

Sample Materials from Chavurah Community Synagogue of Rye

Emails to parents, Curriculum, lessons and noticing tools, promotional materials, etc.

1. Specific Examples

- **Anecdotes/Lesson Guides**

- **Opening Ritual Example:** One opening ritual asked each member of the group to flip through a booklet of blessings and find a traditional Jewish *bracha* to apply to their life that week.
- **Closing Ritual Examples:** A closing ritual called "Praying with Our Feet" had each learner put on foot into a circle and say one way they wanted to use what they had learned that day during the upcoming week.
- **Family Limmud Example:** The first family *Limmud* featured a boundary breaking activity known as "The Great Marshmallow Challenge:" in eighteen minutes, teams must build the tallest free-standing structure out of 20 sticks of spaghetti, one yard of tape, one yard of string, and one marshmallow. The marshmallow needs to be on top.
 - The Great Marshmallow challenge is designed to demonstrate how assumptions can be our downfall: everyone assumes that the marshmallow is light and fluffy and plans on placing it at the last minute on top of a very tall tower, but in actuality it is much heavier than the spaghetti base. This allowed the *morah derech* to engage the families in an ice-breaking activity that transitioned very naturally into a conversation about the importance of good communication and checking one's assumptions in this new Chavurah community.

2. Sample Parent Communication:

Shalom Parents,

*Thank you so much to the Cammisa family for hosting on Wednesday -- and a special thanks to our special presenter Crystal! We had an opportunity to see how much sugar is in many different kinds of soda and sports drinks by measuring out the white sugar equivalent. Many of us were shocked by the results! Afterwards Crystal suggested some healthier choices: carbonated water mixed with fruit juice. We discussed that making healthier choices about how we eat, sleep, and behave helps us fulfill the mitzvah of "**Shmirat HaGuf**," (taking care of our bodies). We also decided that as we strive to be partners with God in repairing the world (Tikkun Olam) it is important to also be partners with God in taking care of ourselves.*

As part of our conversation about "What Can I Do?" we agreed that even in the 5th grade it is possible to feel empowered to take responsibility for making good choices about our lives. Each child wrote one way they want to try to live out the idea of "Shmirat HaGuf" in their lives before we meet again in April. They wrote their commitment on a label to be placed on a binder/bulletin board, etc. -- if your child

was absent, please help him or her think of a way they could live out this Jewish value. (Some examples from our Chavurah include going to bed at an earlier hour, exercising before watching television, reading more, and eating healthier snacks). The three texts we looked at about "Shmirat HaGuf" are attached to this email.

We also had a chance to review a little about Passover. We acted out our favorite parts of the Passover story and spent some time discussing the 10 Plagues. Each child suggested a more relevant "modern plague" to keep in mind during the Seder this year; the suggestions included war, pollution, child labor, and animal cruelty.

To embody our wishes of a "Zissen Pesach," (a sweet Passover) we ended with watching this (short but cute) "Googled" video about Passover: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BlxToZmJwdI>

Wishing you and your families a Shabbat Shalom and a Chag Sameach!!

*B'Shalom,
Hilary*

*P.S.: Don't forget to check out our Tumblr for pictures and more:
chavaroonies.tumblr.com*

Explanation of Tumblr:

A Chavurah group has its own Tumblr, which is a free blog-style social networking platform. It is free and wonderful for displaying pictures:

"I started using it because there are a lot of emails that go with Chavurah, and at some point it became overwhelming for the parents to read through 5 paragraphs of text and look at 3 or 4 attached pictures every week. I used the tumblr to post weekly summaries of each lesson, with accompanying pictures and links for further learning (usually myjewishlearning or something like that). In my weekly email to the parents I included the link to the tumblr, so that there wasn't too much text or too many attachments -- my sense is that most parents read these emails for the first time on their phones but then would check out the tumblr when they got home. There was space for parents to post their own content.

The tumblr is password protected and not indexed for search results (so you can't find it on google) for privacy reasons." – From a 2012- 2013 Morah Derech

3. Excerpt from Guidebook on Designing Learning Around Learner Questions:

The Chavurah model is based on designing learning around learner questions. There are two ways of thinking about learner questions, both of which encompass design principles.

The first framework for learner questions addresses areas of interest within Judaism: *Learning will enable individuals to construct their own meaning through inquiry, problem solving, and discovery.*

The Chavurah model allows the *morah derech* to understand what the students are interested in learning about. This approach to designing learning around learner questions is a good first step in the Chavurah. This takes place through online surveys, in-person focus groups, and “launch lessons,” interactive lessons that are designed to open up conversations about what learners are interested in exploring.¹ Once the *morah derech* has a good idea of the learner questions, he or she designs learning around those questions. Once the learners begin to understand how their interests and questions about Judaism shape the content of the learning, they can (with the help of the *morah derech*) uncover new and different ways of thinking about Jewish learning.

Example: During snack time one *mifgash*, the *morah derech* noticed several learners discussing how much they love sushi. When one child said she could not eat shrimp because her parents keep a kosher home, a second child said, “Thank goodness I’m not fully Jewish, otherwise I’d have to keep kosher!” A third member of the Chavurah said, “Wait, both of my parents are Jewish, and we don’t keep kosher.” The second learner then asked, “Wait, so who has to keep kosher?”

The *morah derech* interrupted to say, “There are many different ways to be Jewish. Would you be interested in learning about how different Jews practice Judaism?” The learners all nodded, before one said, “We can learn about that?”

The learners were not asking direct questions about Judaism, nor were they choosing from a pre-set list of topics. The model allows for the learners to discover areas of Jewish living about which they are curious – areas they previously thought they were *not allowed* to inquire about. The *morah derech* was then able to design a unit on diversity in Jewish practice, and was able to remind the group that their questions about *kashrut*, etc. were what guided the learning.

The second, more in-depth way of thinking about learner questions relates to another design principle: *Learners will seek the answers to the questions, challenges, and meaning of every day life.*

Beyond uncovering what areas of Judaism interest learner, the Chavurah enables the educator to answer the questions learners have about everyday life. A *morah derech* is able to do so through observing interactions between the learners,

¹ One “launch lesson” asked the learners to think about their interest in Jewish topics according to the LOMED noticing targets. Each child wrote, drew, or expressed what they would like to know, be able to do, feel was important, and feel a sense of belonging to (in a Jewish and synagogue context) by the end of their Chavurah experience. These responses guided the first few units of a new Chavurah group.

engaging them in conversations about their lives, and creating a safe space for children to express themselves.

Example: After Hurricane Sandy, one Chavurah group came together to discuss their individual post-storm experiences. Many children shared stories of their parents volunteering with the red cross and of canned good drives at their schools. When one learner spoke of his time volunteering with his parents in a very hands-on way, the other learners were surprised. “My parents said I can’t really do anything, because I’m just a kid,” said one. “Yeah,” said another, “how come adults are always telling us we can’t really do anything? Isn’t there anything we can do as kids?”

The *morah derech* facilitated a conversation about how the learners wanted to make a difference in the world, and uncovered a series of interests: taking responsibility for themselves, caring for the environment, responding to injustices at school, and standing up to bullies. This led to a unit called “What Can I Do?,” where the members of the Chavurah explored ways Judaism could help them make a difference every day.

For example, one lesson involved measuring out the sugar content in soda and sports drinks to demonstrate *Shmirat HaGuf* (caring for our bodies). The children were able to compare the physical sugar content in Coke with that of milk or water, and discussed how the choices they make at the vending machine every day could add up to pounds of sugar. Another *mifgash* brought the learners to Starbucks to learn about the many ways that buying coffee at Starbucks can help them live out the Jewish value of Ba’al Tashchit (not being wasteful or destructive), as they use as much recyclable material as possible and their coffee is sustainably grown and processed.

The learners were able to use Jewish living to help them uncover the answers to questions about their everyday lives. At the end of each *mifgash*, each learner had to think of one answer to the question “What can I do?” in relation to the topic and agree to spend the next week doing it. Each subsequent *mifgash* began with the group sharing the ways they had been able to “do things,” even as middle-schoolers.