



The Seder and JOFA's Shemot Curriculum

THE SEDER AND JOFA'S SHEMOT CURRICULUM

This seder supplement was designed with two goals in mind:

- To introduce JOFA's Shemot (Exodus) curriculum to the broader community
- To provide JOFA's members with meaningful and enjoyable seder activities that mirror the classroom experiences fostered by the curriculum

We hope that this handbook will enhance your seder, raise awareness of women's roles in the Pesah story, and provide an understanding of the learning style of the curriculum.

COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

The seder offers a time for people to learn from one another. Although many families have a "seder leader" — someone who prepares questions and activities — the seder offers all participants an opportunity to both learn and teach. We remain learners all our lives; by the same token, the mantle of teaching also falls on children. Each of us — at our varied ages and stages of life — can participate in the adventures of the night by telling the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*.

DIFFERENTIATED LEARNING

One of the hallmarks of the seder is differentiated learning — learning that targets a variety of levels, abilities, and dispositions. From the youngest child to the most seasoned seder-goer, everyone interprets the seder in a different way.

MULTI-SENSORY LEARNING

Multi-sensory activities allow people with different interests to stay engaged. At the seder, we use our sense of taste to connect to the bitterness of slavery; we recline our bodies to indulge our sense of freedom; and we use our voices to praise God and to connect to each other through song.

The Shemot curriculum offers each member of the classroom an opportunity to learn and teach — students learn from one another, teachers learn from students, and students learn from teachers. Teachers are encouraged to elicit student questions while students can work in pairs to understand the texts and present their ideas to the larger group.

The Shemot curriculum is designed to address multiple strengths and interests. The variety of homework assignments — some involving art, others with creative writing or computation — enable each student to find a way to integrate the material. Fifth-grade teachers who piloted this curriculum consistently noticed that even their quietest students participate enthusiastically. The lessons reach students with varying skills, playing to their strengths and helping to build confidence as they study Humash.

The Shemot curriculum offers students a variety of sensory experiences to pique their interest and draw them to the material. A unit devoted to the seemingly unstoppable birth rate of the Jewish people in Egypt uses Andy Warhol paintings to help students experience multiple images — or words — as both the same and different. In the unit on Miriam's song at the sea, students listen to music to think about the connections among music, movement, and emotion.

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MERGING THE PERSONAL WITH THE TORAH

The seder is structured with the expectation that participants will become fully engaged in the story of freedom — so much so that they will feel as if they themselves are leaving Egypt — making the story come alive. Part of that process involves breaking down the barriers between past and present. Equally important is the merging of one's personal story with the national or biblical drama.

QUESTIONING AND REFLECTIVE LEARNING

At the seder, questions are welcome; in fact, they are woven into the fabric of the Haggadah. The Gemara in Pesachim 116a underscores the centrality of asking questions with the claim that one who has a seder alone must ask oneself questions! Questions may elicit answers, but they may also be appreciated on their own merit or lead to further exploration.

In the Shemot curriculum, students are encouraged to see biblical personalities and events in relevant terms so they can relate to the characters in the Humash. Thus, if they learn that Miriam was a leader at a very young age, they may realize that they, too, can effect lasting change. Just as the midwives struggled with an ethical dilemma and overcame it, so is each student capable of making significant decisions.

The Shemot curriculum is designed to nurture reflective and critical thinking while encouraging students to ask questions as they engage in the study of biblical text.

THE SHEMOT CURRICULUM AND ITS AUTHORS

JOFA's Shemot curriculum was developed by Tammy Jacobowitz and Judith Talesnick, following the successful implementation of JOFA's *Bereishit: A New Beginning* curriculum. Designed to enhance the study of biblical text, the nine Shemot modules have been reviewed by JOFA's Professional Advisory Committee and piloted in fifth-grade classes at three day schools in New York City and New Jersey.

An educators' workshop for teachers of Humash is planned for the spring of 2009. Participants will learn more about JOFA's curricula and develop a community for ongoing peer support.

For more information about JOFA's curricula or the educators' workshop, visit www.jofa.org, call 212-679-8500, or email curriculum@jofa.org.

Co-writer of JOFA's Shemot curriculum, Tammy Jacobowitz is writing a dissertation on Midrash toward a doctorate in Rabbinic literature at the University of Pennsylvania, where she studied as a Wexner Graduate Fellow. Ms. Jacobowitz is a graduate of the Scholars Circle at Drisha, and teaches in its high school and continuing education programs.

After pursuing a Master's degree in Jewish Women's Studies at Jerusalem's Machon Schechter, Judith Talesnick completed her education training at Drisha's Hasha'ar Educators Program in New York City. In addition to co-writing JOFA's Shemot curriculum and mentoring teachers using the Bereishit curriculum, Ms. Talesnick serves as a Judaic Studies consultant for day schools and synagogues.

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JOFA seeks to expand the spiritual, ritual, intellectual, and political opportunities for women and advocates for their meaningful participation to the full extent possible within the framework of halakhah. Our commitment is rooted in the belief that fulfilling this mission will enrich and uplift individual and communal life for all Jews.