



THE INSTITUTE FOR EXPERIENTIAL JEWISH EDUCATION

Strengthening Shabbat in Birthright Israel

FINAL REPORT & RECOMMENDATIONS

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Strengthening Shabbat in Birthright Israel

Final report & recommendations

By M²: The Institute for Experiential Jewish Education

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[1] Introduction

We are delighted to present this report, as the conclusion of the project: **Strengthening Shabbat in Birthright Israel**. Over the past four months M²: The Institute for Experiential Jewish Education has facilitated a process of re-imagining possibilities for Shabbat programming on a Birthright Israel trip, in order to maximize the transformative potential of a Shabbat experience.

Our **goals** for this project were to:

- ▶ Focus on Jewish value/s and how they are expressed on a Shabbat, particularly through ritual (both traditional and contemporary)
- ▶ Provide ideas and actions that participants can integrate into their lived realities
- ▶ Offer recommendations to be implemented at all levels of the Birthright Israel system that would achieve these goals.

The consultancy process for this project was comprised of two stages:

1. A brief mapping of what Shabbat looks like on a Birthright Israel trip; the typical programs, powerful moments and challenges that staff and Trip Organizers face. We discovered that there is enormous commitment to the Shabbat experience and a certain standardization of rituals, but that there is also a lot of variety between Trip Organizers, and varying quality of staff and programs. Our conclusions and questions arising from the mapping process are contained in our initial report.
2. A series of three consultative meetings, that included diverse participants. During those meetings we discussed the following three **core topics** and accompanying questions:
 - ▶ Topic 1 – The **purpose** of Shabbat: Identifying and bringing to life the core Jewish value(s) that Shabbat embodies.
 - ▶ Topic 2 – The **experiences** of Shabbat: Creating and providing impactful, interactive and concrete experiences, practices and rituals that bring these Jewish values to life and provide ways for participants to integrate into their life at home.
 - ▶ Topic 3 – The **environment** of Shabbat: Crafting the surrounding conditions of Shabbat, (specifically as they pertain to the selected Jewish values), including the intentional design of space and environment on Shabbat.

In addition, we considered the **organizational and staffing** ramifications related to these questions, and we will address recommendations for both of these areas below.

The list of participants at the meetings is included in Appendix I. All the ideas and insights gathered are linked from Appendix II.

As a result of this process we present our core findings and then recommendations for strengthening Shabbat programming in a Birthright Israel trip.

[2] Core Findings

We were gratified that all Birthright Israel stakeholders demonstrated immediate willingness to speak about content and ideas surrounding Shabbat and that there was **clear openness to rethinking Shabbat**. This stems from a widespread and shared understanding that Shabbat is a valuable and meaningful part of an Israel experience, especially as a key lever for future Jewish behavior after the trip.

The suggested values framework (described in detail below) revealed that **ideas and values that are deeply Jewish and rooted in tradition allow for relevance, interpretation and innovation**. The 3-part values of framework for Shabbat has resonance and there is willingness to adopt and use it. As a result, we believe that we will be able to create a paradigm shift from observance as obligation, to observance as a value-based choice.

Unsurprisingly, we also saw clearly that **staff, and staffing configurations, are critical to making cultural change** in the Birthright Israel system and that there is a necessity to include qualifications to lead Shabbat as one of the considerations when building a staff team.

Making change in any system, and particularly the Birthright Israel ecosystem, is challenging. While some of what we suggest below provides a new organizing frame for what already exists, there may also be the need to exclude or reimagine current programming. We are optimistic, however, that this values-based approach and the resources and training that accompany it, suggested below, will provide avenues for making a positive impact on Shabbat programming across Birthright Israel.

[3] Recommendations and Directions for Future Action

Our recommendations begin with laying out a values-based framework for Shabbat. We then provide ideas for specific activities and rituals based on each of the three values, followed by an overview of staff training and programmatic ramifications.

A Values Framework for Shabbat, or: “What is Shabbat About?”

Our central recommendation is to adopt a values framework for Shabbat that answers the question, “What is Shabbat about?” and that is infused throughout the whole Birthright Israel system.

A values framework achieves many purposes:

- ▶ It provides staff and participants with a shared and codified organizing frame for understanding what Shabbat is about;
- ▶ It provides purpose, direction and structure for Shabbat activities and programs;
- ▶ It provides a clear and consistent set of meanings about Shabbat that can be tested and measured;
- ▶ It provides a springboard from which multiple rituals and activities can be created;
- ▶ It creates a shared language that participants can incorporate into their life in the future.

To this end, we suggest a values-based approach to Shabbat, focused around three values:

- ▶ **Shmira — Preservation**
- ▶ **Zechira — Memory**
- ▶ **Shvita — Rest**

These three values are drawn from the three verbs used in relation to Shabbat in the Torah. We are instructed to **rest** on Shabbat (the word “Shabbat” means ‘rest’), to **keep** Shabbat (the Hebrew word is “*lishmor*” – ‘to keep’ or ‘to preserve’) and to **remember** Shabbat (“*lizkor*”). Each of these values includes a set of understandings and meanings that provide us with a wealth of ideas to explore and experience on Shabbat.

Below we outline how each of these values can be expressed and experienced on a Birthright Israel Shabbat. For the purpose of adopting the Values framework as a whole and infusing it deeply into the system, we first make the following recommendations:

- ▶ **Staff Guide for Shabbat Values Exploration:** Create guide for staff that collects and codifies the values framework clearly, providing them with the language and core concepts that will be used throughout any Shabbat experience on Birthright. The guide can include explanations along with traditional and current commentaries about the values, as well as images, resources and ideas for how to infuse the values into a typical Shabbat. The guide will serve as accompanying resource for the asynchronous training module (see below).
- ▶ **Shabbat Companion for Participants:** Develop a Shabbat Companion that captures the ideas, stories and commentaries behind the Shabbat values. The Shabbat Companion will include images, stories, recipes, texts, profiles of people, all featuring a diversity of ethnicities and perspectives. It will also include concrete ideas for celebrating and practicing Shabbat back home. Workshops and programs delivered while on the trip should constantly reference the Shabbat Companion.
- ▶ **Shabbat Objects:** Create one or more Shabbat objects inspired by the values, serving as a concrete memento of the trip. This physical expression of one of the Shabbat values must have a practical use, and participants should *actively practice using it* on the trip so that they can use it again upon their return home. It may be a challah cover, candlesticks or *havdalah*-related object, though we should consider developing a less traditional object, for example a towel for covering Challah dough while it rises, with a Bracha woven onto it.

We now expand on each of the individual values, providing suggestions for programs and rituals that can be developed. Our recommendations are based on the “knowing-experiencing-becoming” framework that guided our work on this project, namely:

- ▶ What do participants need to **know**, about Shabbat and its meanings?
- ▶ What do they need to **experience** and thus be able to do in relation to Shabbat?
- ▶ And as a result – how will this impact who they **become**, and particularly, how they will be connected to and experience Shabbat in their lives?

The Value of Shmira — Preservation

What should participants know?

Participants should identify the meaning of *shmira* as “preserving”, or “look after”. On a universal level, this allows participants to identify that which is precious to them and consider the role they need to take in looking after this precious thing. More particularly, this enables participants to see Shabbat as a precious gift that must be looked after.

Participants should recognize the relationship between the word Shmira and the word *Shimurim* = yeast; that what is looked after and preserved can become the catalyst for activity and growth.

**This value is probably the most challenging of the 3 values because of the traditional understanding of this word, which connects it to traditional observance (the ‘don’t do’s’). We believe it can be reinterpreted and given new focus.*

What should participants do?

Provide multiple experiences for how to create and care for what is precious or special. Rituals and programs can include:

- ▶ **Focus on blessings**, as way to acknowledge, guard and preserve something of value.
 - Expand the “blessing of the children” ritual to a group “blessing train” ritual where each participant blesses another, using traditional formula with additional, personal elements. Provide blessing card as a resource.
 - Encourage participants to call loved ones and bless them with a special Shabbat.
 - Provide a resource with many different blessings (in a deck of cards or as part of the general Shabbat resource) – including the less known ones – with each participant making out loud a unique blessing over the course of Shabbat.
- ▶ **Focus on ownership**, as way to take responsibility over something related to value in order to cultivate a relationship with it.
 - Build activity focused on reflecting on a family heirloom or memory and how it can be passed down.
 - Organize Shabbat committees for decoration, set-up, rituals and any other program elements.
 - Prepare participants to share stories of precious objects, memories or stories.
- ▶ **Focus on cooking** as a way to create, taste and share the food that makes the day more precious.
 - Workshop to bake challah – yeast in baking = “*shimurim*” in action
 - Pickling workshop – a physical expression of preservation

How might participants become?

Through carefully facilitated conversations, participants need to:

- ▶ Reflect on these activities, and on “*shmira*” in general, in order to recognize the gift that is Shabbat.
- ▶ Discover and reveal that which is precious to them in their lives and become more conscious of the responsibility they have in preserving it.
- ▶ Be encouraged to make commitments that will help them include these components in their weekly Shabbat.
- ▶ Have transferable practices that they can use again: blessings, cooking, precious objects.

The Value of Zechira — Memory

What should participants know?

Participants should know to create and engage with memories, both individual and collective. Participants should surface their “north star moments” – the things that matter to them most, and how these can connect their past to their present and their present to their future. Participants should recognize how this value incorporates a component of celebration, *oneg shabbat*.

What should participants do?

Provide multiple experiences that allow participants to connect to their personal memories, engage with collective Jewish memories and create new ones that will serve as a compass and inspiration for the future. Rituals and programs can include:

- ▶ **Focus on the memories** of the trip and invest them with power to fuel future experiences.
 - Create exhibition of photos or powerful expressions of the week. Make a communal mural as a visual reminder of powerful moments from the week.
 - Share photos, with captions and interpretations.
 - Take group photos before Shabbat, together with blessings or other rituals that mark what the group has experienced together.

- ▶ **Focus on family** – both the Birthright Israel family and the participant’s biological or chosen family / heritage.
 - Create a group family tree that showcases personal and group narratives of where participants originate from – focusing on diverse backgrounds and ethnicities.
 - Share family stories or memories in a gallery walk or with small groups of participants.
 - Shabbat Angels / Ushpizin: By displaying photos or telling stories, participants ‘invite’ loved ones from their present or past, to join the groups shabbat table.
- ▶ **Focus on foods** and food memories.
 - Around different foods place cards with stories describing where these foods originated.
 - Eat or make foods representing different ethnic groups and cultures.
 - Create a group cookbook or album.

How might participants become?

Through carefully facilitated conversations, participants need to:

- ▶ Create a real imagined album of memories, and collect imagined or real objects that are invested with a personal story and an Israel story.
- ▶ Recognize how these memories shape who they are and realize that they are the ones who get to author these memories.
- ▶ Access memories, both personal and collective, home, to build their own rituals and activities that can be part of their future Shabbat experiences.

The Value of Shvita — Rest

What should participants know?

Participants should know that this value includes unplugging and separating from distractions and the regular rush of the week. Thus, space is created for rest. Participants should know that this space must actively be filled positive intention and distinctive qualities. *Shvita* is not just an absence of something; it is the presence of holy time. It is recharging, as opposed to simply unplugging. Note that the word *Shvita* also refers to a strike; it is an active concept.

What should participants do?

Provide multiple ways to unplug and recharge, in preparation for Shabbat and during the day. Rituals and programs can include:

- ▶ **Focus on unplugging** from technology and separating from daily life.
 - Curate a set of pre-Shabbat guided workshops (facilitated in person, or using apps) to unplug in a range of domains - spiritual (meditations), physical (yoga, running), emotional (guided discussions, exercises), cognitive (reading and discussing texts).
 - Develop unplugging rituals that incorporate both the intention to stop doing certain things, and also to start doing others that accomplish recharging.
 - At Kabbalat Shabbat or when lighting candles, participants write intentions that articulate what they are “plugging into” – what do they want to add into their lives that takes the space that they are making room for?
 - Provide “sleeping bags” or boxes to put phones in and create a ritualistic moment where all participants place their phones (or any distraction) into the “sleeping bag” and share a *Kavanah* – an intention.
- ▶ **Focus on noticing** what is typically not noticed – visibility.
 - Develop a number of exercises and resources to help participants identify what – in the craziness of day to day life – we do not typically see or notice. For example, a ‘noticing’ walk – walking around the space and neighborhood – looking for what we would otherwise miss – and then reporting in.
 - Incorporate an experiential chavruta learning moment, in which participants intentionally engage in four practices: listening; paraphrasing; supporting and challenging.
 - A group noticing exercise – participants give one another anonymous notes about what they noticed about each other this week, and what they are now grateful for.

How might participants become?

Through carefully facilitated conversations, participants need to:

- ▶ Recognize the value of unplugging and recharging.
- ▶ Be able to translate these concepts into their life after the trip by outlining practices that they commit to engaging in back home.

For the values framework to become an integral part of how Shabbat is integrated and implemented, it will need to become part of the core language of Birthright Israel Trip Organizers and staff, as well as participants. We recommend a multi-pronged approach to infusing the framework throughout the system, touching participants directly, as well as the staff and organizers.

[4] Implementation

A. Develop Staff Training Opportunities

There is a clear recognition that all staff, and the Trip Organizers (TOs), play a role in maximizing the potential of Shabbat. There are multiple ways to train and orient the various staff so that they can receive, transmit and infuse the values framework into Shabbat most effectively. Our recommendations address training at all levels.

During the consultative meetings staffing questions were addressed in-depth and several important findings emerged. TOs shared that they have not typically considered familiarity with Shabbat – and confidence around it – as a criterion when building a staff team; this needs to be changed.

Secondly, despite the recognition that some staff are not as highly qualified to lead Shabbat as we would like, there was a very strong feeling that bringing external staff (Shabbat *madrichim*) into the dynamic of a 10-day trip is not desirable. This might be possible in a longer trip. Less so in a Birthright Israel context. However, TOs and *madrichim* are very interested in bringing in “experts” to provide enrichment on Shabbat. This could include storytellers, tefilah-leaders, musicians etc.

We, therefore, recommend:

- ▶ Train and orient the Trip Organizers to the values framework, discussing and internalizing the ramifications for staffing and how it can be implemented.
- ▶ Develop a new role of staff “experts” and recruit a pool of people to take this role. These staff would offer a particular expertise; storyteller, improv artist, tefilah-leader/musician (and more) and would arrive either just before or during Shabbat in order to deliver a specific piece of the Shabbat program. They would work together with the *madrichim* to provide a particular enrichment for the group. This model needs further development and a small pilot project to test it.
- ▶ Provide training for *Madrichim*, including:
 - **Basic orientation** to the values framework. This could be offered as an asynchronous module available on the Birthright Israel online platform. Ideally, it would be mandatory for all *madrichim* as a baseline introduction to Shabbat on Birthright Israel.
 - **A personal Shabbat experience** for *Madrichim* who have not experienced a powerful Shabbat in their life. This training would start with a carefully-designed, highly-experiential and powerful Shabbat experience, and be followed by deep processing and reflection.
 - **Skills-training** for specific components of Shabbat programming, including leading prayer services, managing the traditional rituals and song-leading. This training could be run as short (3-4 hour) workshops on a regional or online basis.

- **In-depth 2-day training** focusing on the values framework of Shabbat, designed for *madrichim* who want a deep-dive into this topic. Preferably delivered in-person, it may include modeling multiple Shabbat experiences, text study, and a “design sprint” to generate great ideas for use with the values framework.
- ▶ Provide training for Tour Educators that includes an orientation to the values framework, confidence-building, finding their place within it, and facilitating the new rituals. This half-day training can be delivered online or in-person.

B. Establish Core Components of a Shabbat Program for Trip Organizers

To strengthen Shabbat across the whole system of Birthright Israel, it is important to ensure that all Shabbat programs include a set of core components, listed below. We recognize that Trip Organizers and group staff will have to make programmatic and logistical changes to incorporate these elements, and to develop the appropriate programs and resources.

The recommended core components are:

- ▶ At least **one programmatic element for each of the three values.**
- ▶ Designated **preparation time for Shabbat**, at least 90 minutes. This may be personal, “down time” for participants, or more structured time for committees, participant responsibility for preparation etc.
- ▶ A **“Shabbat Box”** of programmatic materials and equipment that each group receives, from their Trip Organizer. The box may include; materials about the values, decorations for Shabbat, ritual objects (candles, *havdalah* spices), games (card games, board games etc.), other treats or craft materials.
- ▶ At least **one special meal per Shabbat**, to create a sense of “holiness” or intimacy around the meals. This could include home hospitality, self-prepared food and more
- ▶ **A designated space** that groups can use for atmosphere and bonding. It could be a “Shabbat lounge” (for games, and also decorated, with food) or Shabbat space (inside or outside).
- ▶ At least one **“Shabbat expert”**; someone on the staff team with a high level of Shabbat confidence and capacity. If this is not possible from within the existing staff team, the group can be joined by an external expert, such as a storyteller, ritual expert, song-leader or more.

Summary of Recommendations for Implementation

The following table includes the concrete recommendations described above, organized into categories.

Action Step	Comments
Adopt values framework	
Finalize language and concepts for values framework, so that they are consistent throughout the system	<i>This needs to be the first step, before all others, so that language and concepts are consistent.</i>
Produce Staff Guide for Values Exploration	<i>Develop with asynchronous training model</i>
Create Shabbat Companion for participants	<i>Still needs further development in terms of format and scope</i>
Work with Trip Organizers to incorporate the values framework in multiple ways, uncover challenges and obstacles and develop plans to overcome them	
Establish core components of Shabbat	
Orient Trip Organizers to idea of core components and provide support	
Develop programmatic resources	
Create new resources or rituals for each value, based on someone of the ideas above	
Staffing and Staff training	
Basic <i>Madrichim</i> introduction/orientation to the values framework – develop asynchronous training module	<i>To be ready for Spring/Summer 2021</i>
<i>Madrichim</i> training – personal Shabbat experience	<i>Perhaps offer in winter 2021 before Spring season?</i>
In-depth Shabbat training for <i>Madrichim</i> (2-day in-person, perhaps on a regional basis).	
Develop model of “experts”. Plan for recruitment, management of the “experts”, training, deployment. Implement system to recruit, hire and train pilot group. Develop training for pilot group.	<i>Implement in Summer 2021</i>
Training for Tour Educators – develop online workshops to orient them to the values framework	<i>Winter 2020/21</i>

[5] Conclusion

Birthright Israel is one of the more important levers in the Jewish community for powerful Jewish and Israel education, and Shabbat on a Birthright Israel trip is one of the most valuable components of the program. This is already clear to everyone involved in Birthright Israel, and we recognize and appreciate all that has been invested in years of effort to ensure that Shabbat live up to its full potential. We are also inspired, gratified and excited that this process has led us to a new level of creativity, with many ideas for innovation and for how to expand the impact of the trip, and Shabbat in particular.

We are grateful to all the stakeholders who have shared their experience and ideas with us and we are excited by the new possibilities that this project has surfaced. We look forward to the further evolution of these ideas, and humbly offer our services as a partner in their future development.

Clare Goldwater & Shuki Taylor

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Appendix I

Participants in Consultative Meetings

Category	Name	Organization	Comments	#1	#2	#3
TO	<i>Yael Tamari</i>	OU Free Spirit		1		1
TO	<i>Esther Abramowitz</i>	Hillel	M2 alum	1		1
TO	<i>Yifat Yissachar</i>	Tlalim		1		1
Birthright	<i>Carolyn Kupietzky</i>	BRI	Strategy	1	1	0
Birthright	<i>Eran Shlomi</i>	Tour guides institute	Tour Educator	1	1	1
Birthright	<i>Astrid Berkovitz</i>	Tour guides institute		1	1	1
Birthright	<i>Ifat Bechor</i>	BRI			1	1
Birthright	<i>Irit Klein</i>	BRI			1	
Tour Educator	<i>Aidel Gestetner Margolin</i>			1		1
Tour Educator	<i>Avi Poupko</i>	Ein Prat		1	1	
Tour Educator	<i>Michael Even Esh</i>				1	
Others	<i>Mark Charendoff</i>	Maimonides Fund			1	1
Others	<i>Shalom Orzach</i>	Independent, iCenter	Also on Ed committee	1	0	
	<i>Ayal Beer</i>		M2 alum		1	0
	<i>Justin Korda</i>	Education committee				1
M ²	<i>Mollie Andron</i>	M ²			1	1
	<i>Esteban Gottfried</i>	Beit Tefilah Yisraeli			1	
	<i>Carine Warsawski</i>	Trybal Gatherings			1	
	<i>Elyssa Moss Rabinowitz</i>	Kol Ha'Ot	M2 alum		1	1
	<i>Rabbi Jessica Minen</i>	One Table			1	
Fellows	<i>Emily Yechezkel</i>				1	1
	<i>Magda Dorosz</i>	Hillel Poland	M2 alum	0	1	
Fellows	<i>Shoshana Gibbor</i>		M2 alum		1	

Appendix II

Worksheets and Padlets

Shvita: <https://padlet.com/DaysOfGratitude/Shvita>

Zechira: <https://padlet.com/DaysOfGratitude/Zechira>

Shmira: <https://padlet.com/DaysOfGratitude/Shmira>

Values-Based Ideas for Shabbat:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1vKKR-SS6w0zGGPReqc7mspaA4LCwm91n_mAx2Q6z9JU/edit?usp=sharing

Concrete Experiences

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Qhp8arGEnbJwqhKCyl21wBCkY6eH_vX-t6hl1TYsGsA/edit?usp=sharing

Understanding Different Staff Types:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1GkFVPyftPHXEOuzpwG2mOxgAEGzYjnyzujgCYhCkNfg/edit?usp=sharing>

Staffing and Training: <https://padlet.com/clare107/tgl5xtkvizvrqkuy>

Focus on Meals: <https://padlet.com/DaysOfGratitude/6hmlaf39ftw3xs4>

Design of Space and Environment: <https://padlet.com/DaysOfGratitude/SpaceEnvironment>

<https://padlet.com/DaysOfGratitude/ShabbatProgram2>

<https://padlet.com/DaysOfGratitude/ShabbatProgram1>

<https://padlet.com/DaysOfGratitude/Shabbat4>

<https://padlet.com/DaysOfGratitude/Shabbat3>

<https://padlet.com/DaysOfGratitude/Shabbat5>

<https://padlet.com/DaysOfGratitude/Shabbat6>

<https://padlet.com/DaysOfGratitude/Shabbat7>



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