the content of Jewish education is Jewish but the methods and practices of Jewish education are as well.
2. To develop unique practices for Jewish education, utilizing M²'s multidisciplinary approach that draws upon diverse academic fields such as psychology and anthropology.
3. Jewish educators often lack Jewish content knowledge, and subsequently lack confidence in their work. The use of Jewish Pedagogies will enable these educators to experience their practice as more authentically Jewish, thus boosting their confidence.
4. To offer Jewish educators a broader set of educational pedagogies that will provide them with greater range and depth to their work.

[2] Defining a Jewish Pedagogy

For the purpose of this project, ***a pedagogy is to be understood as an educational practice that is a manifestation of a certain educational worldview.*** They are not merely the practical tools and methodologies used by educators, but in fact represent something deeper and more comprehensive that serves to frame much of what the educator does. An example of a commonly used pedagogy in contemporary education is project-based learning. This approach is a manifestation of the constructivist approach to education and contends that students learn best when they seek to answer questions and understand ideas through their own exploration.

A number of practical questions arise when considering how to apply this definition to what we would call a Jewish Pedagogy: Does the practice need to be Jewish? Does the worldview need to be Jewish? Do both? Either and all are probable. For the purpose of this project, we have (arguably) decided to work with a definition that sets limitations on the Jewish context from which the pedagogy draws, as follows.

A Jewish Pedagogy is an educational practice reflective of an educational worldview that starts with and develops from the Jewish tradition.

Drawing on the benefits of creative limitation, and with a clear intent of defining a narrow starting point to best achieve the goals outlined above, we have identified four qualifiers in the development of a Jewish Pedagogy, as follows:

A Jewish Pedagogy should be developed from -

1. A Jewish ritual, custom, or *mitzvah* that is
2. Pervasive in the Jewish tradition and
3. Educational in nature, and
4. Is in conversation with the *Mishnah* in Pirkei Avot on *Kinyan torah* (acquiring Torah).

[3] Unpacking the Qualifiers

Qualifier 1: Why develop a Jewish Pedagogy from a Jewish ritual, custom, or *mitzvah*?

This qualifier emphasizes practice. As stated above, Judaism places an emphasis on praxis. Much of the Jewish tradition is dedicated to understanding the conceptual underpinnings of Jewish practices and the various forms that they take. We believe that starting practice, with rituals, customs, and *mitzvot* representing different forms of Jewish practices, will allow for the development of educational practices that can be applied to new contexts.

Qualifier 2: Why must the rituals, customs or *mitzvot* be pervasive in Jewish tradition?

This qualifier emphasizes recognition and accessibility. Rituals, customs, and *mitzvot* that are pervasive in the Jewish tradition will have a wealth of sources that can be explored and will be readily identifiable to those who work in Jewish education. Being able to analyze a wide variety of sources will allow for a more thorough and comprehensive articulation of the Jewish Pedagogy. Some rituals, customs, or *mitzvot* may, at first glance, appear educationally relevant but ultimately lack a strong grounding in Jewish texts. For this project, we are seeking Jewish pedagogies that can be based on practices that are recognizable and relevant practitioners in the field of Jewish education.

Qualifier 3: Why must the ritual, custom or practice be educational in nature?

This qualifier emphasizes educational relevance. While one could make the argument that all Jewish rituals, customs and *mitzvot* are educational in nature, we are specifically seeking rituals, customs and *mitzvot* that explicitly address core educational concerns relevant to Jewish education. Core educational concerns refer to educational aspirations, problems and questions that are common to most if not all practitioners in the field of Jewish education. They can include but are not limited to:

- Direct approaches to teaching and learning;
- Process of identity development;
- Educator / learner dynamic;
- Personal and spiritual growth;
- Educational processing

Qualifier 4: Why must the Jewish Pedagogy be in conversation with the *Mishnah of Kinyan Torah*?

This qualifier emphasizes an ideological continuity. Pirkei Avot Chapter 6 Mishna 6 is an important resource in thinking about and developing a Jewish Pedagogy. The *Mishnah* provides a list of 48 ways in which Torah is acquired. The items listed reflect not only cognitive dimensions of learning but include dimensions such as character and the teacher-student relationship. We believe that our work in the development of Jewish Pedagogies should build on – or be in dialogue – with this foundational text. This qualifier serves as an explicit commitment to the relationship between Jewish preservation and innovation; *Masoret* and *Chiddush*. As such, in context of this project, a Jewish Pedagogy should reflect – or be in conversation with – at least some of the elements described in the *Mishnah*.

Pirkei Avot 6:6

גְּדוּלָה תוֹרָה יוֹתֵר מִן הַכֹּהֵנָה וּמִן הַמְּלָכוֹת, שֶׁהַמְּלָכוֹת נִקְנִית בְּשִׁלְשִׁים מַעְלוֹת, וְהַכֹּהֵנָה בְּעֶשְׂרִים
 וָאַרְבַּע, וְהַתּוֹרָה נִקְנִית בְּאַרְבָּעִים וּשְׁמֹנֶה דְבָרִים. וְאֵלוּ הֵן, בְּתַלְמוּד, בְּשִׁמְיעַת הָאָזְנוֹ, בְּעִרְכֵּי שְׂפָתַיִם,
 בְּבִינַת הַלֵּב, בְּשִׂכְלוֹת הַלֵּב, בְּאִימָה, בְּיִרְאָה, בְּעִנּוּהַ, בְּשִׂמְחָה, בְּטַהֲרָה, בְּשִׁמוּשׁ חֲכָמִים, בְּדַקְדּוּק
 חֲבָרִים, וּבְפִלְפּוּל הַתְּלַמִּידִים, בְּיִשׁוּב, בְּמִקְרָא, בְּמִשְׁנָה, בְּמַעֲוֵט סְחוּרָה, בְּמַעֲוֵט דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ, בְּמַעֲוֵט
 תַּעֲנוּג, בְּמַעֲוֵט שִׁינָה, בְּמַעֲוֵט שִׂיחָה, בְּמַעֲוֵט שְׂחוּק, בְּאֶרֶךְ אַפִּים, בְּלֵב טוֹב, בְּאַמוּנַת חֲכָמִים, וּבִקְבֻלַּת
 הִיסוּרִין, הַמְּכִיר אֶת מְקוֹמוֹ, וְהַשְּׂמַח בְּחֻלְקוֹ, וְהַעוֹשֶׂה סִיג לְדַבְּרֵיוֹ, וְאֵינוֹ מַחְזִיק טוֹבָה לְעַצְמוֹ, אֱהוּב,
 אֱהוּב אֶת הַמְּקוֹם, אֱהוּב אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת, אֱהוּב אֶת הַצְּדָקוֹת, אֱהוּב אֶת הַמִּישָׁרִים, אֱהוּב אֶת הַתּוֹכְחוֹת,
 מְתַרְחֵק מִן הַקְּבוּדָה, וְלֹא מְגִיס לְבוֹ בְּתַלְמוּדוֹ, וְאֵינוֹ שׂוֹמֵחַ בְּהוֹרָאָה, נוֹשֵׂא בַעַל עִם חֲבֵרוֹ, מְכַרְעוֹ לְכַף
 זְכוּת, מַעֲמִידוֹ עַל הָאֵמֶת, וּמַעֲמִידוֹ עַל הַשְּׁלוֹם, מְתִישֵׁב לְבוֹ בְּתַלְמוּדוֹ, שׂוֹאֵל וּמְשִׁיב, שׂוֹמֵעַ וּמוֹסִיף,
 הַלּוֹמֵד עַל מְנַת לְלַמֵּד וְהַלּוֹמֵד עַל מְנַת לַעֲשׂוֹת, הַמְּחַכֵּים אֶת רַבּוֹ, וְהַמְּכֹנֵן אֶת שְׂמוּעָתוֹ, וְהַאֲמוֹר דְּבַר
 בְּשֵׁם אֲמוֹרּוֹ, הָא לְמַדְתָּ שְׂכָל הָאֲמוֹר דְּבַר בְּשֵׁם אֲמוֹרּוֹ מְבִיא גְּאֻלָּה לְעוֹלָם, שְׁנַאֲמַר (אֶסְתֵּר ב) וְתַאֲמַר
 אֶסְתֵּר לְמַלְךְ בְּשֵׁם מְרַדְּכִי:

Greater is learning Torah than the priesthood and than royalty, for royalty is acquired by thirty stages, and the priesthood by twenty-four, but the Torah by forty-eight things. By study, Attentive listening, Proper speech, By an understanding heart, By an intelligent heart, By awe, By fear, By humility, By joy, By attending to the sages, By critical give and take with friends, By fine argumentation with disciples, By clear thinking, By study of Scripture, By study of *mishnah*, By a minimum of sleep, By a minimum of chatter, By a minimum of pleasure, By a minimum of frivolity, By a minimum of preoccupation with worldly matters, By long-suffering, By generosity, By faith in the sages, By acceptance of suffering. [Learning of Torah is also acquired by one] Who recognizes his place, Who rejoices in his portion, Who makes a fence about his words, Who takes no credit for himself, Who is loved, Who loves God, Who loves [his fellow] creatures, Who loves righteous ways, Who loves reproof, Who loves uprightness, Who keeps himself far from honors, Who does not let his heart become swelled on account of his learning, Who does not delight in giving legal decisions, Who shares in the bearing of a burden with his colleague, Who judges with the scales weighted in his favor, Who leads him on to truth, Who leads him on to peace, Who composes himself at his study, Who asks and answers, Who listens [to others], and [himself] adds [to his knowledge], Who learns in order to teach, Who learns in order to practice, Who makes his teacher wiser, Who is exact in what he has learned, And who says a thing in the name of him who said it. Thus you have learned: everyone who says a thing in the name of him who said it, brings deliverance into the world, as it is said: "And Esther told the king in Mordecai's name" (Esther 2:22).

[4] THE ROLE OF GENERAL PHILOSOPHY AND CULTURE

The development of a Jewish Pedagogy begins with selecting a ritual, custom, or *mitzvah*, and analyzing and developing it through the lens of Jewish texts. To further articulate the educational implications of the Jewish Pedagogy, general philosophy and cultural studies may be helpful in exploring and developing some of the themes that emerge. They can be systematic, reflective and bring a level of sophistication to this process that are not inherent in Jewish texts, substantially contributing to the development of Jewish Pedagogies and to our understanding of Jewish ideas and practices.

[5] WHAT ARE WE EXCLUDING?

For the purpose of this initiative and in keeping with the definition of Jewish Pedagogy articulated above, the following are examples that would not qualify, for our purpose, as a Jewish Pedagogy.

- A custom, ritual, or *mitzvah* that comes from the Jewish tradition but *is not pervasive in Jewish practice or that has limited sources with which to develop a pedagogy*. For example, developing a pedagogy based on the rituals of *tashlich* or *Havdalah* or the idea of *breishit* (beginnings);
- Taking an idea or concept from secular educational thought and giving it a Jewish label. For example, developing a pedagogy of differentiated instruction based on the verse '*Chanoch l'naar al pi darko*' or giving a Jewish name to the Socratic method;
- Utilizing a concept or practice of a Jewish thinker, but one that is not explicitly rooted in Jewish texts. For example, Martin Buber's philosophy of I-Thou.

[6] APPENDIX: SAMPLE JEWISH PEDAGOGIES

[A] Havruta

What is it?

Havruta learning is the study of Talmud and other Jewish texts in pairs. In a typical *havruta*, each person will take turns reading from the text, asking questions, and offering possible interpretations. It encourages argument and debate between the two sides.

Why is it pervasive?

The practice of *havruta* learning dates back to the Talmud and there are many Jewish texts which reflect upon its nature and purpose. In recent years, *havruta* learning has seen a revival and has now become commonplace outside formal yeshiva settings.

What are its educational implications?

Havruta learning assumes that one learns best not alone but in dialogue with others. It also serves to emphasize the idea that relationships are at the core of meaning making and that we seek to make sense of that which is most important to us through conversation with others.

An analysis of *havruta* learning might potentially lead to the development of educational practices in the following areas:

- Dialogical Learning: The ways in which knowledge is co-constructed in dialogue
- *Machloket*: How to have constructive disagreement even when we strongly clash
- Relationship: Exploring the emotional dynamics of the *havruta* relationship and how they can be managed?

Relationship to *Kinyanei torah*

Many elements of *Havruta* learning can be found in the *mishnah* of *kinyan torah*: 'attentive listening,' 'proper speech,' and 'critical give and take with friends.'

[B] Tochecha

What is it?

Vayikra (19:17) states “Rebuke your fellow but incur no guilt because of him.” From this the Talmudic rabbis deduce that there is a *mitzvah* to rebuke sinners, and that one is not permitted to stand by idly in the face of transgression.

Why is it pervasive?

From the prophets of the Bible to today’s social activists, *Tochecha* is seen as a primary Jewish obligation. The *halakhic* tradition contains extensive analysis of the practice, and has explored various questions such as: How should rebuke be done? Must one rebuke every sin? Must everyone engage in rebuke or only in certain circumstances? What if rebuke will embarrass the other party or simply be ignored?

What are its educational implications?

Tochecha presumes that every person is on some level responsible for another, and that this manifests in an obligation to protest wrongdoing wherever one may see it. *Tochecha* is particularly incumbent upon parents and educators, who are explicitly responsible for shaping the hearts and minds of the next generation.

The *mitzvah* of rebuke could be used as a model for:

- Giving criticism to those whose behavior we feel to be problematic
- Providing general feedback in a thoughtful way so that can be heard by another

Relationship to *Kinyanei torah*

Elements of *Tochecha* found in the *mishnah* of *kinyan torah* include ‘understanding heart,’ and the one ‘who loves reproof.’

[C] Mitzvah of Chinuch

What is it?

The *mitzvah of chinuch* mandates that parents have the obligation to educate their children in the performance of *mitzvot*. The Talmud (Sukkah 42a) states that if a child can shake the *lulav*, then the parent must teach them to do so. The *mitzvah* of chinuch emphasizes practice over comprehension. A child should be taught to perform the *mitzvah* even if he or she if one does not fully understand and internalize the meaning of the practice.

Why is it pervasive?

Judaism's emphasis on educating towards practice has long been seen as one of its defining features and there are many Talmudic texts which explore this idea.

What are its educational implications?

The *mitzvah of chinuch* aligns with the Talmudic notion "*shelo lishma ba lishma*" that even if one begins by not performing a *mitzvah* for its intended purpose one will eventually come to do so over time. It reflects an approach to education that privileges direct experience and active experimentation rather than abstract reflection or cognitive learning.

The *mitzvah of chinuch* could be used to explore:

- How one educates towards a ritual when its meaning and relevance is not necessarily obvious to potential learners?
- How and when direct experience of a Jewish idea or practice should be prioritized over more cognitive learning?

Relationship to *Kinyanei torah*

While the *mitzvah of chinuch* may not be found explicitly in the *mishnah of kinyan torah*, one can still see it as very much in dialogue with terms such as "who learns in order to teach and who learns in order to practice."

[D] Hitbodedut

What is it?

Hitbodedut is one of many Jewish spiritual practices dedicated towards deepening the individual's connection to God. It has taken on different forms throughout Jewish history, often involving the individual secluding themselves to engage in contemplation of God. In later centuries it was developed by R' Nachman of Breslov as an unstructured, spontaneous and individualized form of prayer and meditation through which one would establish a close, personal relationship with God and ultimately see the Divinity inherent in all being.

Why is it pervasive?

Hitbodedut has its roots in the Talmud and later took on great significance in the Chassidic tradition. In recent years familiarity with it has spread throughout the Jewish community and one can find it utilized as an alternative to prayer in many different settings.

What are its educational implications?

Hitbodedut emphasizes self-reflection, encouraging the individual to take responsibility for their spiritual life. Instead of depending on a fixed text or prayer community, one must speak directly to God in the first person. Its application to Jewish education could involve:

- Developing a focused spiritual practice to give learners an alternative to the traditional prayer experience.
- Developing a set of practices that could be used to allow learners the opportunity for self-reflection and personal growth.

Relationship to *Kinyanei torah*

Hitbodedut incorporates many different aspects of the *mishnah* of *kinyan torah* such as 'an understanding heart, an intelligent heart, awe, fear, humility, and joy.'

[E] Mussar

What is it?

Mussar is a religious, intellectual movement which places moral development at the center of Jewish life. Founded by Rabbi Yisrael Salanter in the nineteenth century, it encourages adherents to focus on their character and emotional life through an emphasis on *middot* (behavioral attributes). *Mussar* attempts to achieve this through a series of practices including the study of Jewish ethical texts and reflection exercises meant to cultivate moral growth in one's day to day life. *Mussar* texts are often studied with others under the guidance of a teacher, and the practice of *mussar* includes a willingness to share about one's inner experiences (their successes and failures) with one's fellow students.

Why is it pervasive?

The popularity of *mussar* has grown in recent years and in addition to many traditional compilations of *mussar* ideas and practices, there now exists a significant amount of English writings on *mussar* produced for a general audience.

What are its educational implications?

As stated, *Mussar* places the development of one's ethical character at the heart of Jewish life. It emphasizes introspection and recognizes that personal growth is often slow and painful.

Mussar ideas and practices could be applied towards various goals such as:

- *Heshbon Ha-Nefesh* (Self-reflection): How does one do an honest assessment of one's strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures?
- Character growth: How does one take the small steps necessary to grow morally and spiritually?

Relationship to *Kinyanei torah*

Mussar utilizes many different aspects of the *mishnah* of *kinyan torah* such as 'an understanding heart, awe, fear, humility, joy' and many more.

[F] Demama

What is it?

While Jews are perhaps best known for their powers of speech, the Jewish tradition also acknowledges the importance of silence. This suggests that a part of pedagogic practice requires experiencing the silence – the ‘white space’ – that accompanies the learning and teaching process, asking us to take in the learning through contemplation, or to find the silenced voices in the learning process.

Why is it pervasive?

Demama (silence) manifests in a variety of practices and ideas. Certain Talmudic rabbis who would wait in silence for an hour before prayer in order to properly prepare (*Mishnayot Berachot 5:1*). The shemoneh esrei should be done silently and it is considered inappropriate to be done out loud (*Berachot 24a*). When an individual enters a shiva home they customarily remain silent until they are spoken to by the mourner. Silence also structures the spoken word. If one did not pause when reading the Torah, there would be no way to know when one verse ends and a new one begins.

What are its educational implications?

As mentioned above, silence is essential when preparing for activities that require presence and concentration. The rabbis also emphasize that silence is often a posture that Jews must take in the face of divine inscrutability or when words fail us. The Talmud states that when R' Akiva's painful death is revealed to Moshe and Moshe questions God's justice, God's response is that Moshe must be silent (*Menachot 29b*). Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel saw silence as essential for achieving and maintain wisdom (*seyag l'chochma shetika, Avot 3:13*). Based on the models for silence that exist in the Jewish tradition, one could develop a variety of ways in which silence is best integrated into experiential Jewish education.

Relationship to *Kinyanei torah*:

To be explored further.

[G] Shoel u-Meshiv

What is it?

Jews are famous for their questions. As Leo Baeck once wrote, “Ask a Jew a question, and the Jew answers with a question.” Questions are understood as essential to learning and therefore they play a very prominent role in the study of Torah. The key to this pedagogy is, however, in the idea of asking and answering – the importance of the back and forth between educator and learner, and the adoption of the question-based dialogical mindset.

Why is it pervasive?

The back and forth of question-answer is essential to Torah learning. Nearly every page of the Talmud is filled with countless questions. To the outsider many of these may appear obscure or archane, but in the *beit midrash*, almost no question is to be dismissed as insignificant. The act of asking questions is probably best known from the Pesach Seder. It is not sufficient for parents to simply tell the story of the Exodus to their children but rather they must do all that they can to inspire them to ask questions.

What are its educational implications?

The Jewish emphasis on asking questions accords with modern educational notions of constructivism which assumes that learners must actively construct knowledge rather than passively absorb it. However, questions have different purposes and can achieve different goals. What makes for a good question? When is a question problematic? What must educators do to make space for questions? What role can questions best serve in experiential Jewish education?

Relationship to *Kinyanei torah*

Shoel u-meshiv is listed explicitly.

[H] Noseh be-Ol Chavero

What is it?

The term literally means to “share in the burden of another” (*Avot 6:1*). The *mussar* movement of the 19th century developed this ethical mandate into a specific practice through which one strives to have empathy for the pain of another person. In pedagogic terms, this means good teaching must include sharing the burden of learning. This can be done through an act of the imagination or contemplation in to better understand and identify struggles of learning, understanding, exploring and making meaning.

Why is it pervasive?

The importance of having empathy for those who are suffering is understood to be a cornerstone of the Torah. The Jewish people are commanded to love the stranger for they too were strangers in a strange land. In fact, the Torah repeatedly emphasizes our ethical obligation to the orphan, widow, and stranger, all three of whom often suffer at the margins of society. As tikkun olam and social justice has become central to many Jewish communities, the practice of noseh be-ol chavero takes on new importance.

What are its educational implications?

The writings of Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv are central to the *mussar* practice of *noseh be-ol chavero*. He both describes the importance of the practice and offers concrete suggestions for how it should be done. There is important work to be done in translating these practices to a more modern audience and reflecting on how they best can be utilized within experiential Jewish education.

Relationship to *Kinyanei torah*

Noseh be-ol chavero is listed explicitly.

[I] *Mi'ut*

What is it?

Many Jewish texts emphasize the simple truth that we can often get along with far less than we think and that it is important to minimize pleasurable distractions. Because we live in a time of material excess when we can have nearly anything we desire with the push of a button, this sensibility is worth paying close attention to. Furthermore, Judaism teaches that less is often more, and quality is preferable to quantity.

Why is it pervasive?

The practice of *mi'ut* manifests in a variety of places. First, it should be noted that the rabbis of the Talmud along with many of the great Medieval rabbis declared the importance of reducing pleasurable distractions. (For example, see Maimonides *Hilchot Detot*.) Regarding prayer, one is required to eliminate all potential distractions before one prays so that they will have proper concentration. Furthermore it is understood to be a general principle that it is better to say less prayers with *kavvanah* rather than more prayer without *kavvanah*. *Mi'ut* is also a significant feature of mourning. The mourner refrains from a variety of pleasurable activities so that their focus remains on their loss. Similar customs can be seen in mourning the loss of the Temple. During the week before Tisha B'Av, one refrains from meat and wine along with other enjoyable activities.

What are its educational implications?

At a time when it is so easy to overwhelm people with information, we easily lose sight of the simple truth that "less is more." The *mishnah* of *kinyanei torah* lists several activities that should be minimized such as sleep, chatter, pleasure, frivolity and busying oneself with worldly matters. Because so much of our lives are consumed by distractions, it is worth exploring what we can live with less of and how it might help our ability to focus, learn, or be creative.

Relationship to *Kinyanei torah*

Mi'ut is mentioned explicitly.

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