



BECOMING

*The Best You*

Learning  
& Growth

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## LEARNING AND GROWTH

“What is life for? It is for you.”

- Abraham Maslow

A Jewish journey of learning and growth is a journey toward wholeness. It's about stepping into the director role of your life, making space and time to look at what's currently 'playing on your screen' and refine habits and patterns that shroud your innate goodness from shining brightly. It's about letting your values guide the choices you make to a degree that your life becomes a gift not only for yourself but for your children and for all those around you.

Momentum Trip Leader, Adrienne Gold says: “Many women have shared with me that as they embark on their Jewish learning journeys, what they learn feels as if they already know this; that they intuitively recognize it as truth! So, it is no surprise that in the Talmud (Niddah 30b), the sages say ‘The fetus is taught the entire Torah from beginning to end. Before birth, an angel approaches, taps the fetus above its mouth and causes it to forget it all completely.’ This enables us a learning journey that corresponds with the Latin word *educere* - ‘to draw out from within.’ Jewish learning and growth at its best is the drawing out of what the soul has heard before.”

Throughout our history, Jews have been known as “People of the Book” who study the world as it is and as it ought to be, approaching everything as learners and questioners. Everyone is encouraged to study - men, women, and children - because knowledge is seen as the basis for love and relationship with God, and for achieving our own perfection. Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, a great leader in making Jewish learning accessible to all, has said: “Jewish knowledge is not just good to have. It is essential. Some may think that knowledge belongs to scholars, religious leaders and the elite. Not so in Judaism. For us, study is an essential for everyone.”

Besides being valued for its own sake, Jewish learning is prized for helping individuals build capacity to serve and do good. Even a little bit of study each day can lead to incredible growth and can help our children.

Groundbreaking new research, the largest study ever on American Jewish teens, *GenZ Now: Understanding and Connecting With Jewish Teens Today*, shares insights relevant to parents from survey results and interview responses from over 17,000 teens:

“Today’s teens feel warmly about their parents, enjoy celebrating Jewish holidays with their families, and are more likely to see their lives as following in their parents’ footsteps than as rebelling against them.” “Teens want to ask trusted adults questions about Israel.”

The GenZ Now researchers report that teens who reported doing ‘Jewish stuff’ in activities rated significantly higher across all positive study outcomes, including the social-emotional ones. “This finding was one of the strongest and most consistent predictors in our study.”

Our history is full of stories of people who did not have the privilege of a rich Jewish education in their childhood but applied themselves in adulthood and became scholars and leaders.

Jewish learning can help us look at the world in new ways, try new things, find added meaning in our personal and family lives, and propel us to a life of kindness and good deeds.

**Some questions to ask yourself as you move through this unit:**

- *What is something that I learned on the Momentum trip or a past Jewish experience that I would like to continue to explore and put into practice?*
- *What are segments of time that I can build into my schedule to continue learning and growing?*
- *How can my learning impact my development, my family and community? How might it impact my relationship with God?*
- *How can I share my learning with others?*

## WELCOME BACK FROM THE MOMENTUM TRIP!

The trip was a whirlwind of learning and new experiences. Now that you have had time to reflect upon the trip, let's use our time together to unpack some of what you gained from the trip and what you would like to put in practice.

Have each woman in your group select two sentences from the following and then take a few moments to reflect and to jot thoughts about the sentences. Then ask each woman to pick one reflection to share, remembering that when sharing, vivid details — sights, sounds, and smells — helps paint a picture that enable listeners to imagine the moment with you.<sup>1</sup>

- *Describe a moment on the trip that moved you.*
- *Describe a moment on the trip where you experienced yearning or longing.*
- *Describe a moment on the trip that made you laugh.*
- *Share a message from the trip that is still on your mind. Why does it grab you?*
- *Describe a character trait of yours that was enhanced by the trip.*
- *Describe a moment on the trip when you experienced love.*
- *Describe a new cultural experience that you experienced on the trip.*
- *Describe a moment on the trip when you became teary and emotional.*
- *Describe a moment of reconnecting with a family member or close friend after the trip.*

<sup>1</sup> Lightly adapted from Roni Ezra Friedman





## DEBATE, LEARNING, STUDY AND ACTION

Jewish texts are filled with stories of leaders who question and debate each other in pursuit of good answers and deeper understanding.

Read the following excerpt from the Talmud featuring a debate between the great sages Rabbi Tarfon and Rabbi Akiva, and then engage in the rich Jewish tradition of questioning in search of better understanding. You could break into three groups considering the text from three vantage points.


**Rabbi Tarfon** and **Rabbi Akiva** lived in the Land of Israel during the 1st and 2nd Centuries under Roman rule. Rabbi Tarfon famously taught: “It is not your responsibility to complete the whole task, but neither may you evade it” (Ethics of the Fathers 2:7). We will learn more about Rabbi Akiva later in this session.



### Your attitude toward debate and disagreement

- *What is your general attitude toward debate and disagreement? What would you like it to be?*
- *In what situations is it easier for you to express a different opinion? When is it harder?*
- *How do you respond when others disagree with you? What would you like your response to be? How can you get to that point?*

### Your learning

- *What would you like to learn?*
  - *Where does learning happen in your life (e.g. over the phone, internet, kitchen table, rides home from school, coffee dates, formal classes)?*
  - *What new learning might you seek to incorporate into your life? How could you make that happen?*
  - *What do you do when you learn something to make sure it “sticks” (e.g. journaling, discussing with a friend or partner, acting upon it, representing it creatively or artistically)? What would you like to do to make your learning “stickier”?*
- 



### Talmud *Kiddushin* 40B

Once Rabbi Tarfon and the Elders were reclining in the attic of a house in Lod and this question was asked of them: Is study greater or action greater? Rabbi Tarfon answered, saying, "Action is greater." Rabbi Akiva answered, saying, "Study is greater." All [others who were gathered] answered saying, "Study is greater, since study leads to action."

#### קידושין מ' ב

וכבר היה רבי טרפון וזקנים מסובין בעלית בית נתזה בלוד. נשאלה שאילה זו בפניהם: תלמוד גדול או מעשה גדול? נענה רבי טרפון ואמר מעשה גדול. נענה רבי עקיבא ואמר תלמוד גדול. נענו כולם ואמרו תלמוד גדול שהתלמוד מביא לידי מעשה.

### Your study leading to action

*Often the final opinion in a Talmudic debate is the one favored by the editors. In this case, "study leads to action."*

- *Where have you experienced study leading to action or actions becoming more meaningful because of study that you did?*
- *If a magic wand could make your learning regular turn into actions, how would that affect you?*
- *What has helped you to turn learning into action?*
- *What gets in the way? What is one small thing you could do to more regularly turn learning to action?*
- *How might you teach your children the value of "study leads to action?"*



## IT'S NEVER TOO LATE THE STORY OF RABBI AKIVA

Rabbi Akiva was one of the greatest Torah scholars in Jewish history, but he had humble beginnings. Until he was 40 years old, he did not know a stitch of Torah. In fact, he did not even know how to read. According to legend, when he met his wife Rachel, the daughter of a very wealthy man, she believed in him even though he was a poor, illiterate shepherd. She married him, against the will of her father, and she and Akiva lived together in abject poverty.

How was Akiva able to overcome the many obstacles and study Torah? In this story, we learn about how Akiva was inspired to study despite his age:

### Avot d'Rabbi Natan 6:2

What was the turning point of Rabbi Akiva? He was 40 years old and still had done no formal learning. One time, he was standing next to a water well and wondered, "Who shaped this stone?" They told him, "Is it not the water which is constantly dripping upon the rock?" ... Immediately, Rabbi Akiva reasoned. "If the soft water can engrave a hard stone, then surely words of Torah, which are as powerful as iron, can engrave my heart, which is flesh and blood!" He promptly set off to learn Torah.

מה היה תחלתו של רבי עקיבא? אמרו בן ארבעים שנה היה ולא שנה כלום. פעם אחת היה עומד על פי הבאר אמר מי חקק אבן זו ואמרו לא המים שתדיר [נופלים] עליה בכל יום אמרו [לן] עקיבא אי אתה קורא אבנים שחקו מים. מיד היה רבי עקיבא דן קל וחומר בעצמו מה רך פסל את הקשה דברי תורה שקשה כברזל על אחת כמה וכמה שיחקקו את לבי שהוא בשר ודם.

- *If the water was dripping slowly, and still carved the stone, what might this teaching offer us living in a fast pace culture with our often-overscheduled lives?*
- *Have you encountered experiences like Akiva's, where you or someone you know started as a beginner but practice and perseverance helped you become better, one small step at a time? What about this might you apply to your Jewish learning and growth?*
- *What are some of your hopes regarding your Jewish learning? What are some of your fears about your Jewish learning?*
- *In what context might you share this story with another, such as with a child or friend?*

Avot d'Rabbi Natan was composed in Israel and Babylon c.650 - c.950 CE. It contains ethical maxims of the Sages, along with stories about their behavior.





## APPROACHING LIFE AS A LEARNING OPPORTUNITY *HITLAMDOT*<sup>1</sup>

What would it be like to approach life as a learner? Who do you know who does this? In Hebrew, there's a reflexive form of the word for learning (*limud*), which is *hitlamdut*. It refers to the act of approaching everything as a learner and internalizing the lessons that one learns. This mindset compels us to ask ourselves, how might a situation apply to our own lives and what can we learn from it?

Some have claimed that *hitlamdut* is the essence of Torah learning. Torah learning is not just for the sake of acquiring information. Instead, its purpose is to impact and transform our lives and our actions. *Hitlamdut* is what makes our learning transformative.

- *In what instances do you naturally approach life as a learner?*

Unfortunately, inertia may lead us to maintain old habits or stick to the status quo even when there are good reasons to grow and develop. After the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, the Midrash teaches, “Moses had to drag them from the Sea of Reeds

against their desire.”<sup>2</sup> Why? Even though their current situation wasn't good, they were reluctant to change and felt drawn back to Egypt. When we practice *hitlamdut* in our everyday lives it nourishes our willingness to change which is essential for growth, and it builds the self-awareness needed for us to affect even our most engrained habits.

Throughout the day, we experience both good and bad things. We can learn from success and failure alike. Our children don't do what we ask them to do; a colleague is late; a pipe bursts in our bathroom. We may take such experiences in stride or we may show our frustration. *Hitlamdut* guides us to learn from these experiences.

Imagine that you are a pilot flying an aircraft. You get a signal from the dashboard instruments that you need to adjust the plane's altitude. So, should you focus on altering the instrument? *Hitlamdut* offers a powerful alternate tactic. “When an instrument gives you an unexpected reading, you need to change your course, not the instrument,” explains corporate coach, Rabbi Lapin with this metaphor. “Think of people's reactions to

1 Adapted from writing and teaching by Rabbi David Jaffe, founder of the Kirva Institute and author of *Changing the World from the Inside Out*.

2 Midrash Tanhuma on the verse “Then Moses caused Israel to set out from the Sea of Reeds” Exodus15:22

you and the way they behave around you as a set of instruments that reflect your mood, attitude, and actions. Trying to change others is like trying to change the instruments on your cockpit panel instead of moving the levers.”

So, when my children don't set the table even though I've asked them repeatedly, I might be inclined to ask them again and to focus on changing their actions. Or, I explore what I can do differently. For example, maybe I can change the tone I'm using. Maybe I could play with them more before dinner. Maybe I could invite each person to choose from a menu of dinner preparation tasks. *Hitlamdut* orients us to see life as a ceaseless series of learning opportunities.

- *How could you apply a mindset of hitlamdut to different patterns in your behavior? Consider your different roles: friend, parent, colleague, daughter or wife.*

“*Hitlamdut* nurtures an attitude of acceptance towards our imperfections. If we feel like we need to be perfect, we may feel like there is no room for learning,” explains Rabbi David Jaffe.

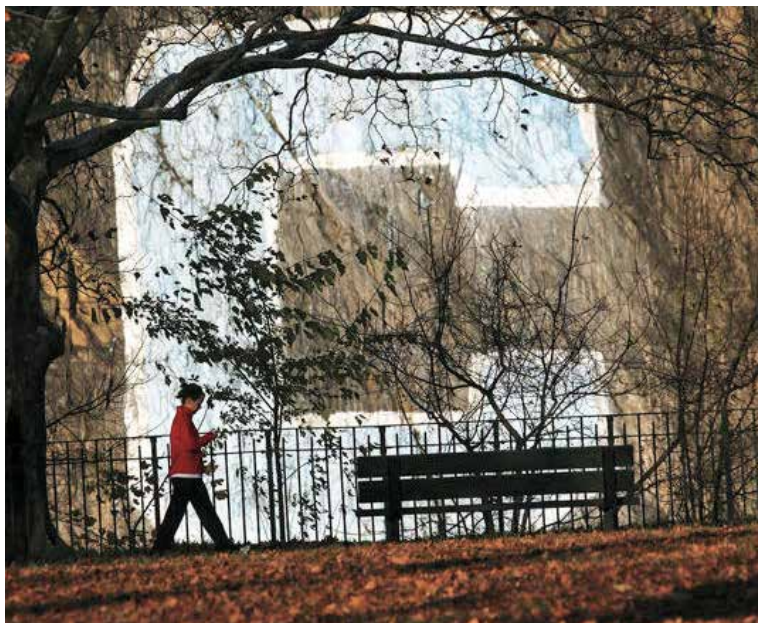
Perfectionism often breeds paralysis and inaction, leading us to fantasize about greatness while not taking the risks needed to build (even if slowly) actual achievement. When I can accept that I am not perfect at parenting, organizing, dieting or anything else, I can find room to learn. Jaffe observes, “*Hitlamdut* nurtures a mindset that everything we do is practice. It invites us to be self-reflective in order to learn from our experiences — failures included. We are all always just practicing. This mindset also helps us avoid self-righteous or arrogant thoughts that lead us to believe that we're perfect or invulnerable.”

- *Is there an area in your life where you are prone to perfectionism? What step could you take to apply an hitlamdut approach to this area or to other aspects of your life – work, parenting, hobbies, caring for your home, or your Momentum group learning?*

## THE POWER OF PARTNER LEARNING, *HAVRUTA*

How might the traditional Jewish activity of learning with a partner be a gift for you?

Give a quick glance at the image below. What single sentence would you use to completely and accurately describe this scene? Put this page away and write down your sentence.



Suzanne DeChillo/The New York Times/Redux

- *Have different people in your group each share what they saw. You'll likely find a range.*
- *When has hearing another person's perspective on an issue really clarified it for you?*
- *Where in your experience as a group did the perspective of another sister help clarify, complicate, or deepen what you had heard, seen or experienced?*
- *How might learning with a partner contribute to your growth?*
- *If you were to consider setting up a learning partnership for the next two weeks, for a short quick learning at regular intervals, what might work well for you? With whom would you want to learn and when?*

Rabbi Judah Loew, the Maharal of Prague<sup>1</sup>, noted that profound learning, such as Torah learning, takes us beyond regular thinking and understanding and enables us to access the "Supernal Mind." He believed that accessing such transcended consciousness requires preparation together with a partner.

Learning with another person makes it possible for us to leave our egocentric-focused mindset and access a more transcendent truth. Learning in partnership also deepens our grasp of the material because it requires us to be active, to articulate our ideas, which helps to clarify and embrace our learning.

<sup>1</sup> Lived 1525-1609, and source is from his book *Netivot Olam*, *Netiv HaTorah*, 86.



## ACCOUNTABILITY PARTNERS – SUPPORT FOR GROWTH

When our learning partner is also an accountability partner, we have the support to take the intellectual ideas and make them part of our lives and actions.

Accountability partners can help us take “response-ability” to turn learning into positive actions that affect our lives.

To reap the benefits, follow four simple steps:

- **Find** a person whom you trust and who is willing to explore accountability partnership.
- **Share your individual goals** and your plan for the specific actions you will each take to meet your goals.
- **Set regular two-way check-ins**, allotting equal time for each person to speak about her progress, obstacles and next steps. Practice attentive listening without giving unsolicited advice. Set frequent check-ins. For example, you may want to have 10-minute phone conversations twice a week, with each person speaking for 4-5 minutes, as well as short text updates an additional three times per week.
- **Revisit your plans** to assess whether you are on track or need to adjust course. This could be done periodically, such as once every month or two during a longer conversation.

Among the benefits of the classic teaching, “Acquire a friend – קנה לך חבר,” our sages included journaling, based on a pun on the word “acquire, קנה,” which means “pen.” In addition to finding an accountability partner, journaling also supports learning and accountability.

While speaking with your accountability partner and journaling, consider the following questions to foster your growth. Each Year of Growth sessions includes an invitation and a space to reflect on questions such as these.

**Goal** – What do you want to “go for”?

**Reality** –Where are things now for you? Consider this ABC mnemonic devise: – Affect (how are you feeling?), Behavior (what actions are you and aren’t you taking?), and Cognition (what thoughts and ideas regarding your goal are helping you or holding you back)?

**Obstacles** – What’s getting in the way? What are your options for dealing with the obstacles?

**Will** – How can you engage your will to move forward? Why is this goal important?

**Tiny** – What tiny step can you take and how will you celebrate your progress along the way?

**Help** – How are your work with your accountably partner and your journaling helping you? What adjustments could help nurture a safe space for your work? What support can further your progress?

Learning is most impactful when it embraces values, emotions and structure. Accountability partnership can provide structure. As you create an emotionally safe space with your partner, you can deepen your learning by sharing stories and feelings of your inner journey.

## LEARN WITH YOUR SISTER CONTINUING TO LEARN AND GROW

At the end of each Momentum Trip to Israel, we share that the last day of your trip is the first day of your journey. And we truly believe that!

To kick off your exciting journey ahead, here are tips from Momentum Trip Leaders. Enjoy!



### **Raquel says: Do your best.**

Contrary to societal expectations for the perfect outcome, Judaism values our effort. Pirkei Avot (Ethics of Our Fathers) says, “It is not your responsibility to finish the job, but neither are you free to desist from it.” Don’t give up because something doesn’t work at first. Just try your best!



### **Nili says: Make Judaism fun.**

No one walks away from fun, so get creative! On Shabbat, let your kids choose the menu — especially the dessert. Allow your kids to eat their favorite sugar cereal on Shabbat and call it, “Shabbat cereal.” Make Shabbat a day filled with games, stories, building a tent in the living room, and inviting their friends over — whatever appeals to your children. If your kids love a particular skating rink, make it their Chanukah outing. If they want a certain toy, make it their Passover afikoman present. Turn Shabbat and Jewish holidays into the delivery methods for your kids’ best childhood memories. After all, everyone wants to give their fondest childhood memories to the next generation.

### **Be a role model.**

There are lots of ways to grow that no one needs to know about but you! If you decide to pray, no one will know. If you decide to focus on the positive, no one will know and no one will mind! If you want everyone to turn off their phones on Shabbat, turn off your phone first. No one will mind getting Mommy’s undivided attention. Even if they leave their phones on, they will look back 10 years from now and say, “My mom always turned off her phone on Shabbat because she found it important to spend one day with us with no distractions.” You are planting seeds, and it takes a while for seeds to sprout.

### **Know that God loves you.**

If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it. God is so proud of you. You don’t need to be perfect to be wonderful.



### Adrienne says: Be patient.

Growth is happening even before you see the results of your work. Consider the Chinese bamboo plant, which shows zero growth for almost six years and then sprouts 90 feet in 18 days. An elaborate “root system” is forming that will support the growth spurts that come in their own time. Continue to “water” and tend to your goals and trust that they will bear fruit.

#### Never stop learning.

The opposite of old is not young. The opposite of old is new. Learning new ideas and putting them into practice will keep you fresh and vital. Through your efforts, your children will also see that education and growth are not just for the young. Life is an ongoing process of growth and refinement.

#### Embrace the growing pains.

Do you know how a lobster grows? Its insides start to ache as it grows internally but its hard shell does not grow along with it. A lobster must shed its shell and remain raw and vulnerable until the new shell grows back to fit its expanded insides. This happens over and over with great pain to the lobster throughout its life. If at any time a lobster was able to anesthetize the pain to avoid the growth cycle, it would remain a stunted version of itself and it would never grow to its full capacity. Growth can be painful, especially as we are shedding an old shell and waiting for a new one to grow in its place. Chose growth despite/in spite of the discomfort. Your potential is worth it!



### Ruchi says: Do the hard work.

Thomas Edison famously said that genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration. We have to do the hard work in between the flashes of inspiration in order to truly transform ourselves.

#### Prioritize what's most important to you.

There is a famous story about a teacher who asks her students to fill a glass jar with various things, including large boulders, small rocks, gravel, and sand. The students wonder how they might fit everything in the jar. It soon becomes clear that to fit them, one needs to place the large boulders in first. The large boulders symbolize our priorities in life. There will always be a million things competing for our attention but if we don't put in the important things first then the urgent but less important things will continuously tug for our time and attention.

#### Surround yourself with a great community.

I cannot overstate the importance of a peer group. Be mindful to choose friends who fill you up on an emotional and spiritual level and then surround yourselves with them.

# LEARN WITH YOUR SISTER

## HABITS – A LITTLE BIT EACH DAY

By Dr. Ronit Ziv-Kreger

Doing a bit of something each day can build new habits but changing old habits isn't easy. We often set new goals only to find old habits kicking in and thwarting our progress:

- I plan to begin my day with learning and avoid checking email in the morning. But, I find yet another day beginning in the details rather than with my priorities.
- I plan to avoid snacking after dinner, and then “just a little” popcorn turns into quite a lot more...

Our sages observed this long ago, saying: One mitzvah leads to another mitzvah and one wrongdoing leads to other wrongdoings.<sup>1</sup> A Duke University research paper titled “Habits – A Repeat Performance” found that about 45% of our waking behavior can be attributed to habits. So, what's an effective way to acquire new, healthful, positive habits that stick?

Contemporary neuroscience research, Rabbi Selanter, and other Jewish wisdom point to six steps:

**1. A purpose** – being clear on why you want a new habit provides the ‘engine power’ to propel you to do what it takes to change. There's a Jewish blessing<sup>2</sup> that says God satisfies each person not necessarily by giving us what we want but rather by giving us willpower *to want*.

Daniel Pink's book *Drive* describes contemporary research on purpose as a key driver of human behavior. So, start with articulating, ideally in writing, *why* you want a new habit. What's the underlying purpose? Your learning may inspire a phrase or a quote. Post it where you'll see and review it often. Read it to yourself aloud and with passion, this is in accordance with a Jewish practice called *hitpa'alut* - of using emotional arousal in repeating an inspiring verse to imprint purpose in ways that feed our ‘engine’ for change.

**2. Sensitive-awareness** – is a key beginning stage. When your learning and will move from the intellect to an embodied practice, you develop a sensitive awareness. This sensitivity includes attuning to bodily sensations that preempt habitual foibles – tightening in the chest that comes before speaking critically; salivating with craving that precedes reaching for potato chips; one's tailbone ascending that precedes giving advice when staying settled and listening would be more helpful.

1 Ethics of our Fathers, Pirkei Avot 4:2

2 משביע לכל חי רצון - [God] satisfies us with will ; Psalms 145:16 with a literal reading/translation



**3. Self-restraint** – awareness can put a pause between stimulus and our habitual response, giving us choice between the old habitual well-trod path of behavior and the Robert-Frost-like-path of the less-trodden.

Rabbi Dessler describes this *choice point*<sup>3</sup> as the point of push and pull, an inner-battle we experience when we want to elevate our behavior. The ability to identify this *choice point* is an opening to exercise self-restraint.

**4. Trigger** - Neuroscientists advise us that to help establish a new habit it's helpful to identify a concrete trigger –something that fits into our daily lives, so we can graft onto existing stimuli a specific new trigger to alert our awareness to the choice point we are facing. Charles Duhigg, in his book, *The Power of Habit*, underscores the value of making the trigger specific. He says any of the following will help the trigger be more specific: when, where, who else, emotional state, and the immediate preceding action. For example, a trigger could be, at home (where), in the evening (when), when my son (who) makes a big bowl of popcorn before we sit to watch a movie (preceding action), and I'm feeling drained (emotional state).

**5. A micro-habit** – something small, that ideally takes less than 60-seconds. B.J. Fogg, Stanford psychologist and researcher, says

that training our brain to make significant lifelong new habits works best when we experience success with small adjustments that help us gain confidence and get traction. If you select an action that is effortful or time-consuming, your brain will find a way to hack it and avoid it. Plan something small – silly-tiny-small – so it can fly under the radar of your resistance.

Perhaps it's a daily 5-minute partner phone learning with a friend. A small action taken regularly is more effective in changing your behavior than setting out big goals that are hard to follow through with. This fits the Talmudic idiom “If you seize too much, you don't seize at all, ***Tafasta merube lo tafasta***”

**6. Appreciation** – when a similar situation arises and you overcome the temptation of old habitual behavior and enact your new habit celebrate success! Yes, take time to notice and appreciate even small successes. Rabbi Nachman teaches that noticing ‘good points’ in ourselves and in others is absolutely transformational.

Appreciation is easier from a place of worthiness, knowing that who we are and what we do is enough and worthwhile. This mindset helps us also redirect ourselves back when things don't go as planned. King Solomon taught<sup>4</sup> that a righteous person falls again and again and yet gets up and continues.

<sup>3</sup> Often referred to with the Hebrew word for ‘choice,’ as *bechira point*.

<sup>4</sup> Proverbs 24, 16

## LEARN WITH YOUR SISTER SAVED BY THE *DAF*

By Dr. Erica Brown



Each morning, when my house is still silent, I get up – often before the sun is out – wash my hands, make a cup of coffee, say my morning blessings and then proceed to study a page of the Talmud. Since I was in my early twenties, I wanted to complete *daf yomi* (A page a day) – the daily study of Talmud that takes seven and a half years to complete. I started at 21 but only got through the first of 37 volumes. Life got in the way. Thirty years later, I am now five and a half years in. I stumble each day in confusion and incomprehension. The breakneck speed does not help, but my daily study shapes and colors each day before the rest of the day starts.

In the early 1920s, a pioneering scholar, Rabbi Meir Schapiro was initially ridiculed for suggesting that the Talmud could be studied this way. He had an innovative vision of hundreds of people all learning the same page of Talmud no matter how far apart. He probably could not have imagined tens of thousands of people across the globe learning it in classes and train cars, in synagogues and prisons, in hard copy and on iPhones. You can study *daf yomi* in dozens of translations. There are people who write haikus and limericks on the daily *daf*. One artist/student even draws a picture on the *daf* every day.

Although for most of my life, I have been reciting the blessings that enable us to study Torah each day, it was not until I began *daf yomi* that the words truly jumped off the page:

**“Blessed are You, HaShem, our God, Master of the world, who has sanctified us with His mitzvot and commanded us to engage in words of Torah.”**

All blessings prepare us to sanctify and elevate ordinary moments. Since study is so fundamental to Jewish life, we make sure that this, too, is preceded by a blessing. The great twentieth century scholar, Rabbi Joseph Solovetichik, observed that in the words of the blessing we do not bless the study of Torah but our engagement in Torah because our study pervades our lives and shapes them with constancy and a sacred rhythm.

The way that study creates this anchor was most evident to me years ago when a neighborhood group of us completed a particular volume. In Jewish tradition, when we complete the study of a book, we make a *siyyum*, a celebration of our completion and a commitment to keep going. For this *siyyum*, we finished *Yevamot*, a tractate of the Babylonian Talmud about leverite marriage. On page 128a, we read about an influential rabbi, Rabban Gamliel, who saw a ship sinking. He knew that another sage, Rabbi Akiva, was aboard that ship. To his great relief, Rabban Gamliel saw Rabbi Akiva on dry land, teaching Torah. He asked him how he had survived. Rabbi Akiva said that he held firm to a plank and whenever a wave passed over him, he ducked down. He was, in other words, saved by this plank. In this passage of Talmud, a plank is called a “*daf*” – the same word

as a page. A commentary notes this and suggests that those who study are anchored by their learning.

In a cycle of seven and a half years, many of us in the group have passed happy milestones. We’ve had children graduate and marry. Some of us have lost parents. One of us lost a child. Some of us have shifted jobs. Some have retired. One friend in another city lost his father, who had completed close to five years of Talmud study before he died. His son decided that he would complete the learning his father could not, in a beautiful act of continuity. Ilana Kurshan, in a wonderful new memoir of *daf yomi*, *If All the Sees Were Ink*, tells the story of how her study stabilized her during a painful divorce. It was a constant in a life that had been thrown into emotional turmoil. The *daf* has saving powers. It connects us to people we know and to strangers. It connects us to a two thousand-year old past and to people all over the world. Such is the magic of Torah study.

As a teacher, one of my most beautiful moments in a class happens right before we open a book. I will often recite the blessings on the Torah with my students, assuming that many may not know of this practice. It puts us in a frame of mind for the sacred intention of learning, to be able to receive, transmit and share wisdom and realize that the best learning we do comes out of holy curiosity. It is a gift. More than that, as I have learned through daily study, it is an anchor.

## TRY IT OUT

The immersive nature of Momentum offers transformative moments and the forging of uniquely meaningful relationships. So many of our women return home with a powerful desire to continue seeking inspiring experiences and a commitment to deepening those newfound friendships. But it can be a challenge! Life has a way of keeping our calendars full with appointments and growing to-do lists. In this section, *Try It Out*, we offer ideas for ways to bring those magical elements home.

### For Yourself or with a Partner

- What were your most magical moments on Momentum? Perhaps they were intimate conversations with a friend, folk dancing with dozens of others, a quiet, personal prayer, or something different. Many of these opportunities are present in our home communities. Explore the events offered at your local JCC, synagogue, and other organizations for the chance to continue at home some of what excited you in Israel. Museum exhibits, Jewish cooking classes, book clubs, women's Torah study groups, and spirituality retreats are just

a sampling of the innovative programming offered these days in our own neighborhoods.

- Invite a friend along with you, maybe some of your Momentum sisters, remembering that experiences shared with others heighten their impact on us and those we love.
- Create a vision board using photos and memorabilia from Momentum to bring your trip experiences into your daily life at home. Hang the board somewhere you will see it each day, rekindling the inspirations they engendered each time you look at it.
- Reread your Momentum Trip Journal. Take time to contemplate your written reflections and check in with yourself on where you are with the thoughts and goals you had for your homecoming.
- Consider getting a Habit Tracker App to support you with documenting your progress with new habits. Search online for one that's a fit for you.



- Select a phrase that inspires you, write it on a card and place it where you'll see it. Repeat the phrase to yourself a few times each morning with enthusiasm. Phrases you could consider:
  - “It’s not all or nothing”
  - “Who is wise? One who learns from every person.” (Pirkei Avot 4:1)
  - “A little bit is also good” (Rabbi Nachman)
- Take time to reflect on your Momentum experiences and relationships: “Disconnect to connect.” Find a cozy, quiet spot to remember how they impacted you. Consider ways to bring them into your present that speak uniquely to you. Ask yourself, “How can I continue to learn more about my Jewish heritage and Jewish values?”
- Peppered throughout Momentum were growth experiences. As humans, we never stop learning, and we feel alive when we are expanding our horizons. Now that you’re home, discover what your particular *learning style* is. Are you a visual, aural, tactile, interactive or kinesthetic learner? Or a combination of styles? Find out by selecting and completing one of the eight learning style questionnaires found at <https://bit.ly/2GV0jJ8>. What you learn about yourself can inform how and what experiences you seek!
- Check out the podcasts, videos, and articles on [MomentumUnlimited.org](https://MomentumUnlimited.org)
- Sarah Margaret Fuller said, “If you have knowledge, let others light their candles in it.” With whom can you share your learning? Our learning deepens when we share it with others.
- As mothers, we want to share the lessons we’ve learned on our life paths with our families. Your Momentum journey may have provided such inspiration. Read here for activities that can help you guide your children to deeply meaningful experiences and relationships of their own.

### For Families with Young Children

- Include your children in activities you try. Age appropriate cooking classes, Israeli dance sessions, and more can be found at the same organizations that offer adult opportunities.
- Sign up for PJ Library, which sends Jewish families books for free! Explore Jewish values and holidays together in ways that feel personal and on your own terms. Visit this link to get started. <https://bit.ly/2qrk81c>
- Support your child's growth by discovering their "learning personality." Visit Scholastic's website to learn more about how you can support their development with a better understanding of how they learn. <https://bit.ly/2qs3RZS>

### For Families with Older Children

- Join a parent-child book club. Reading and learning together in this setting offers an opportunity to explore many of life's important topics that can be otherwise difficult to broach. Can't find a group? Start one! Read this article to learn how. It even includes suggestions organized by the childrens' age. <https://bit.ly/2Hvxvpd>
- Create a new family ritual on Friday nights by introducing the *Shabbat Box of Questions* to your mealtime conversation. "...Designed to enhance your connect(ion) with your loved ones in a meaningful way," the questions ignite important conversations about a number of topics rooted in Jewish values. Examples include: What cause in the world are you willing to stand up and fight for? Who is the one person from the Bible or history that you would want to meet? What accomplishment are you most proud of? You can purchase your own *Shabbat Box of Questions* on amazon.com. <https://amzn.to/2HwKt6n>

- Share with your children two of Albert Einstein's famous quotes:

“Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow. The important thing is not to stop questioning.”

“The true sign of intelligence is not knowledge but imagination.”

Discuss with them their interpretation of each quote. Ask them if they can think of examples from either their or a friend's experience that illustrates one of the quotes.

- Teach your child this visual-imagery exercise to prime their imaginative muscle. Have them close their eyes and use their imaginations to answer questions such as:

- *Imagine what a perfect day would be like from start to finish. What is the weather like? Who are you with? What are you doing?*
- *Imagine where you would most want to go if you could take a trip. What would you do there? What sites would you visit? What foods would you eat?*
- *Imagine an improvement in either your academics or sports. What new practices could you implement to achieve that improvement?*

1 This activity is adapted from the book *Nurturing Spirituality in Children* by Peggy Joy Jenkins, PhD.

# FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

## Suggestions for Facilitating: Becoming the Best You - Learning and Growth, *Limud v' Hitlamdut*

This session is the “welcome back from the trip” session. We also explore the values of *limud & hitlamdut*, learning and approaching life as a learning opportunity.

As we transition back from MOMentum to our yearlong journey into self and sisterhood, it is important to allow time for processing the trip experience and for sharing it with each other. This sharing can deepen the bonding in the group, so the group becomes a network of allies for growth and learning. Additionally, we encourage emphasizing the tremendous value that one can gain from participating in the yearlong experience, especially when it comes to partnering for learning, growth, and accountability.

### Mind-ful Vocabulary

Learning	<i>limud</i>	למוד
Mindset of approaching everything as a learner	<i>hitlamdut</i>	התלמדנות
Learning with a partner	<i>havruta</i>	חברותא

### The Guiding Questions in this Unit Are:

- *What learning from the Momentum trip or other Jewish experience do I want to put into practice?*
- *Where in my schedule can I build time for personal learning and growth?*
- *How can my learning impact my personal development, my family and community? How might it impact my relationship with God?*
- *How can I share my learning with others?*



## Facilitating the Session

### 1. Seek Participant Input

In advance, invite a few sisters to take a small role in leading the session such as:

- In advance, ask a few participants to review their trip journals to re-immerses in the experiences, thoughts, and relationships from MOMentum. Ask them to share some of their thoughts and reflections with the group.
- Plan for and initiate a discussion about study vs. action by offering an illustrative example from their own lives.
- Lead a conversation about bringing the value of *hitlamdut* into family life, with a time to share ways participants have already encountered successes and challenges in doing so.

\*\*Involving participants helps them take ownership over their learning and prepares them to take the lead in their family and community!

### 2. Choose Your Session Activities (in advance)

You know what will best engage your participants and what are their personal and parenting goals for growth and development, so tailor the session to their interests and needs. **Soul Sparks** activities carry a particular power, and we encourage you to include them where possible.

### 3. Prep Your Space

Before the session begins, prepare the room, for example, by helping the hostess put out food and drink and arrange the space or seating to support connection. Think about what materials you will need and make sure you have everything prepared.

### 4. Welcome & Warm-Up

Make a ritual of transitioning your participants from their hectic, everyday lives to your safe space of learning and growth. Consider engaging your participants in a short stretching exercise or focusing on deep, relaxing breaths.

### **Reminder! Sisterhood Safe Space**

Remind everyone that you are in your Sisterhood Safe Space of confidentiality and compassionate listening, free of judgment and unsolicited advice.

### **5. Intro & Inspiration**

We suggest using the activity, **Welcome Back from the MOMentum Trip!**, found on Page 10, to begin this first session with your participants. To facilitate the activity, you can make a few copies of the strips of paper and cut them out so that the women can randomly pick one. Alternatively, they can select a sentence directly from the page.

Before women begin sharing their reflections, consider having the group select a hand motion that they can use to signal that they have had a similar experience.

Continue with your session by asking a reflection question: What helps you turn learning into growth?

Introduce the Hebrew phrase for learning and growth, *hitlamdut*. Ask the women to reflect on the quote found on the first page of this session, “Jewish learning can help us look at the world in new ways, find added meaning in our lives, and propel us to a life of kindness, justice and good deeds.” Following

individual reflection time, think together about the themes, longings, and conflicts that emerged as your participants thought about this quote. Make a note for yourself about which of these themes is connected to this session, and which themes you would like to follow up on in future meetings.

### **6. Soul Sparks Activities**



There are several different activities in the session that will encourage learning and growth; we suggest choosing one or two for your session. Below are some of our favorites:

#### ***The Power of Partner Learning, Havruta***

Read the opening two paragraphs of the article aloud. Devote a few minutes to completing the introductory task, where each participant writes a brief description of photo provided. Once everyone has completed this step, have a group discussion around the five questions that follow the task prompt, which will set the table for digging deeper into the power of partner learning. This activity could be dovetailed with the next that speaks about accountability partners. Either way, move the learning into action of having women set a structure of how pairs of women can support each other with learning and turning the learning into growth-full action.

### ***Accountability Partners - Support for GROWTH***

In addition to or instead of the previous activity, read this article together. Talk through the next steps of finding a *havruta* partner and brainstorm ways to take the first step of reaching out and inviting that person to join them in partner learning with a structure for supporting learning leading to action.

### **7. Reflection & Closing**

Recall the main ideas explored in the session and create an opportunity for reflection.

***Reflection Suggestion:*** Ask participants to reflect on the following: “What is one takeaway you’ll be going home with after our session today?” or “A learning and growth idea or practice that I would like to begin with my family is . . .”

Invite them to respond to the prompt by writing, drawing, or thinking silently. After individual reflection time, you may ask your women to partner and share their reflections, which can be followed with group (voluntary) sharing.

Direct the women’s attention to the “**Try It Out: Practical Tips and Resources for Families.**” These suggestions will help them bring the learning they have done today home to their families in interesting and fun ways. Encourage them to choose at least one

thing they will do with their families and come back next time and report on how it went. Give a brief overview of the rest of the unit.

Provide an opportunity for participants to arrange a time to connect with another sister to continue exploring, reflecting, and offering each other support and accountability. This “**Learn with Your Sister**” activity serves as an entry points for conversations that may never otherwise happen. (See pages XXXXXX) Let all the women know when you’ll be meeting again and what theme will be explored.

### **Extra! Program Ideas:**

To enhance your session and to help each and every participant know the goals that others in the group are working on and aspiring toward, you may want to consider the following:

- Combine this session with creating vision boards that illustrate the areas in which your participants would like to learn and grow in the coming year;
- Create “Intention Candles” as a physical embodiment of the desire to learn and grow in the coming year. (For instructions on how to create these candles, visit <https://bit.ly/2XJ0m4O>)



The sales of Year of Growth are used entirely to cover costs of creating, producing, distributing, and supporting the successful use of this educational resource.

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**Ministry of Diaspora Affairs**  
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