

# FROM ENCOUNTER TO INTERNALIZATION

Toward a Theory of Applying Jewish Wisdom

## ABSTRACT

We encounter wisdom, Jewish and otherwise, all the time. The application of this wisdom in our everyday lives, however, is much less common. Under what conditions is internalization most likely to occur? This manuscript explores the roles of frameworks for understanding, identity, and proximal and distal relationships and community in moving from encountering to internalizing Jewish wisdom.

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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

What happens when one encounters Jewish wisdom? If I were a gambler, I'd put my money on "not much." After all, we frequently encounter sources of wisdom – Jewish and otherwise – with little impact. Sometimes the wisdom goes virtually unnoticed. Not all synagogue attendees (back in the day when attendees were actually sitting in a synagogue) recall the main idea of the rabbi's wisdom-filled Yom Kippur sermon after a day has passed. Wisdom is regularly ignored. I am in good company when I say that I am well aware that I should lose weight. I have access to, and have encountered, plenty of wisdom about this. I know there are good reasons, from a medical perspective, for me to do so. I know what needs to be done (really, it ain't complicated... reduce caloric intake, increase exercise). I know that it can be done (others have lost much more weight than I need to) and I even know that I can do it (after all, I've done it before). I've even had opportunity to link this to Jewish values and concepts and have learned Jewish texts about how we should treat our bodies. And yet, here I am....

Perhaps we only need to find the right texts or rituals to do the trick and serve as a sort of Jewish-wisdom booster shot? Or, perhaps once we get the presentation right – pedagogically-sound, enthusiastically and charismatically delivered – then those transformative educational moments will occur, and a learner will experience an "Aha" moment. There is no doubt that such lightning-bolt moments of insight and transformation can and do occur, but this is suspect as a model for promoting Jewish wisdom. We've all encountered powerful texts

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and fantastic pedagogy with no lightning bolt of internalization of the teaching.

Transformational education, despite its somewhat rosy title, takes hard work (e.g., Mezirow, 1991). My thinking about this topic emerged from concern that we, like the professor depicted in the New Yorker cartoon on the cover of this report, are not operating with a robust theory of change.

In this paper, I consider the question of what happens when one encounters Jewish wisdom and the conditions under which one is most likely to incorporate these teachings into one's life. A core question might be: *Under what conditions is Jewish wisdom likely to take root?* Organizations regularly produce logic models that trace the expected pathways of impact that program participation would have. Here, we look at the topic from the point of view of the participant, exploring theories of learning and change. In its most ambitious framing, we address one of the broadest questions there is: Why do people do what they do? Framed more narrowly, we attempt to trace the move from encountering Jewish wisdom to internalizing it.

## Organization of This Manuscript

This document begins with an overview of definitions related to the notion of applying Jewish wisdom. The bulk of this manuscript is divided into two sections, with a review of literature in the first and a discussion of implications in the second (though there is overlap). Within the literature overview in Section 1, I begin with what might be seen as a primarily intra-personal dimension of the discussion, our behaviors and frameworks for understanding the world. The focus then shifts to the inter-personal sphere, looking at the importance of relationships and context. Between these sections, I've included an "interlude" in which I

discuss the role of identity in bridging our internal and social worlds. For my discussion in Section 2, I draw from holistic educational models to discuss implications for practice. Finally, I include some concluding remarks in Section 3.

### Getting Oriented: Jewish Wisdom and Sensibilities

To begin with, it is helpful to bring some definitional clarity to the scope of the discussion, particularly around (a) the terms "applied Jewish wisdom" and "Jewish sensibilities" and (b) what we might mean by applying or internalizing these.

The past decade has seen a growing focus on "Jewish wisdom," or the power of the Jewish tradition to supply guidelines for navigating life's challenges, both the mundane and the extraordinary, and to promote life-satisfaction and other positive outcomes. While Judaism has always emphasized norms for inter-personal interaction (*mitzvot bein adam l'chavero*, for example), there have been several creative pathways blazed toward framing and articulating ideas that could guide behavior across multiple situations. Common to these approaches is the use of Jewish texts and practices as springboards for broad assertions for how to live one's life.

Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah (LKFLT) has been at the forefront of these efforts. According to its website, LKFLT "promotes and supports 'Living Torah' – Judaism as a powerful, evolving wellspring of accumulating wisdom and sensibilities that enriches people's lives and helps create a better world." Here, we'll focus on the use of the terms *wisdom* and *sensibilities* by the Foundation. Although this material will be familiar to some readers, given the centrality of these issues to both the Foundation and to the discussion later in this paper, an overview is warranted.

Jewish Sensibilities, which seems like the narrower of the two terms, provides a useful starting point. The Foundation's work in this area draws from the work of Dr. Vanessa Ochs (Ochs, 2003, 2006) and, through its efforts, these ideas reached a wide audience (for example, Hillel International developed a curriculum guide for these.) The sensibilities can be seen as a set of religio-cultural guidelines for behavior, or the “unarticulated code that many Jewish Americans try to follow — even judge themselves by” (Ochs, 2003). Ochs describes the concept as being "supported by traditional Jewish practices, texts and regala, but it is not necessarily synonymous with them" (Ochs, 2006). To Ochs, the sensibilities are part of the worldview of Jews regardless of their level of ritual engagement. They may operate on the level of intuition without one's conscious knowledge, and they are instilled as part of cultural transmission that may not even be recognized.

Ochs describes ten sensibilities:

1. *Havdalah*: Making distinctions
2. *Kavod*: Giving Honor
3. *Teshuvah*: Turning
4. *Tzelem Elohim*: Human Dignity
5. *Pikuach Nefesh*: Saving a Life
6. Being a *Mensch*/good person.
7. *Shalom Bayit*: Keeping the peace.
8. *Tikkun Olam*: Repairing the world.
9. *Yesh Tikvah*: Maintaining hope
10. *Z'chut Avot*: Memory of one's ancestors

These sensibilities contribute to an individual's overall functioning, touching all aspects of their lives:

The sensibilities are Jewish ways of understanding what it means to be a human being. They affect how one thinks, acts, and feels. They guide and orient one's actions and choices. And just as they shape and refine one's own behavior, they serve as

benchmarks as one evaluates the behavior of others and, in the case of parents and teachers, as they erect an informal curriculum for character development. (Ochs, 2006)

The sensibilities can provide a "Jewish 'compass'" when faced with ethical dilemmas. And, as we'll see later in our discussion about worldviews, "consulting the sensibilities helps one understand how one's Jewishness defines or contributes to the way one lives when the influence isn't at first obvious" (Ochs, 2006). Notably, the sensibilities exist in conversation or dynamic tension with one another - they are not instructions for how to handle specific situations but rather frameworks for deliberation.

Ochs draws a distinction between her original intention for the sensibilities and what she describes as "off-label" use (Ochs, 2019). The latter has to do with using the sensibilities as a set of Jewish priorities formulated in a way that speaks to a broad audience that may be disconnected from traditional observance. Taking such an approach leads to efforts to curricularize the sensibility as Judaism's guidelines for living. She doesn't see this as problematic per se but worries about reifying her observations to create prescriptive norms.

The term Jewish wisdom seems to be more broadly encompassing. It shares with Jewish sensibilities a rootedness in Jewish text and tradition. However, the term does not seem to be accompanied by a consensus list of components. The term can be applied to the general project of drawing from Judaism guidelines for inter- and intra-personal functioning. This would include various initiatives that fall under headings such as of positive psychology, social and emotional learning, and *middah*-promotion, including those related to "thriving" and mindfulness.

## Applying Wisdom

Regardless of whether one is talking about sensibilities or wisdom (or one of the other terms under the heading of wisdom), the Foundation is interested in an active component – application – as well. Horowitz (2019) took an inductive approach, analyzing grant proposals and writings from the Foundation, to arrive at a summary of conceptualizations of the term. From the terms used by the Foundation – "accessed, internalized, wrestled with, and, yes, applied" (Horowitz, 2019, p. 369) – she summarizes the Foundation's interest in both centripetal and centrifugal processes. "By encountering and learning texts and materials, learners then take these ideas/values inside themselves, and ultimately do something with that learning. The first three adjectives highlight processes internal to the learner, while 'applied' points outward to the world" (Horowitz, 2019, p. 369). There is a broader context too, that goes beyond the individual and speaks to a vision of Judaism. The application of Jewish wisdom is also meant "to change the way of framing Judaism, from a defensive position to a more culturally confident one, to bring Jewish ideas and sources" (Horowitz, 2019, p. 370) into a wider cultural discourse.

## The Challenges of Applying Jewish Wisdom

There is no denying the potential for Jewish text and tradition to serve as guidelines for "the good life"; identifying core concepts and related texts is an important step that continues to propel the discussion forward. At the same time, we confront challenges on several levels. We can start with the level of behavior and ask how one, having encountered the wisdom of an action, goes about establishing its routine practice. How do we go from, say, giving little or no

*tzedakah* (in the frequently used but admittedly limited use of the term to mean “charity”) to giving *tzedakah* regularly?

There are further challenges. Even if a behavior (e.g., *tzedakah*-giving) is routinized, the above discussion of applying wisdom points to another level of impact, having to do with the incorporation into a sense of one’s self, or the establishment of more general virtues. This has been the topic Maimonides-based discussions of Jewish virtue ethics. For example:

Through developing a daily practice of *tzedakah*, we can become more responsive to the needs of those around us. ...

Thus, Maimonides understood the value of the Jewish practice *tzedakah* as educational in the sense of building one’s character. For him the benefit of giving was not primarily toward the one who received but toward the giver, within whom a regular practice was needed to cultivate the virtue of generosity. (Robinson, 2017)

But why would repeatedly giving *tzedakah* lead to developing *generosity*? Why not self-centeredness (“Look at how much of a tax deduction I’m getting!”)? Or self-righteousness and disdain (“I worked hard to deserve the money that I’m giving to these freeloaders!”). Again, we refer back to the New Yorker cartoon and remind ourselves that Judaism has a tradition of “*ein somchim al ha’ness*,” not relying on miracles.

The question raised in this paper has to do with the generalization from an act, however much repeated, into a core part of who the actor is, such that similar acts manifest in other situations. At the risk of oversharing, I provide another example from the ongoing saga of my efforts to stay in shape. For a while, I regularly went to the gym before taking the bus to work (a feat I find particularly impressive, if I do say so myself, because it involved getting to the gym before 5:30 am). I did this over the course of years. I certainly missed days, but it was something I would certainly have considered to be a regular practice. However, the practice did

not translate into a disposition or connect to my sense of self (or whatever ambiguous term one wants to use to mean “become part of who I am as a person”). On days when I worked from home, gym attendance was much less likely. When COVID hit, and I was no longer going on a bus or to the gym, the expression of that behavior (exercising) has been much less consistent.

It seems necessary to go beyond the formation of habits, though those are part of the story. In this paper, I try to capture some of the dynamics of this. Also, I’ll make the case that in addition to wisdom-oriented dispositions from repeated virtuous behaviors, we can also think about applying a Jewish wisdom framework to actions already taken, allowing the development of a language and worldview that can go beyond the repetition of an act.

In the Jewish realm, there is yet another layer of complexity, related to the issue of universalism vs. particularism that pervades Jewish thought. Some might say that if one becomes an exemplar of Jewish wisdom, *dayenu*-that would be sufficient; others, though, value the connection between enacting the wisdom and appreciating its centrality within Judaism. To use an example from Ochs’ sensibilities, how do we promote not only a stance of patiently learning from one’s mistakes and honoring the process of doing so, but also the understanding that *teshuvah* is something central to the Jewish tradition?

Complicating matters, we are talking not only about sources of wisdom, but delivery or facilitation of those sources. Jewish texts (or traditions, or concepts, etc.) can be taught or introduced in a way that pulls in learners and inspires them onward to a path of positive growth. The same Jewish texts (or traditions, or concepts, etc.) can be taught or introduced in a way that distances learners and maintains a stance of cynicism and disconnection. While there are some obvious steps that help achieve the former outcome – have respect for the learner,

build positive relationships, etc. – we are still faced with a related tension. Even when we are able to create caring, positive learning experiences, we are still far from our goal. *One may learn the wisdom of Judaism, and even enjoy doing so and be able to speak eloquently about it, without actually incorporating this learning into their life.*

As such, we are left with a challenge that goes well beyond that of “learning” text and tradition and speaks, instead, to how we develop frameworks for understanding and interacting with the world around us. How do some pieces of “good advice” become incorporated into our daily repertoire while others might get a nod of interest but are ultimately disregarded? What is the pathway between learning *about* the sources of Jewish wisdom and becoming an exemplar of this wisdom? What are the potential sources of disconnect?

When it comes to applying Jewish wisdom, we are working on (at least) two levels. There is a level of *kevah*, or routine. This level refers to our enacting the behavioral regularities suggested by the wisdom. It involves the *doing* that would, hopefully, emerge from *knowing* a teaching of Jewish wisdom (although this is, already, an oversimplification). For example, learning the Jewish teaching that humanity is created *b'tzelem Elohim* (in God's image) can lead me to work to create inclusive learning environments. Over time, it is possible that this work takes on a life of its own, so to speak. Even without considering the notion of *b'tzelem Elohim*, or even having forgot I learned it in the first place, I might continue down my inclusionary path. *Kavanah*, on the other hand, refers to intentionality or, in this case, creating a linkage between the action and the element of Jewish wisdom that relates to it. To continue our example, I may have come to the work of inclusion even without the notion of *b'tzelem Elohim*. Perhaps I have a relative with a disability and my awareness is heightened. Perhaps my inclusion work began

by responding to the demands of influential parents in my school and has grown into my passion. Regardless, I might have gotten into the *kevah* – the behavioral regularity – without the *kavanah* of association with Jewish wisdom.

The *kevah-kavanah* distinction is already embedded in Ochs’ discussion. Her notion of Jewish sensibilities refers to culturally rooted assumptions and behavior, operating without needing conscious awareness. In fact, she ponders the utility of bringing these into intentional usage:

... it dawned on me that Jews themselves – and not just those who want to make better sense of us – might find that if they could name the most pervasive Jewish Sensibilities *that were already active and sometimes in conflict* in their own lives, it could help them thoughtfully navigate through difficult challenges and decisions, not just in health care, but beyond – say in communal life, in relationships, at life’s junctures. (Ochs, 2019, emphasis added)

Likewise, it is alluded to in Horowitz’s analysis of the review process of grants for applying Jewish wisdom in her finding that what judges were looking for was not an automatic process. Rather,

applying Jewish wisdom is not the same as enacting Jewish traditions or activities like celebrating or praying simply because “it’s the way we do things.” It needs to be more intentional and regularized. Mimetic, habitual Jewish practice is not sufficient to qualify. Applying Jewish wisdom involves something else, such as taking a regular old practice and reinvigorating it, or repurposing it, reinterpreting it in some fashion, discovering new uses for old forms. (Horowitz, 2019, p. 376)

To conclude our introductory overview of terms and concepts, we can look at Horowitz’s summary of three broad notions of applying Jewish wisdom that emerge from analyzing writing by LKFLT:

The first involves individuals coming to encounter teachings from Jewish sources and finding them to be personally enriching and meaningful. The second meaning of applying Jewish wisdom is to distill from Jewish teachings ways of addressing contemporary problems in the world today. The third formulation is the 'Yavneh move': reinterpreting a long-standing Jewish practice in the face of changing circumstances. (Horowitz, 2019, p. 372)

We now turn to an array of behavioral theories that can help us understand the “miracle” that can happen between encountering and internalizing Jewish wisdom.

# Section 1: Overview of Literature

## Section 1a: Behavior and Frameworks for Understanding

It turns out that the *kevah-kavanah* distinction is reflected in biologically based behavioral science research, a significant amount of which suggests that much of what we do occurs without conscious mediation. Simple, frequently repeated behaviors become *chunked*, or linked together into more complex patterns. These habitual behaviors are processed by the basal ganglia, an area of the brain that handles the often-minute, non-conscious adaptations that we make to enact behaviors (e.g., configuring our hands in the right position so that we can pick up our cell phones). Duhigg (2014) describes the formation of habits as a loop. A particular cue serves to initiate a set of behaviors which result in a reward which, in turn, reinforces the initial behaviors. Over time, this behavioral loop becomes so strong that the cue leads to the anticipation of the reward that awaits at the end of the behavioral routine, manifesting as the feelings (and related neurological reactions) of cravings. Cravings can serve as motivators, spurring us on to enact the behavioral routine that leads to the reward (for example, I see the sign for the donut store on the way to work each day, I pull into the drive-through, and I'm rewarded by a delicious treat). They can also yield frustration should the behavioral routine become blocked (perhaps road construction causes me to take a different, donut-shop-free route to work). All of this can take place without conscious processing. I don't actually *decide* to get a donut each day on the way to work. I just do it. The cue (the sign for the donut store) activates the basal ganglia which puts into action a complex array of behaviors (turn on my blinker, pull into the drive through, etc.); the higher order processing regions of the brain regions are not involved.

Automatic processes are also guided by often subtle behavioral cues. For example, we naturally imitate or mimic other people's behavior, particularly when there are positive feelings toward the person being mimicked. In experimental conditions, those primed with stimuli about the elderly (e.g., shown pictures of elderly people) will walk slower and estimate hills to be higher than those not primed in this way. This happens at an automatic, non-conscious level. Mimicry has social sequelae, helping us bond with others. Automaticity may also occur on the level of "metaphorically related physical and psychological concepts" (Bargh et al., 2012, p. 596). For example, touching something hard seems to activate thoughts and reactions related to difficulty. This is seen as related to the idea of embodied emotions – physical sensations can activate complex affective associations and reactions. Further, our emotional state serves to shape automatic behaviors (e.g., those shown words related to anger will act angrier on a subsequent task; those primed for control showed more self-control). This can be used to shape behavior; providing emotional cues can impact the experience of the behavior.

### The Ubiquity of Automaticity

We often extol the benefits of intentionality and awareness. We (particularly the more psychoanalytically inclined among us) repeat Socrates' claim that "the unexamined life is not worth living." At the same time, though, habitual behavior is necessary for successful everyday functioning. There are simply too many behaviors that need to be integrated in complex ways for us to be able to consider all alternatives on an ongoing basis. Without routines that become automatic, that we describe as "second-nature," we would likely be in a perpetual state of paralysis. I experienced this recently while helping my daughter learn to drive. It was eye-

opening to spend hours with her in a car trying to explain behaviors that I've been successfully enacting – without thinking – for several decades: where to look while switching lanes, when to start turning the steering wheel when making a turn, etc. *When was the last time I thought about these things?!?* I consider myself a fine parallel-parker, and I was easily able to demonstrate the technique. When I tried, in the name of coaching my daughter, to talk through all the moves I was making and instruct her to do the same, I found that my technique suffered. My habitual moves were derailed. I was, quite literally, over-thinking a good habit.

While our understanding of the neurological aspects of habits have expanded, the notion of a self-perpetuating *cue -> behavioral routine -> reward* link is not new. Those of us who took Psych 101 may remember experiments in which animals were prompted by some cue (a sound or light) to enact a complex behavior (going through a maze) to obtain a reward. In the human world, Alcoholics Anonymous and similar organizations stress the avoidance of the cues that might initiate a (in this case, negative) behavioral routine. Contacts with "people, places, and things" (a phrase commonly used in these groups) associated with the unwanted behavior are to be avoided. Likewise, changing my route to work to bypass the donut shop may help me avoid the cue (though truth be told, there is a branch of this donut shop on either end of the road through my town, there is no donut-free way out).

We are generally willing to accept that we are creatures of habit for simple, repetitive behaviors. We may not protest much even when we learn that we may habitually enact even complex series of behaviors (e.g., unintended donut stops). But we're sure that when it really counts, when the chips are down, when we are dealing with morals and ethics, we're guided by

rational thought processes embedded in value systems which we can articulate as the guides to our lives.

*Right? Right!?!? Well....*

It turns out that there is a considerable amount of research evidence suggesting that our ethical behaviors are largely governed by automatic, non-conscious processes as well. That this is not the way we frame our own behaviors leads Haidt (2001, p. 823) to describe two illusions.

The first illusion can be called the *wag-the-dog illusion*: We believe that our own moral judgment (the dog) is driven by our own moral reasoning (the tail). The second illusion can be called the *wag-the-other-dog's-tail illusion*: In a moral argument, we expect the successful rebuttal of an opponent's arguments to change the opponent's mind<sup>2</sup>. Such a belief is like thinking that forcing a dog's tail to wag by moving it with your hand will make the dog happy.

These beliefs in the importance of conscious processing of ethical decisions are reflected in models that assert the primacy of rational deliberation in the processes in the moral domain (think Kohlberg's increasing levels of deliberative sophistication). In such models, moral behavior is the result of reasoned consideration, with emotions or instincts being, at best, irrelevant and, at worst, counterproductive (in that moral reasoning is sometimes framed as reigning in our base inclinations). Behavioral neuroscience, however, points to a different pathway, one in which intuition takes center stage. And, in contrast to theories that posit that we are generally inclined to antisocial behavior (think of Freud's Id), it seems that evolution has brought us to a point of having *prosocial* intuitions that enable us to function within a group or society. Intuitive tendencies to cooperate with members of one's group, or at least to avoid

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<sup>2</sup> And, I'd adapt this to include the idea that presenting a source of Jewish wisdom might create similar change.

harming them, maintain the set of positive interactions required by a well-functioning society, particularly one in which language and memory make it possible for information to easily spread about who is violating intuitive norms (J. Greene, 2013) . Of course, not all of our intuitions can be considered "positive," though they are generally seen as contributory to a group's well-being. In-group cohesion, for example, often comes at the expense of rejection of members outside of one's group.

Emotions play a role in the automaticity of moral behavior. For example, when one is presented with stimuli that elicit disgust (e.g., foul odor), one is likely to provide more severe or strict moral judgements (Bargh et al., 2012) . Moreover,

even when moral judgments result from controlled processes, they can be influenced automatically – without awareness or intention – by factors that are logically irrelevant to the judgment. For example, a moral transgression occurring a year in the future is experienced as more immoral than that same act said to occur tomorrow, and, similarly, a morally good act occurring a year in the future seems more virtuous. (Bargh et al., 2012, p. 597)

Emotions and moral thinking have a complicated relationship, with both the type of emotion and the type of moral situation relevant to determining our moral behaviors (Ugazio et al., 2012). For example, “anger as an approach emotion increased judgments of moral permissibility, the withdrawal emotion of disgust decreased them” (Ugazio et al., 2012, p. 11). Further, emotions have more of an impact on judgements of moral situations than they do on non-moral emotional situations (such as those involving disgusting yet not-immoral activity).

Brain function, not surprisingly, supports the idea of a key role for emotions in our moral lives. For example, our brain is sensitive to deviations from what we've come to expect in our surroundings (a neurological basis for “feeling something is off” before actually being able to

say what the problem is). Research suggests that such processes serve as a sort of environmental scanner to alert us to deviations from expectations regarding "abstract values like uncertainty, conventional values like money, and social values like trustworthiness" (Railton, 2017, p. 176).

This is not to say that moral reasoning does not occur, only that it is, by and large, not the driving force of everyday behavior. Moral reasoning can be helpful, for example, when situations bring intuitions into conflict or when one encounters novel situations for which intuitions are lacking. There is a constant interplay of conscious and non-conscious processes:

...preconscious forms serve as unfelt automatic input into controlled processes, such as decisions and behavioral choices, whereas postconscious forms are automatic, unintended consequences of conscious thought processes. Major recent reviews of the causal role of conscious processes and recent integrations of the conscious self-regulation and the unconscious priming literatures have similarly concluded that unconscious processes cause conscious ones, which in turn put further unconscious processes into motion. (Bargh et al., 2012, p. 602)

This *dual-process* theory, the term used to describe the interplay of conscious and non-conscious processing, is related to the theory of cognition developed by Daniel Kahneman and colleagues and popularized in the best-seller *Thinking Fast and Slow* (Kahneman, 2011). Fast, intuitive, non-conscious processing (what Kahneman calls System 1 thinking) characterizes the bulk of our thinking. And we're quite good at it.

Expert intuition strikes us as magical, but it is not. Indeed, each of us performs feats of intuitive expertise many times each day. Most of us are pitch-perfect in detecting anger in the first word of a telephone call, recognize as we enter a room that we were the subject of the conversation, and quickly react to subtle signs that the driver of the car in the next lane is dangerous. (Kahneman, 2011, p. 11)

This serves us quite well in many cases. However, it may serve us too well in that our intuitive thinking is characterized by predictable biases which tend to prop up our pre-existing beliefs.

For example, we are far more likely to notice and read a news story that seems to be slanted in a way that we agree with than one that contrasts (a finding that leads companies to create algorithms to send us links to certain news sources and not others). System 2, the “slow” thinking of the book’s title, is more deliberative and rational. We are more likely to notice our biases and take other views into account.

Greene (2014) uses an analogy to a camera. Usually, we're on auto mode. Automatic settings can be innate or can be learned through community cultural norms. They are determined by "genetic transmission, cultural transmission, and learning from personal experience" (J. D. Greene, 2014, p. 714). But we can also switch to manual mode.

[T]o promote efficiency, our brains have point-and-shoot automatic settings in the form of intuitive emotional responses. These are marvelous, but nonetheless limited in what they can do. In particular, we should not expect them to perform well in the face of peculiarly modern problems, ones with which we have inadequate genetic, cultural, and individual experience. Many of the most important moral problems we face may be of this kind. (J. D. Greene, 2014, p. 725)

The dual-process model also accounts for the often-encountered discrepancy between moral reasoning and moral behavior; we claim something is wrong, but we do it anyway. Our verbal explanations result from our higher order processing; our automatic, intuitive behaviors are slower to change.

It is possible to reason ourselves away from intuitive reactions, and to influence the intuitive reactions of other people. In fact, claims Haidt (2007), it is interpersonal engagement that provides the most common pathway for the activation of reason to counter intuition; the process is rarely spontaneous. “[W]e can talk with people who raise new arguments, which then trigger in us new flashes of intuition followed by various kinds of reasoning. ....[M]ost moral change happens as a result of social interaction” (Haidt, 2007, p. 999).

The interpersonal dimension foreshadows a theme to which we turn in a later section: the importance of context. For now, we can see implications for automatic behaviors as well as for deliberative processes. On a “micro” level, particular situations initiate differing responses within the dual-process system; a salient contextual cue can activate an implicit association which then shapes a response to the situation. As such, "moral behavior is shaped by the interplay between...implicit assumptions about morality and the contextual cues, both explicit and subtle " (Reynolds et al., 2010, p. 754). In an experimental condition, employees who were primed for competitiveness (through a message from a faux CEO) and who implicitly believed that business was inherently moral (and therefore profit is particularly important) were far more likely to act immorally when given the chance (e.g., to inflate an insurance claim in a simulation activity). In fact, the importance of contextual cues led the Reynolds et al. to conclude that "perhaps there is less moral agency in moral decisions than previously considered, and perhaps organizations bear more responsibility for the actions of their members than is currently understood" (Reynolds et al., 2010, p. 758).

On a macro level, culture plays a role in shaping moral intuitions through prioritizing certain intuitions and providing guidelines for how intuitions can apply in real-world situations (Haidt, 2001). For example, there may be a universal distinction made between what is appropriate in public vs. private, which culture may shape into what is considered to be public or private. As such, rather than imparting norms into a blank slate, the "complex web of explicit and implicit, sensory and propositional, affective, cognitive, and motoric knowledge" (Haidt, 2001, p. 827) fine-tunes existing intuitions through "practice, repetition, and physical movement" (Haidt, 2001, p. 828).

Of course, context is not only relevant to non-conscious process; it comes into play in multiple ways over the course of ethical decision making process (such as the process described by Rest, 1980). For example, we are particularly attuned to "social consensus, the decision maker's perception of how his or her social group views a situation" (Lincoln & Holmes, 2010, p. 58). Social norms can make an individual aware of the presence of a moral issue (and alternatively, allow the individual *not* to perceive an issue as a moral dilemma) and provide a set of possible, acceptable actions to take. The choice of a course of action may be shaped by beliefs about how peers/society will evaluate their behavior. Lincoln and Holmes suggest that ethical decision making can benefit when it includes consideration of moral salience, particularly social consensus (by asking, for example, "Would my peers...detect a moral dilemma in this situation?", Lincoln & Holmes, 2010, p. 62).

On a more macro level, Orlitzky (2017), among others, points to culturally-based "moral traditions [which] may encode ethical patterns of behavior" (Orlitzky, 2017, p. 725). Similarly, Ochs (2019) discussed culturally ingrained patterns of behavior. When Jews go out of the way to find a leading physician, for example.

they were not turning to the Torah, Talmud, or even to the doctor-scholar, Maimonides. They were engaging in a habit of being, Bourdieu's "habitus," practices based on a lifetime of watching people act, hearing them gossip and analyze, and noticing who is rewarded with praise or criticized and shamed. It is the messy kind of interactive learning that is usually picked up mimetically in the context of family and communal life. Such intuited guidelines about "what we do" and "what we avoid doing" are dipped into as sources of wisdom without much conscious thought; they seem to be so obvious that they feel "natural."

Such theories suggest that much of what we do is not actively processed. A request for motivation causes us to, retroactively, engage in slow thinking. If this sounds familiar, it is because the "dual-process model of cultural cognition" (Vaisey, 2009, p. 1706) mirrors the

interplay of habit and reasoning discussed earlier, albeit on a cultural level. And, the two standpoints (behavioral explanations of behavior as *motivation* or as *justification*) as able to work in concert (in the same way that habit and reason work in concert). Behavioral automaticity occurs on multiple levels that ripple throughout a culture. Broad cultural beliefs shape the proximal interactions that guide day-to-day experience, and vice versa (we'll return to this idea in our discussion of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of development). In fact, Vaisey reviews research "explicitly likening Bourdieu's habitus to the set of unconscious schemas that people develop through life experience" (Vaisey, 2009, p. 1685). Regardless of their origin, habitus/schemata provide the blueprint for behaviors, even complex ones. Vaisey (2009, p. 1687) employs the metaphor of the elephant and its rider:

Research in a number of areas points toward a dual process model of cultural cognition: actors are driven primarily by deeply internalized schematic processes ("the elephant"/practical consciousness/habitus), yet they are also capable of deliberation and justification ("the rider"/discursive consciousness) when required by the demands of social interaction. "

Looking at data from the National Survey of Youth and Religion, Vaisey (2009, p. 1703) notes that

most interviewees claim to know the difference between right and wrong in an intuitive way yet are largely incapable of articulating their moral decision making processes in substantive, propositional terms. Further, many young people who do attempt to articulate their moral reasoning maintain their judgements even when the evidence they offer is insufficient or even self-contradictory.

Theories and research such as these provide further nuance for the intersection of our habitual, routine behaviors (*kevah*) and our deliberative processes (*kavanah*). Some of what we take to be moral reasoning may be an after-the-fact attempt to provide the most socially acceptable

justification for what we did as a result of our culturally-tuned, innate intuitions and moral emotions.

We can see this interplay of act and understanding reflected in Jewish sources. We are often reminded of the Israelites' response of "*naaseh v'nishmah*" [we will do and we will hear/understand...with doing proceeding understanding] at the moment of the giving of the Torah (Exodus 24:7). As Abraham Joshua Heschel succinctly put it, "The act teaches us the meaning of the act." Moreover, this interplay of action and understanding can be seen as a central dynamic in character development. As shown in the following excerpt from his *Eight Chapters*, Maimonides describes a circular relationship between virtue and action. Virtues are themselves dispositions toward particular actions, either positive or negative. At the same time, repetition of virtue-relevant behavior drives the development of these virtue-dispositions.

"[T]hese moral excellences or defects cannot be acquired, or implanted in the soul, except by means of the frequent repetition of acts resulting from these qualities, which, practiced over a long period of time, accustoms us to them. If the acts performed are good ones, then we shall have gained a virtue...."

The interplay of behavior, thought, and emotion may sound familiar, particularly for those who have visited a psychotherapist or read a self-help book recently. Though often subject to oversimplification ("Smile, you'll feel better"... though there is indeed some evidence for this), Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is based on the premise that as we change our behaviors, our interpretation of events, and the running dialogue in our heads (referred to as cognitive self-talk), we can change our emotional reactions. For example, in CBT, someone with a phobia will be coached to work their way closer to contact with the subject of their phobia, supported by self-calming techniques and reframing of the situation.

Maimonides and contemporary CBT approaches both give a central role to cognition in influencing affect and health (Pies, 1997). Moreover, Pies (1997) sees Maimonides's interpretation of Job (faulting Job for making assumptions about God's desires) as consistent with errors made by patients "when they attribute their unhappiness to the shortcomings of others—in effect, 'externalize blame'" (Pies, 1997, p. 28). Both CBT and Maimonides emphasize the importance of effortful, repetitive practice in bringing about changes in thought and behavior. Behavior is crucial; "persistent practice of good deeds will engender the corresponding virtues in the individual; i.e., *there is a direct link between praxis and character*" (Pies, 1997, p. 29, emphasis in the original). To both, our framing, or construction, of events is crucial, more so than objective realities. Of course, to Maimonides there did remain a standard, that of Jewish law, to guide our actions. At the same time, though, Maimonides exhorts us not to assume that we know God's purpose and plan and, therefore, not to blame God for negative events but rather look internally for interpretation. Likewise, therapy can serve as "an empathic *exploration of possible meanings*" (Pies, 1997, p. 34, emphasis in original).

The picture that emerges is one of complex interaction among behavior, emotions, and cognition. We can achieve *kevah* without *kavanah* as we develop behaviors habitually. *Kavanah* can potentiate *kevah*; our powers of reason and intention can lead us to enact (or cease to enact) certain behaviors that have the potential to become habitual.

#### Modes of Interpretation: Schema and Worldviews

From the analysis of dual-process theories, we can see that we are working on two levels. The *kevah* of established habits and automatic processing dominates our everyday

functioning. Under certain conditions, the *kavanah* of deliberative processes kicks in.

Connecting this to the topic of this paper, this suggests that the application of Jewish wisdom can be facilitated by (a) opportunities to slow down and apply rational processes and (b) access to Jewish-wisdom frameworks to apply at those moments. It can also be helpful to have Jewish-wisdom frameworks to apply when intuition fails us (perhaps we are in a novel situation, or perhaps we experience two conflicting intuitions). When it comes to applying Jewish wisdom, an ideal would be for Jewish wisdom frameworks to be in place as one moves through the world and encounters new situations. To put it another way, our model of change speaks to an interest in incorporating Jewish wisdom into one's worldview.

To think about the ideas of worldviews, we can start with the notion of schemata (the plural of schema). We interface the world through our internal representations or schemata of it. When I see a 4-legged tail-wagging animal on a leash, I don't need to start from scratch each time and ponder "Hmm...what is that thing!?!?" We have a schema for "dog" that includes things we know/believe about dogs, how we feel about dogs, and even patterns of behavior that we (without even thinking about it!) put into action when the dog-schema is activated. As we experience the world, we assimilate new information into existing schemata and modify our schemata to fit new information. [Again, those who took Psych 101 may find this familiar; it is Piaget's central dynamic of development.] We may have developed a schema for *dog* that goes something like "Dogs are mean, they bite, I'm scared of dogs, I'm going to run away" or something like "Dogs are affectionate and cute, I love dogs, I'm going to pet the dog."

Thinking about schema activation is relatively simple with very concrete stimuli. We see a dog, our schema for dog activates. Sometimes the schema may need some fine-tuning (when

I see a cuddly Shih Tzu, I approach; when I see a snarling Pit bull, I avoid); sometimes we misapply a schema (e.g., from afar, I see someone walking with a leashed animal and assume it is a dog when it is really someone walking their cat...hey, it happens). But there remains a (developing, sometimes misapplied) schema for *dog*. What about when the stimulus is more ambiguous and can be encoded in multiple ways, fitting multiple schemata? What determines how we “decide” (scare quotes to indicate that this is not a conscious decision) what a more ambiguous stimulus is a *case of*?

Sometimes, we note similarities to a prototype. Based on my schemata for dog and for cat, a ferret may seem a better fit for the latter, so I may (mis)apply my cat schema and assume the ferret is a cat. Sometimes this prototype is more ambiguous, and it’s not clear which schema to apply. When the application of multiple schemata is possible, we are most likely to apply the one “that is the most activated in memory and is the most semantically similar to the stimulus. This encoding will, in turn, affect structure-relevant judgmental and behavioral processes” (Sedikides & Skowronski, 1991, p. 170). This accounts for the notion that we can “prime” schema activation by presenting associated words or images (someone who is presented with terms related to eating, for example, may be quicker to find pictures of food in a hidden figure activity).

The question of which schema is activated is of far-reaching importance as schemata help determine what we attend to, how we interpret what we encounter, and what we store in our memory. While we might consciously apply a certain schema, this process generally occurs automatically. And, as we saw in our discussion of behavioral habits, automaticity of schema-activation “is particularly important, because it implies that the way people process

information, and hence, the way in which people view the world, can vary depending on slight changes in their day-to-day lives” (Sedikides & Skowronski, 1991, p. 172). Also, activation of a schema seems to beget further activation of a schema; repeated activation makes future activation more likely (one might say that we form schemata-activation habits).

Schemata are the basic building blocks of our construction of our world. However, we further organize our representations so that our interactions with the world have coherence and continuity. We don’t experience life as a series of distinct moments in which schema come and go. One framework for this organization is suggested by psychologist George Kelly (1963), who built on the family of schema-oriented approaches in developing a theory of personal constructs (referred to, not surprisingly, as Personal Construct Theory, or PCT). To Kelly, we each interpret the world through multiple (but not an unlimited number of), lenses or constructs. The meaning of events arises from personal construal. “[F]or each of us, meaning assumes the shape of the arguments which lead him to his predictions, and the only outside check on his personal constructions are the events which confirm or disconfirm his expectations” (G. A. Kelly, 2017, p. 5).

While schemata are sometimes thought of as *cognitive* structures, Kelly points to a broader conceptualization.

Cognition, for example, strikes me as a particularly misleading category, and, since it is one designed to distinguish itself from affect and conation, those terms, too, might well be discarded as inappropriately restrictive. (G. A. Kelly, 2017, pp. 9–10)

Constructs are described as bi-polar; we construct the world as being closer to one or another extreme. The array of constructs and the primacy of any one of them differ among individuals and account for differences in behavior. I do what I do (and, because of the ubiquity of

construct-behavior links in our lives, I am who I am) because of the constructs I use to interface with the world.

Let's look at an example: Abe may be particularly apt to interpret the world through a construct of "accepting-rejecting." At work, he may interpret critique from a peer as a threat. Sarah is not attuned to signs of acceptance or rejection. Rather, she applies a construct of "helpful-unhelpful." This is not to say that Sarah would necessarily come up with a more *positive* framing for a work peer's critique, but rather that she is applying a different frame of reference (that is, she might see the feedback as unhelpful – still a negative construal, but different than Abe's). Some construals are better suited for our interface with the world in that they provide interpretations that allow for optimal functioning. To continue with our example, when faced with critique, Abe's sense of the *feedback-as-rejection* may result in depression, paranoia, desperate attempts to have others like him, etc. In the same situation, Sarah's interpretation of the feedback as *unhelpful* may lead her to ignore potentially relevant advice, but she may be less likely to generalize to a broadly negative appraisal of self or others. It's not that Abe or Sarah are more or less accurate in their assessments, or more positively oriented or optimistic, or better or worse at reading a situation. It's that they are applying different rules of interpretation.

Importantly, constructs are related to the individuals that hold them, not to the objects they describe. That is, a situation "is" a certain way only because we see it as such. We extend our constructs to apply to new situations and, to the extent that these construct-extensions work, we incorporate these new situations, objects, or ideas into existing frameworks for understanding. In this way, we can think of constructs as higher order schemata.

While Kelly's work may not strike us as particularly revolutionary today, it is worth keeping in mind the context in which he was writing. At the time, psychology was dominated by two strong threads: the psychoanalytic world of Freud and Co., and the strict behaviorism of Watson and others. In the former approach, behavior was understood as driven by attempts to manage internal drives; the roots of behavior could only emerge once conscious processing is set aside and the hidden emotions are able to manifest themselves symbolically (through dreams, word associations, and such). To the behaviorists, cognitive processing was irrelevant; we responded to the contextually-based rewards and punishments in our environment.

Though sharing with Freud the idea that we are not always aware of what drives our behavior, Kelly posits that our constructs are readily knowable (though perhaps it would take the intervention of a therapist to help uncover them). Further, there is a sense of lack of agency in classic psychoanalytic theory, with the ego constantly trying to manage the raging conflicts beneath the surface of our consciousness. In contrast, Kelly conceptualizes individuals as scientists, taking their theories (constructs or schemata) out into the world. These theories create expectations for how the world works (e.g., how others will react to us, what others are likely to do in particular situations); we track the accuracy of these predictions and either strengthen our constructs (when our predictions come through) or modify them (when reality fails to meet our expectations). To Kelly, "behavior provides a confirmation or disconfirmation of the anticipation, which in turn leads one to carry out a constructive revision. ....[A] feedback loop in which behavior...and anticipation influence each other in a circular way" (Feixas, 1995).

Kelly (2017, p. 10) notes that the application of constructs has epistemological consequences.

At the end of an experiential cycle one not only has a revised construction of the events he originally sought to anticipate, but he has also a construction of the process by which he reached his new conclusions about them. In launching his next venture, whatever its concern might be, he will have reason to take account of the effectiveness of the experiential procedures he employed in his last.... the outcome of an experience is not merely a tendency to repeat or to avoid it thereafter, as reinforcement theory presumes, but that the conclusions reached through experience are likely to be in the form of new questions which set the stage for new venture.

There are many approaches to the idea that we create organizational structures through which we process the world, and multiple terms are used to describe overlapping ideas. At perhaps the broadest level, one can find discussion of *worldviews*, "sets of beliefs and assumptions that describe reality" and include "assumptions about a heterogeneous variety of topics, including human nature, the meaning and nature of life, and the composition of the universe itself, to name but a few issues" (Koltko-Rivera, 2004, p. 3). As an example, religion often provides a worldview that includes "a sense of how the world works and what beings exist in it (including the human, infrahuman, and suprahuman)" (Koltko-Rivera, 2004, p. 6). Worldviews are seen as more general and all-encompassing than schemata (one may have a schema about dogs, but not a worldview about dogs) and less subject to direct experience (a schema is gained and constantly honed through experience; worldviews can change but are much more stable). There is, however, conceptual overlap among the two. It is possible to understand Kelly's PCT as a way of describing worldviews.

Although our discussion of schemata and worldviews can seem rather individualistic (after all, we were discussing *Personal Construct Theory*), social context comes into play in this arena as well (Butt, 2001). We make constructions about how others make constructions. This helps us anticipate others' actions and guides our interpersonal behaviors. We form our personal constructs within a social structure which will help determine the sort of constructions

we make. "[M]embers of a given culture adopt that culture's worldview (however unconsciously) to gain a sense of meaning, permanence, and security in the face of existential meaninglessness, life's impermanence, and the inevitable annihilation of our bodies through human mortality" (Koltko-Rivera, 2004, p. 38).

Finally, it should be noted that the notion of schemata or worldviews can be seen as related to theories of learning that use other terms to describe what seem to be very similar ideas. Perhaps most familiar because of its prevalence in the adult education literature is Mezirow's theory of transformational learning (Christie et al., 2015; Mezirow, 1991; Moore, 2005). This theory differentiates the learning of adults from that of children, with the latter seen as primarily a socialization process and the former one of perspective change. Learning, to Mezirow, is a

process of perspective transformation that considers how people interpret their life experiences, critically examine the assumptions and beliefs that have structured how those experiences have been interpreted, and revise their assumptions until the very structure of their assumptions has been transformed. (Moore, 2005, p. 402)

At the heart of this theory is a 10-phase process of change that begins with a disorienting dilemma, something that calls into question one's current worldview. This dilemma can stimulate a process of self-examination, distancing one's self from current beliefs. Mezirow's theory is fundamentally interpersonal in that successful resolution requires the learner to explore their concerns and potential change pathways to others. Based on these options, the learner would experiment with new worldviews and attendant roles and, when the process is successful, come to a new way of construing the world. It is possible, as seen in the

next section, for the discussion of our ever-evolving construals and worldviews to be understood as fundamental elements of identity.

## Section 1b: An Identity Interlude

In the previous section, we saw that schemata and worldviews link behaviors with beliefs and emotion, all within a social context. Jewish wisdom can become more than what we do, it can become part of the way we give meaning to our world. When we talk about the frameworks through which we interact with the world, it is difficult to avoid the topic of identity. As Horowitz noted in her analysis of the Jewish wisdom construct, there seems to be an emphasis not only on enactment, but also that those enacting the wisdom “take these ideas/values inside themselves” (Horowitz, 2019, p. 369).

In the rarified circles of Jewish educational research, notions of Jewish identity have been getting a bad rap. This may come as a surprise to those actually engaged in everyday Jewish educational practice, where the use of the term Jewish identity is still common, as it has been for many years. There are many good reasons, thoughtfully outlined by Levisohn and Kelman (2019), to be skeptical of the notion of Jewish identity, We can find a litany of abuses perpetuated in the name of this construct: <cue the Yom Kippur tunes...>

*We have used the term Jewish identity without a clear definition, let alone a universally accepted definition.*

*We have conceptualized the term in an overly narrow way, focusing on a singular dimension (a feeling state, a set of behaviors).*

*We have reified the construct, treating it as something that can be directly “built” as might a sukkah, sometimes at the expense of a solid grounding in Jewish practice or knowledge.*

*We have isolated Jewish identity from the broader range of identities a person may have.*

*We have treated identity as a scorecard, with some people having more (or stronger) and some having less (or weaker) identities.*

[Oy. Our chests ache from the beating of our fists.]

In rejecting the notion of Jewish identity, however, we risk throwing out the proverbial baby with the bathwater (to use a rather unpleasant but surprisingly persistent expression). After all, there is a wealth of research suggesting that identity matters, in ways that we'll explore in this section.

It could be helpful to start with the notion of self-concept, a term referring to one's description of one's self. [This term is sometimes used interchangeably with identity; sometimes a distinction is made, with self-concept used for how one sees one's self and identity for how one thinks others see them.] Note that although I use the term "description," I don't mean to imply that one must be completely aware of how they conceive of themselves; elements of our self-concept operate without conscious mediation. The broadest sense of self-concept relates to the notion that I see myself as having continuity across space and time. I might see myself as shy in school and gregarious with my friends...but I still know it's me! I might be jolly today and depressed tomorrow...but it's still me.

Let's get a bit more specific: Self-concept has to do with how we relate to ourselves as objects. As discussed in the previous section, we interface with the world through our internal representations (or, schemata) of it. We see a four-legged animal and interpret it as "dog." In a similar but much more complex way, we have what we might call a self-schema, or the array of knowledge/beliefs, emotions, and behaviors we associate with ourselves. In a general sense, we can say something like "I wasn't myself today" and know that this doesn't mean that I was a different person but rather that I wasn't enacting the sort of behaviors (or feeling the sort of feelings; or thinking the type of thoughts) that I characterize as my norm. We describe ourselves as having certain default traits and characteristics (e.g., shy, outgoing), usual affects

("I'm an upbeat person"), and self-consistent behaviors ("There I go again, flying off the handle like I always do").

When we ascribe traits to ourselves and/or when others ascribe them to us, we may come to think of them as our personality, the amalgam of traits that are consistent with our self-schema and that we see as relatively stable and enduring (that is, we don't say "my personality today is X" in the same way we say "my mood today is X"). This set of relatively stable traits is the domain of *personal identity*. Interestingly, in light of the discussion in the previous section, although habitual behaviors occur frequently and, as such, would seem likely to provide a solid grounding to our self-concept, this is not the case. In fact, research shows that "people generally consider their habits less informative about themselves than nonhabitual actions" (Neal et al., 2006, p. 201), possibly because they see these actions emanating from an external source (the cue to the behavior) and not from within the self. This further underscores an important role for self-reflection in unpacking habitual behaviors, as alluded to in the previous section.

Our identities bridge our internal and external worlds; there is a component of identity related to the social groups we are part of and the roles we inhabit. Social Identities are shaped by the expectations and perceptions that others have of members of a group as well as group members' desires to remain part of the group or, when there is a negative social identity, to move apart from the group (Ashmore et al., 2004; Deaux, 2002). Because we inhabit multiple social groups, we have multiple, inter-related social identities, with a sense of self (or self-schema) related to each (that is, I have a self-schema related to myself-as-a-Jew, myself-as-a-man, etc., Kress, 2012a).

In addition to personal and social identities, the literature discusses relational identity (e.g., Chen et al., 2011), or as sense of myself within particular relationship or roles (though the latter is sometimes discussed as a separate category). As opposed to the self-as-[member of social group], relational identity speaks to *self-in-relationship-with* or *self-in-my-role-as*. The dynamics of relational identity have similarities to those of social identities in that the self and a contextual element (a social group, a relationship) are seen to exert mutual influence. I have a sense of myself in relationship with my children (or, in the role of father) or with my students (or, in the role of teacher). My identity shapes how I engage with those in the relationship and is, in turn, shaped by being in that relationship.

Note that while social identity and role identity are sometimes treated separately, there are similarities, given the potential overlap between roles and groups (“Jew” is a social group; “Jewish educator” seems to be a role, but is clearly related to the “Jewish” social group ; “parent” can be seen as straddling both...one can think of both a parental role and membership in a meaningful category of “parent”). And, there is dynamism in the interconnectedness of personal, social, and relational identities (Sedikides et al., 2011). As we engage with the world, all aspects of identity come into play, though some contexts or situations may bring certain elements to the forefront (Stryker & Serpe, 1982). As I stand in front of a classroom, my self-as-teacher (or, self-in-relationship with my students) may be most salient, though my work will be guided by my personal identity (or general sense of self that transcends particular contexts) and, given that I teach at JTS, my identity as self-as-Jew may come into play as well. The accumulation of contexts in which an identity comes into play both reflects the salience of an identity and strengthens it. The process is cyclical. As my sense of self-as-Jew strengthens, I’ll

seek out more contexts relevant to that identity. *As I expand the array of relevant contexts in which I function, I will develop more relationships and take on more roles related to my self-as-Jew, thereby strengthening that identity.*

Though we sometimes think about identity as an object (for example, something we can build, lose, or strengthen), the description above points to identity as a process which mediates, motivates, and is continuously shaped by our interactions in the world. There is considerable evidence that we tend to act and think in ways that we see as consistent with who we think we are and avoid actions and thoughts that run counter to our self-perceptions (Oyserman, 2009). We apply “identity-congruent mindsets” (Oyserman, 2009, p. 250) to shape our behaviors and thoughts, generally without conscious mediation. In experimental conditions, when individuals were told that their behavior differed from their identity self-standard, negative emotions were reported (Stets & Carter, 2011). These negative emotions can provide motivation to seek a state in which one’s self-perceptions are verified (perhaps through a change of behavior or seeking feedback about one’s behavior from a source that is more likely to be identity-affirming).

Motivation is also seen as resulting from identity’s temporal and aspirational elements. The question, “What type of person do I want to be?” (or, at least, “How do I want others to see me?”) can be quite relevant to our actions. In their oft-cited article, Markus and Nurius (1986) discuss the notion of *possible selves*, “ideal selves that we would very much like to become. They are also the selves we could become, and the selves we are afraid of becoming” (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954). Desired possible selves motivate behaviors that would move

us to those ends; undesired possibilities are a disincentive for actions that would lead us in that direction.

Possible selves allow us to evaluate our current selves in terms of the degree to which we are approaching the ideal. They provide a future orientation that allows us to transcend short-term threats to identity. For example, a graduate student may see themselves (currently) as an excellent student and also have a strong sense of a possible future self as a faculty member at a university. A low grade in a class might cause the student to question their current self-perception, but they are likely to try to keep the longer-range desire intact (until, of course, there is sufficient evidence negating it; if I get a low grade in all my classes, I might start to wonder...). Particularly powerful are those imagined futures that are accompanied by a reasonable hope that one can achieve that outcome (Bennetts, 2003).

Possibilities are shaped by societal strictures and structures a la Bourdieu (1977). However, Mische (2009) emphasizes the agency of individuals "to interpret and coordinate one's action in accordance with the motives and projects of other actors" (Mische, 2009, p. 698). She augments theories of possible selves "to include a projective dialogue not only with future selves, but also with other people who inhabit the imagined future" (Mische, 2009, p. 698). Who I'll be in the future is considered, one might say, together with who I'll *be with* in the future and what expectations these people (both proximal relationships and more distally on a communal level) might hold. These future projections help determine our thoughts, feelings, and actions in the present as we work toward desired ends and away from undesired possibilities.

As such, context plays a role in determining which of our multiple identities becomes most active in exerting its influence at any point. A context can activate an identity with which it shares a set of meanings, such as self-as-teacher becoming more active when I walk into a classroom (Carter, 2013). We are motivated to seek out settings that are congruent with aspects of our identities, and these settings then strengthen those aspects of our identities. “Identities and behavior are thus linked to one another; identities are embedded in greater social structures that exist in one’s environment—and they are motivational across many social settings” (Carter, 2013, p. 204).

#### Identity as Tagged, Not Filed

Implied in the notion of identity as a motivator is that identity is not a passive description of the self but rather an active tool that both reflects and shapes engagement with the world. This shift toward thinking of identity as a process has implications for thinking about how Jewish identity manifests. An analogy can be drawn from my experience attempting to stay organized. I spend a fair amount of time considering tools and tricks to help do this. When it comes to organizing electronic files, I have noticed two general approaches, *filing in folders*, and *tagging*. It occurred to me that there may be some interesting analogies to thinking about Jewish identity.

When I first started using computers, *filing* was the way to go. Any given document had its place, and this place could be located by a pathway that specified the drive, folder, sub-folder, etc. Finding a place for a document involved assigning it to a category represented by the folder. The budget for project X went into the *Budget* sub-folder in the *Project X* folder; if I

wanted to find the file, I looked there. *Tagging*, on the other hand, allows the assignment of multiple categories. My project X budget can be tagged *Budget*, and *Project X*, and *ABC Foundation* (which funds Project X), and *Dr. Jonathan Dough* (my collaborator on Project X), and so on. While a Boolean search using multiple tags would lead me directly to the document, the document might come up in some unexpected searches, completely unrelated to Project X other than the fact that they share a tag. For example, I might search the tag *Dr. Jonathan Dough* in order to find the schedule of when we play racquetball together, and the budget would emerge (along with the schedule and anything else I have associated with my colleague). Tags are more idiosyncratic and allow for multiple connections and webs of associations.

The analogy to identity goes something like this (and, note that this is only an analogy, not a suggestion that we equate our identity structure with a computer): Jewish identity as *filed in a folder* implies a certain pre-established definition of what “counts:” going to synagogue sits nicely in the folder, while going hiking (even though I am doing it with old friends from college whom I met through Hillel) most likely ends up in a different folder. However, my college reunion hike can receive multiple tags, including that of *things-important-to-myself-as-a-Jew*.

We can broaden our conceptualization of Jewish identity as something that can be manifested in a variety of ways. A search of my “Jewish” tag might reveal a rich number of associations (including, perhaps, the aforementioned hike), none of which might come up in *yours* (and vice versa). Further, things you might expect me to have tagged *things-important-to-myself-as-a-Jew* may be absent (for example, “going to synagogue” may be absent because I don’t go, or because I go occasionally but don’t see it as particularly important to my Judaism).

In this way, identity theory mirrors the notion of personal constructs discussed earlier in serving as an often-idiosyncratic go-between connecting one's internal and external worlds.

### Identity- (and Motivation-) Enhancing Environments

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides an additional oft-cited and potentially useful framework for thinking about the motivational aspects of identity (Deci et al., 1994; Deci & Ryan, 2008, 2012). In this theory, two classifications of motivation are described. *Autonomous motivation* is used to describe situations in which “people have identified with an activity's value and ideally will have integrated it into their sense of self,” resulting in their feeling a sense of “volition, or a self-endorsement of their actions” (Deci & Ryan, 2008, p. 182). While it has become common to contrast extrinsic motivation (based on external rewards) with intrinsic motivation (that which is self-driven), both of these can occur under the heading of autonomous motivation. We can come to embrace external stimuli and even see these as part of ourselves. In contrast, *controlled motivation* is, not surprisingly, motivation that is completely (or mostly) experienced as being instigated from an outside force (e.g., a reward, threat, desire to avoid shame, etc.). Under conditions of controlled motivation, people “experience pressure to think, feel, or behave in particular ways” (Deci & Ryan, 2008, p. 182). [Note that a third category, amotivation, which refers to the lack of motivation, is also used by these theorists.]

Clearly, the self-determination that accompanies autonomous motivation lends itself to better outcomes in terms of psychological health and long-range commitment to whatever it is that one is (autonomously) motivated to do. Under what conditions is autonomous motivation likely to develop? The research identifies three important factors:

1. Agency (or Autonomy): The sense that one is able to make their own decisions and exert influence on one's environment in a way that can make a difference (also see Ajzen, 1991, for discussion of the idea of "behavioral control.")
2. Belonging: A sense of community and interpersonal connectedness.
3. Competence: The sense that one has the wherewithal to successfully participate in the community, that one has the skills needed so that when agency is exercised, successful outcomes are achieved.

One might have the skills needed to participate meaningfully in the community (competence), but not openings to do so (agency/autonomy). Conversely, one may have opportunities to participate, but lack the skills to do so. And, of course, skills and agency can take place on an individual level; SDT emphasizes the importance of the group. It is this topic – relationships both proximal and distal – to which we turn in the next section.

## Section 1c: Relationships and Context

The contextual/communal situatedness of our behaviors, schemata, and identities has emerged as a theme at several points in the discussion, often in complex ways. In her analysis of well-reviewed proposals to LKFLT, Horowitz notes that Woocher emphasized the social component of successful programs, positing that "[t]here is a second key element as well in these programs: the fostering of relationships. Many of the programs submitted not only transmit ideas, they create communities" (Horowitz, 2019, p. 382). The wording here – *relationships and communities* – shows the breadth of what we are talking about. We use terms such as community, context, environment, and milieu to describe relationships between two individuals, the unarticulated norms of a culture (Bourdieu, 1977), and everything in between.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) provides an important framework for thinking about relationships both proximal and distal (and is useful despite, or because of, its infusion of jargon!). Starting from the point of view of an individual, Bronfenbrenner describes a systemic ecology of development of mutual influence of individuals and the environments in which they are embedded. To Bronfenbrenner, promoting desired developmental outcomes requires us to understand an array of developmental influences and to work on multiple levels. He described several levels of ecology.

The *microsystem* consists of an individual's direct relationships. These often take place within activities, venues, or roles. It is fairly easy to think about populating this category to include family members, friends/peers, and teachers. Finer-tuned distinctions may be possible; for example, one many have relationships with friends at school, at youth group, and at camp.

Bronfenbrenner's second ecological level, the *mesosystem*, deals with the overlap and interconnections among microsystems. To what extent, if at all, do one's "camp friends" overlap with their "school friends?" How much interaction is there between parents and the school? Do youth-group-leaders overlap with camp counselors? Are some the same people? Is there contact between them? Do they share ideals? On this level, we begin to see more dynamism within a web of developmental influence. The degree of overlap – not only physically (in terms of direct contact) but also in terms of values and goals – can determine the vectors that influence development.

Importantly, a developmental ecology goes beyond those with whom an individual interacts directly. Bronfenbrenner's *exosystem* captures this and describes settings in which an individual does not directly participate but which, nevertheless, have developmental impact. This impact can result from decisions made within those settings regardless of whether or not someone from the child's microsystem is a direct participant in that setting. Perhaps this can be seen as a sort of trickle-down, indirect, effect. Decisions made by the local school board have an impact on children and teachers, as do settings in which teacher learning takes place (pre-service programs, conferences and retreats, etc.). Similarly, a parent's employment context can have an impact on the life of a child.

Bronfenbrenner's final level<sup>3</sup> can seem less tangible than the others. The *macrosystem* includes cultural beliefs, ideologies, and such by which one's society as a whole operates. These are generally more stable than the settings and relationships at the other ecological levels (that

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<sup>3</sup> In later models, Bronfenbrenner also discussed a *chronosystem*, or a temporal element for the functioning of the remainder of the ecological system.

is, it is easier to bring change to a school board or to a teacher-student relationship than it is to change a national zeitgeist).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes these developmental levels functioning as a dynamic system. Changes in one arena will bring changes in others; individuals influence the environment as well as being influenced by it. And Bronfenbrenner's model goes well beyond the boundaries of "learning" and speaks to broad, multi-dimensional outcomes. We don't *learn about* roles and relationships. We inhabit them, with potential impact on our behavior, beliefs, attitudes, etc. Exosystems and macrosystems guide our formation as people.

Similarly, Lave and Wenger (1991) claim that "learning is an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 35), and is a process of "becoming a full participant, a member, a kind of person" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53) embedded in a context. Learning is seen as a journey from being on the periphery of a community to playing a more central role. As with Bronfenbrenner's work, this is a theory of development, not education, per se. That is, as long as we are embedded in some sort of culture, centripetal movement is apt to take place. One can become more central to a religious community or to a gang. Notably, *the center* (in a religious community or a gang) does not necessarily mean the formal leadership (a rabbi, gang leader), though such people are to be found at the center. At the center of any community are also those that are able to be active members and embody communal ideals, even among the laity (or the gang equivalent of "laity"). Context is not mimetically replicated; as people move from periphery to center they have the capacity to shape the norms of the culture. There are limits, though; movement

toward the center results from what Lave and Wenger call *legitimate* peripheral participation (emphasis added by me to indicate that one's participation can be deemed illegitimate).

There are other theories that can be seen as being “adjacent” to Lave and Wenger's, for example, Barbara Rogoff's (Rogoff, 1990; Rogoff et al., 1998) work on cognitive apprenticeship – or the notion that through our participation in culturally sanctioned activities we adapt to those behaviors and modes of thinking that are characteristic of the community in which we are embedded. Though differences exist within this family of theories,<sup>4</sup> they share the notion that development takes place within a community of learning or meaning; we grow into a particular context.

Taken together, ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and theories of development-in-context (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990; Rogoff et al., 1998), point to

- (a) The importance of the various levels of context; both proximal and distal relationships and structures come into play in both theories;
- (b) The holistic impact of context; these theories talk about who one becomes, not only what one knows or does;
- (c) The powerful developmental influence that a coordinated (by intentional design and/or evolution over time) community of learning/practice can have.

A relevant example can be found in Luhrmann's (2012) study of American evangelicals. Through deep anthropological work, Luhrmann shows how multifaceted change can occur when one enters a community with its own set of beliefs and norms. While the idea that one adapts to new communal norms is not surprising (if I move to the next town, there may be new

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<sup>4</sup> Which I don't minimize, but I do claim are beyond the scope of the current discussion.

rules and etiquette about where to store my garbage cans, when to bring them out to the curb, etc.), the changes traced by Luhmann are epistemological, involving not only learning new things, but also developing new ways of thinking and being. And, further, members of the community come to embrace a way of thinking that to many of them had heretofore been seen as absurd (if not downright psychopathological).

As part of their immersion into the church community, the people in Luhmann's study come to see that they "must develop the ability to recognize thoughts in their own mind that are not in fact their thoughts, but God's. They learn that this is a skill they should master" (Luhmann, 2012, p. 39). Change is described not as a flash of insight or even divine intervention, but the result of going through the needed "hard work and required effort and training" (Luhmann, 2012, p. 41). Luhmann goes out of her way to emphasize the participants' agency in all of this; the process is not one of brainwashing any more than is becoming part of any group.

This occurred in the context of committing to participation in a multilayered community. Beyond church services, there are regular prayer meetings in people's homes. Guidelines and tutorials can be found in numerous books and videos. There are multiple roles for members to take on as they become more immersed in the community – hosting home-based prayer groups, prayer mentorship, etc. As a result of participation in this community, members experienced changes in attitudes and behaviors. They not only changed their thinking, but also their thinking about their thinking, coming to be able to differentiate between their own thoughts and what they interpreted as God's voice talking through their thoughts.

While Luhrmann's work provides a particularly vivid portrait of a change through participation in a religious-based context, research on the social-contextual mediation of change is widespread. In the Jewish context, it has been pointed out that residential summer camps and day schools (often seen as stark contrasts) can both be considered "encompassing settings" (Kress & Elias, 2008) which fit criteria similar to those described by ecological and community of learning/practice theories. Participants at both settings are presented with a variety of ways to engage with Judaism (and, more generally, with the community) that they master over time; they have models who are a step ahead of them in the process; and these settings' have multiple components (e.g., in a day school, classes, extra-curricular activities, etc.) that (ideally) are coordinated to meet the needs of their members.

Further, Alcoholics Anonymous has been rigorously studied for decades, both in terms of its impact and the active ingredients that promote positive outcomes. Interestingly, though AA claims the centrality of a "spiritual awakening" in the success of its approach, there is only limited support for this in the research literature. The major mechanisms for changes seem to be in

AA's capacity to a) help change people's social networks in support of abstinence and recovery (e.g., increasing recovery-supportive social ties); b) boost abstinence self-efficacy and recovery coping skills; and c) help individuals to maintain recovery motivation over time. (J. F. Kelly, 2017).

Research into other community-based support groups find trends, consistent with the findings regarding AA, of the characteristics of communities that show efficacy in supporting their members (Maton, 1988; Maton & Salem, 1995). These groups are marked by

- a) a belief system that emphasizes the possibility of personal growth and the importance of the group in fostering it;
- b) role structures that allow for increased, meaningful participation;
- c) support systems within and beyond the setting; and
- d) committed, visionary leaders who will serve as role models.

In this description, we see clear echoes of Lave and Wegner's and Bronfenbrenner's frameworks. Impactful communities induct members into shared norms by providing multiple opportunities for meaningful participation and by intervening on multiple levels of relationship.

#### Identity in Context

*Picture this: A group is concerned with the dwindling number of its members; there is a sense that the size of the community is insufficient to ensure continuity. Considerable communal resources have been allocated to address this issue. However, in this group, membership is a complicated process, involving often-esoteric knowledge and behaviors.*

Sounds like we're talking about Judaism, no? Could be, but...

In considering how these theories relate to the Jewish educational context, we have the opportunity to learn from those grappling with similar issues in what seems, at first glance, to be a very different context. Concerns about science literacy have spurred on the growth of STEM (or STEAM, or various other acronyms) education, particularly for girls (who have been underrepresented as science majors in college and as professionals in the field). There is a strand in the science education literature that points to the importance of the creation of a

science identity that transcends the usual discussion of school success. A traditionally “good” science student can graduate with excellent grades and little interest in science. Those with a science identity, however, incorporate science into their worldviews, have a sense that they are part of a (distal) community of scientists, use what they know about science in situations that are not traditionally seen as the realm of science, and see science as having a place in their futures.

### *Sound familiar?*

It did to Dorph and Shunn (2018) and Kolodner (2018). The former note that both science and Jewish education value

the development of a (science/Jewish) identity or an identification with a (scientific/Jewish) community is a critical aspect of one’s self-concept on the path toward positive and lifelong engagement with the subject. (Dorph & Shunn, 2018, p. 15)

Further, in both cases there is an expectation that while some people will become leaders in their respective field, most efforts deal with

supporting the development of a (scientifically/Jewishly) literate society or community. Literacy in this context means that every citizen will appreciate that ways of thinking, reasoning, and values of the disciplinary (science/Jewish) community and apply them to their daily lives and communal/societal participation. (Dorph & Shunn, 2018, p. 15)

Kolodner, too, embraces a broad range of outcomes associated with both Jewish and science education. In her science education program, Learning by Design, “students developed situational identities as scientists and engineers....They took on scientific and engineering practices, attitudes, and beliefs even when not specifically required” (Kolodner, 2018, p. 31).

The author sees this as proof that these scientist identities were integrated into a broader sense of self. Kolodner points to the parallel in Jewish education, where we want “not just that our students will know and be able to do things that are identified as ‘Jewish’” (Kolodner, 2018,

p. 31) but also that they “will, over time, integrate beliefs, attitudes, and practices consistent with being some type of Jew into their core identities” (Kolodner, 2018, p. 32).

These authors draw from theories within science education to speculate about the Jewish educational context. Dorph and Shunn (2018, p. 15) focus on *science learning activation*,

the combination of dispositions, practices, and knowledge that enables success in proximal science learning experiences and are in turn influenced by this success (i.e., participate in a positive feedback loop over time). We refer to the elements of this combination of dispositions, practices, and knowledge as *dimensions* of activation.

This approach is forward-looking, having the goal of successful participation in whatever the next experience might be (rather than trying to link directly to a far-off outcome). Drawing an analogy to their work in science education, these authors emphasize proximal Jewish learning experiences. That is,

in the Jewish context we are looking for both enabling success in temporally proximate learning experiences an individual has (e.g., next Jewish learning opportunity; next time they visit a Jewish museum; next time they participate in Jewish learning at home; next time they participate in school, religious school, or another afterschool program) as well as in temporally proximate Jewish living experiences (e.g. next time they go to synagogue; next time they participate in a Jewish home ritual; next time they go to a lifecycle event). (Dorph & Shunn, 2018, p. 18).

Drawing from both the science-education context and from the Jewish education literature, the authors suggest the importance of a cycle of

(1) choosing to participate in Jewish learning, practice, and/or community; (2) experiencing positive engagement (affective, behavioral, and cognitive) during Jewish learning and living; (3) perceiving oneself as successful within Jewish learning experiences, practice, and/or community and (3) meeting Jewish learning and living goals during these experiences. (Dorph & Shunn, 2018, p. 20)

What sort of learning environments would be most likely to foster this cycle of engagement?

Again drawing from science- and Jewish-education sources, the authors point to 1) a rich,

stimulating, and accessible learning environment; 2) opportunities for social connections to peers and role models; and 3) learning experiences that are "relevant, authentic, joyful, immersive, engages learners in interpretive text study and meaningful Jewish practice, offers opportunities to enact Jewish values, offers choice/control/autonomy, offers increasing complexity and opportunities for mastery" (Dorph & Shunn, 2018, p. 24). This approach leads to a holistic change in dispositions and behaviors.

Kolodner situates her work in (among other things) that of Lave and Wenger, discussed earlier, seeing identity development as "learning how to do the things that are done in a community and learning whatever content one needs to know to do those things" (Kolodner, 2018, p. 35). She provides a useful summary of this approach (and echoing themes from the discussion of Self-Determination Theory, discussed earlier), in stating that

identity development rests on development of competence, the motivation, to participate, opportunities for showing one's skills and understanding, and recognition by oneself and others of one's capabilities....Disposition, it follows, develops from practice in using what one is learning across a variety of situations and requires valuing the practices one is learning, developing capabilities of using the content and skills one is learning across a variety of situations, and becoming able to recognize when what one has learned may be appropriately used. (Kolodner, 2018, p. 35)

She describes how her Kitchen Science Investigators project was able to achieve these ends through engaging learners with the practical science needed for cooking and baking. This approach built on learner interests and involved them in meeting relevant goals (that differed from learner to learner, along with the specific content learned).

Making the connection to Jewish education, Kolodner suggests that learning needs to take place within

contexts of communities that learners enjoy engaging with, that give them

opportunities to develop expertise, be recognized for their expertise, and become more central to the operations of the community, and that reward them for their growing capabilities. (Kolodner, 2018, p. 48)

She sees this resulting not from good lesson or curriculum, but rather from a self-examination of the core values of our educational settings, the ways of being Jewish within them, and the opportunities learners have to participate in these and to reflect on their participation.

Theories such as Bronfenbrenner's and Lave and Wegner's pose challenges to Jewish education in general and, more to the point, to promoting the application of Jewish wisdom. They require us to think beyond the crafting of individual educational experiences, no matter how powerful these might be (though, of course, powerful educational experiences are important!) and to think about the context in which those educational experiences (and the individuals who participate in them) exist. That is, in addition to asking about impactful programs, consideration needs to be given to the creation of systems in which the application of Jewish wisdom is valued, where Jewish wisdom becomes a sort of social or cultural currency. It has been suggested (Kelman, 2018), based on this family of theories, that inquiry into Jewish learning happens on a contextual basis (perhaps think of a several *learning-ats*...learning at camp etc.). This approach starts with an existing community of meaning and looks within. In the current context (of Jewish wisdom) we might ask: Where is the community of practice?

To this point, we've alluded to the promotion of Jewish wisdom as a multi-layered endeavor, involving the interplay of internal frameworks for meaning-making and the external contexts in which an individual functions. The comprehensive nature of Jewish-wisdom-application presents both practical challenges and opportunities, as discussed in the following section.

## Section 2: Practical Considerations

## Section 2a: Re-Embracing the Whole Learner (and Their Context)

I was honored when Dr. Jonathan Woocher agreed to write the foreword to my book *Growing Jewish Minds, Growing Jewish Souls* (Kress, 2012b). In it, he argues that “Jewish education *can* be an effective setting and vehicle for nurturing and guiding the growth of young people in their wholeness and complexity” (Woocher, 2013, p. vi, emphasis in the original). Whole-person learning is not a new idea, though there is now research from behavioral neuroscience, some of which is reviewed earlier, to support this. More than ever, the Jewish educational community has embraced the notion of holistic growth. Jewishness cannot be seen as an isolated element of one’s make-up. With Dr. Woocher leading the charge, many Jewish educators are of the opinion that their work can and should contribute to positive development writ large (Woocher, 2012).

Perhaps revisiting the whole-person education paradigm in light of the evolution in thinking about the goals of Jewish education can be generative. Specifically, I’d like to introduce a framework for thinking about the “whole person” that roughly parallels the literature reviewed in the previous sections.

1. A substrate of skills for Jewish-wisdom-readiness: The importance of developing social and emotional skills and a values-language to accompany them.
2. A vernacular of values to serve to organize the enactment of skills.
3. A routine of reflection to connect the individual with frameworks, informed by Jewish wisdom, to interpret the world.
4. Engagement with the emotions of enactment: Taking seriously the emotional complexities of enacting Jewish wisdom; and

5. Careful consideration of context to expand our vantage point of individual learners to consider the relationships and communities involved.

### A Substrate of Skills

Consider the variety of ways in which the discussion to this point has intersected with the topic of social and emotional intelligence or competence, or intra- and inter-personal intelligence (Gardner, 1999; Goleman, 1995, 2006).

- Emotion is an essential component of decision making and "should not be ignored as 'irrational biases' to a rational ethical decision" (Gaudine & Thorne, 2001, p. 175). Emotions can lead to better decisions, coming into play throughout consideration of an ethical issue. Emotional arousal may make us more attuned to the presence of an ethical issue, although over-arousal may stymie action, as might those experiencing positive affective state (who may be better able to recall having dealt successfully with similar issues). Depression and other mood states may lead to withdrawal rather than ethical engagement.
- Enacting Jewish wisdom often involves navigating complex social and emotional interactions (How can I, say, comfort the mourner, without being sensitive to social cues or attending to my own emotions?). "The intention to do the ethically right thing will only prevail if individuals have the necessary self-control resources...the ability to engage in ethical behaviors depends on self-control" (Rua et al., 2017).
- Self-reflection allows us to move beyond the habitual enactment of Jewish wisdom.
- Social interactions can facilitate reflection; community engagement can lead to reflection-on-action and about valued behaviors and beliefs.

Because of the centrality of the social and emotional domains to the enactment of wisdom (or virtue, Snow, 2010), it stands to reason that we can help set the stage for the application of Jewish wisdom by cultivating social and emotional functioning. This can be informed by work in Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), an approach that has its roots in general education (e.g., CASEL, 2003, 2017; J. Cohen, 1999; Elias, 2009; Elias & Arnold, 2006) and has been meshed with Jewish education (Kress, 2012b; Kress & Elias, 2001).

Social and emotional functioning is so deeply ingrained in our everyday lives that we might overlook its complexity and the challenges of learning it. Yet, we all have our profiles of social and emotional strengths and challenges. There are those who we know to exhibit deep empathy, and there are those who rarely exhibit it at all. While a comprehensive list of skills that comprise social and emotional functioning would be lengthy, it is possible to speak about broad categories. While there are many ways to categorize social and emotional skills, the current iteration by the Collaborative for Social, Academic and Emotional Learning (CASEL) provides a current, widely accepted framework. The following definitions are drawn from CASEL's website (CASEL.org):

- a. Self-awareness: "The ability to accurately recognize one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior."
- b. Self-management: "The ability to successfully regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations — effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself. The ability to set and work toward personal and academic goals."

- c. Social-awareness: “The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The ability to understand social and ethical norms for behavior and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.”
- d. Relationship skills: “The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. The ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed.”
- e. Responsible Problem solving: “The ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms. The realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and a consideration of the well-being of oneself and others.”

While these skills may be overlooked as too granular to be useful for Jewish-wisdom-promotion, let’s not forget that Judaism puts a high premium on one’s actual behaviors. Intention is nice, action is requisite. Embedded in the language used by CASEL is the assumption that one not only possess abilities, but also the tendency or proclivity to use these. One should, for example, be able to empathize with others and predict how our actions impact ourselves and others. At the same the actual “realistic evaluation” and “consideration of well-being” are also desired.

To develop a substrate of social and emotional skills, it is helpful to apply a coaching paradigm (described in detail elsewhere, Kress & Elias, 2020) that includes components such as: breaking down complex behaviors into smaller units (e.g., unpacking “*kavod*” to focus on areas

such as respectful tone of voice, body posture, etc.); practicing in safe situations, with constructive feedback provided; moving toward practice in situations with increasing levels of complexity. The elements discussed in the remainder of this section are also part of the picture. Through the promotion of social and emotional skills, we are creating readiness for the enactment and internalization of Jewish wisdom. The enactment of values (or interpersonal *halachot*) is contingent upon this social and emotional substrate. The substrate, in turn, is shaped by a vernacular of values.

#### A Vernacular of Values

Skills describe the enactment of behaviors. The broader context of their use has the potential to be value free. I might use appropriate interaction skills for inappropriate ends. A very polite “Please hand me that pencil” can be followed by “so I can finish my assignment” or “so I can throw it at Max.” Values provide the prescriptive framework for the pro-social uses of these skills. The value of *kavod* (respect), for example, adds that not only must the skills of “polite requests” be implemented, but also that they be used for the benefit and not the harm of others. At the same time, the skills are the substrate for the enactment of values (Elias et al., 2014). Though one might intend to show *kavod*, a demand of “Gimme!!” would not be taken as such.

In fact, the enactment of values often involves multiple skills working in unison. This applies to even the most seemingly basic cases, like asking for a pencil with *kavod*. This requires an array of social skills such as choosing the right words and tone of voice. Further, the requestor needs to gauge the state of being of the requestee to judge, among other things, “is

this a good time or does that person seem to want to be left alone?” and “am I asking for something that the other person may not want to part with?” One needs to control impulses and not grab the pencil, and not ask for it if the time is not right.

Social and emotional skills are concrete, easily grasped. Not always easily put into action...but mention of “assertive communication” or “self-awareness” is generally met with knowing nods and not head-scratching. Not so with values. The term gets thrown around a lot: Jewish values, values clarification, values-based education. But questions lurk just below the surface.

*Which, or whose, values? Is there a list? A set of priorities or weighting? Are there values that are particularly Jewish? What would it even mean to have a “Jewish” value?*

Thinking about values in the Jewish context adds additional levels of complexity. For one thing, there is the intersection of values and laws. For example, honoring (that is, showing *kavod*) for one’s parents is a commandment. Is it also a value? And if so, what is the value? Is it *kavod*, in the abstract? Or specific *kavod* for parents, as distinct from some other *kavod*?

It may be helpful to distinguish between values that might apply, albeit in nuanced ways, to a variety of different contexts – such as *kavod* – and those that are articulated in a specific context or application – such as *kavod* for parents. The value provides a shorthand and general blueprint for what is expected; the contextual setting calls on us to hone the application of the value to the parameters of the situation.

*Kavod → Kavod for Parents → Kavod for my parents*

Together, they represent an increased degree of elaboration (as noted earlier in this paper, the elaboration of schemata is seen as a fundamental dynamic of learning and growth).

Establishing a vernacular of values helps us connect individual instances of behavior to larger frameworks that can apply more broadly. Naming the value makes it more concrete and transferable. Honoring parents and honoring teachers are both instances of *kavod*. *Kavod* becomes a lens through which we can assess other behaviors as well.

### A Routine of Reflection

We've seen a recurring theme having to do with habit or automaticity in both our behavioral repertoires and in our application of frameworks of understanding and interpretation (schemata, worldviews). We generally function in *kevah* autopilot. To move to greater oversight of one's own behavior and to increased awareness of the frameworks one applies to understanding their world, it is important to slow down automatic processes so that we are more able to engage in *active judgement*, "a deliberate and reasoned application of moral rules that lead directly to behavior" (Reynolds, 2006, p. 743).

This underscores the importance of self-reflection, a process that is central in theories of learning for children and youth (Kress, 2010; e.g., Kress & Elias, 2008; Sigel, 1993; Sigel et al., 2007; Sigel & Kelly, 1988) and adults (e.g. Christie et al., 2015; Cranton, 1994; Mezirow, 1991). in therapeutic change models (e.g., Moore, 2005; Prochaska et al., 2003; Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983), and informal/experiential education (Kolb, 1984; Reimer, 2003, 2008). Self-

reflection is a process that can bridge *kevah* and *kavanah*, leading us to connect behaviors based on Jewish wisdom with frameworks to apply in ambiguous situations.

It is the primary job of the change-facilitator (be it an educator or a therapist) to help the individual identify and examine her or his assumptions—epistemological, social, and psychological—that underlie beliefs, feelings, and actions; assess the consequences of these assumptions; and test the validity of assumptions through effective participation in reflective dialogue. Helping the learner advance developmentally to become more critically reflective, and to integrate meaning perspectives that are more integrative of experience. (Moore, 2005, p. 408)

Through the lens of schemata, self-reflection can be seen as resulting in *distancing* (Sigel, 1993), from currently held representations of objects and ideas in light of new experiences and information that might either strengthen a schema or run counter to it. In the latter case, the schema may adapt, resulting in a process of growth and learning.

As such, a central task for an educator is to provide a context for self-reflection. There are a variety of means to this end. A first step could include mindfulness practices aimed at slowing down automatic processes (e.g., Jennings, 2015). Strategic questioning can call upon a learner to analyze current assumptions and ways of thinking (Cranton, 1994; Sigel et al., 2007; Sigel & Kelly, 1988), as can processes such as reflective journaling (Cranton, 1994; Kress, 2010). Despite the focus on “self,” social interactions (on varying levels) play an important in fostering and providing a context for self-reflection. Self-reflection need not be – and perhaps is not even best suited to be – a process undertaken alone. Interaction with others can help achieve the goal of “looking at familiar things from a new perspective” (Cranton, 1994, p. 189). The educator has many techniques for this, including one-on-one and group conversations (with the educator and/or with peers), simulations, role-plays, and engagement with new experiences.

With regard to Jewish-wisdom-oriented behaviors, why should reflection be a desired element of growth? If I regularly – habitually! – write a check to the local food pantry the week before the end of the financial year, or send money to my local Federation when they call me on a Sunday, then haven't I applied Jewish wisdom (regarding *tzedakah*, responsibility to others, or some other Jewishly-wise concept)? If I do this repeatedly, haven't I satisfied Maimonides criterion of "frequent repetition of acts...practiced over a long period of time?"

There are at least two considerations. The first, mentioned at the opening of this paper, has to do with the issue of intentionality or association of the behavior with the world of Jewish wisdom. It is possible to write a check because it provides a tax deduction or so that the Federation phone-bank volunteer will stop bugging me. If we assume that LKFLT's goals (and perhaps the goals of Jewish education writ large) are that one should connect these behaviors to Jewish wisdom, then reflection opens the door for this to happen.

Note that in a similar way, the Jewish tradition provides many opportunities for reflection itself. But here too, we cannot assume a connection between a mitzvah and a desired outcome. Saying a *b'racha* before eating, or engaging in *tefillah* (prayer), *can* be opportunities for reflection, but only if they are structured as such. I'm not just referring to prayer experiences structured in an unengaging way (e.g., morning prayers at summer camp during which half the campers are dozing off). Rather, one might habitually – and mindlessly!! – say *b'rachot* before eating and might sing along with the chazan – without even thinking about it!! – with great zest. We Jewish educators can easily find elements of these behavior to kvell about. But, while these prayer opportunities may be meeting certain educational goals, they are not being facilitated in a way that is likely to lead to reflection (though reflection can be built on this).

A second important element of reflection relates to issues of transfer and internalization. Habits are highly specific, involving behaviors linked to cues (Duhigg, 2014). Without the cue, the behavior is far less likely to occur. And, seemingly-associated behaviors may not occur either. To say that I've established a habit of rolling out of bed early, grabbing a cup of coffee, putting on my sneakers, and going for a run means that this has become a highly automated behavior. My alarm-clock rings and without much conscious processing I find myself a mile down the road. This works well as long as the contextual cues in the environment (my alarm clock ringing, my sneakers being left in the right place, my coffee maker going on time) fall into place. On days when I can sleep as late as I want, perhaps I don't run. If my toe aches, I stay in bed. And, while a habit can be the gateway to a wide array of behavior changes (to support my running habit, I might change my diet), it needn't. Sometimes a habit is just a habit. Self-reflection can serve to broaden the horizons of a habit by linking it to broader goals (running is one of the several things I do to stay in shape) so that even when the habit is not initiated, one can plan other ways to achieve that goal (I broke my toe, but there are still plenty of ways for me to stay in shape). It can also link the habit to a sense of one's self (I'm someone who takes running very seriously), so that one persists in the behavior despite obstacles.

Reflection in the learning process can help learners integrate Jewish wisdom into the set of lenses (or, personal constructs) one uses to interpret events. Through reflection, one might come to distill out the transferable elements of Jewish wisdom (say, "*b'tzelem Elohim*" as a framework that can apply to many interpersonal interactions). The establishment of these frameworks can result from trying out new behaviors (e.g., developing a sense of *b'tzelem Elohim* by visiting a homeless shelter). Importantly, the process does not need to begin with

behavior change; we aren't necessarily talking about initiating a new set of practices. We can also provide opportunity to reflect on the Jewish wisdom of everyday life, to connect our intuitions and habits to themes of Jewish wisdom. As with the Jewish sensibilities themselves, the idea is to make explicit certain understandings that "many Jews – religious and secular – were already turning to reflexively (that is, whether they knew it or not), particularly when there were life decisions to be made" (Ochs, 2019, p. 401). It's the "or not" part of Ochs' statement that is our target here. Making explicit the implicit Jewish wisdom is a step toward developing a more generalized Jewish-wisdom informed worldview.

Perhaps we can think about habit on two levels. The first is the behavior itself – giving charity, treating others with respect, etc. The second habit can be to pause to connect this with a Jewish-wisdom value concept. I give charity, I reflect on the importance of *tzedakah*. I treat people with respect and make the connection with the notion of *b'tzelem Elohim*. This approach can be seen as rooted in Ochs' explanation of Jewish sensibilities as things Jews do without necessarily framing them in a Jewish light. In fact, she is skeptical about the idea of promoting the behaviors packaged as Jewish wisdom. The reverse approach – tagging existing behaviors as an element of Judaism or applying Jewish schemata to them – is consistent with Ochs' assessment that many Jews are enacting these behaviors to begin with. By naming the values involved and exploring how these values intersect with one's desired self, we are creating the habit of reflecting through a Jewish-wisdom (or sensibility) framework. The advantage of referring to a framework is in the ability to generalize beyond familiar cases. In the event that enacting a behavior does not come naturally, or in which there are conflicting

tendencies to enact conflicting behaviors, Jewish wisdom frameworks can be applied within the “slow” process of thinking things through.

### Engagement with the Emotions of Enacting Wisdom

Different situations call on the shaping of the social and emotional skills underlying values; the mechanics of showing *kavod* to the speaker of an assembly and to a peer on the playground differ despite the common value framework. Each individual will encounter circumstances in which it is particularly difficult to enact values. Respect may be second nature in one’s interactions with teachers but get lost in arguments with opponents on the sports field.

Jewish tradition flags some common situations which pose challenges to many people, weaving these into the fabric of *halachah* (I recognize that this term has divergent meanings...), at least on par with ritual behaviors. As such, is it possible to identify Jewishly mandated value-challenging opportunities. Examples include

- a. *Bikkur cholim* [visiting the sick]
- b. *Hachnasat Orchim* [welcoming guests]
- c. *Kibud horim v’morim* [honoring one’s parents and teachers]

What unites these? Each is an interpersonal mitzvah [*bein adam l’chaveiro*] which holds the potential to be fraught or complicated. Each may be accompanied by strong emotions (our own sadness about a loved one’s illness; the joys and stresses that characterize parent-child relationships) and, relatedly, the need to be particularly intentional in our interactions. They may call for action in unfamiliar contexts in which the norms are unclear (e.g., etiquette for

hospital visits, the unknown needs and wants of a guest) or in which one is faced with conflicting values.

Of course, not all difficult situations are universally predictable. One person's routine set of interactions can be another's emotional tipping point. And, new situations for which we (individually and as a society) might be unprepared arise regularly (when I finished graduate school in the late 1990's, online etiquette and cyber-bullying were not on the agenda).

Yet, the complexity of our social and emotional worlds is frequently downplayed or even absent from our educational settings. Consider this scenario: Since 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Elana's day school class has been visiting the local rehabilitation center and home for the elderly. Since 5<sup>th</sup> grade, she's been dreading it. So much so that she hopes that this will not be part of the program when she begins high school this fall. Ask her why, and she'll tell you "It's boring" and "It's a waste of time." Explain to her that it is an important thing to do, and she'll let you know that she doesn't think the residents care...in fact, one of them yelled at her for blocking the television in the rec room. Press her, and she might even admit that some of the sights, sounds, and scents make her very uncomfortable. Perhaps the experience brings up sadness at the loss of a grandparent.

Our interpersonal commandments address a range of actions that, in many cases, are not ways we might choose to spend our time given the option. The inherent rewards – self-satisfaction at doing something helpful, for example - are fairly abstract while the challenges (time, energy, awkward feelings) are concrete. Yet, we often expect Elana and her classmates to participate in these acts as if they were going to any other class trip – bring your permission slip, get on the bus, be quiet in the hallways. What about students who feel uncomfortable

because they don't know how to read cues in this novel environment? Those who are saddened because they are reminded of a loss of a loved one? Some of these students will express the discomfort in bravado or jokes. It is also likely that a very basic behavioral principle is in play. Negative reinforcement<sup>5</sup> is the term used to describe the strengthening of a behavior stemming from the "reward" that one experiences when that behavior results in something unwanted being removed. The student experiences negative emotions in the nursing home visit that are only mitigated by the behavior of *leaving the nursing home*. While we have hoped to establish a habit of *bikur cholim* or such, we have actually increased only the desire to remove one's self from the *bikur cholim* experience.

At the very least, these challenges should be acknowledged. Further, incorporating self-reflection into the process will make it more likely for these impediments to surface. Once recognized, these challenges can be addressed. This often occurs through revisiting the social and emotional skills discussed above. For example, developing the self-awareness and self-regulation skills needed to deal with negative emotions as they arise and staying focused on the matter at hand (visiting the sick). Even better than waiting for these concerns to emerge after enacting a value, educators can help learners anticipate and prepare for these challenges even before they occur.

Of course, not all the emotions of enacting wisdom are negative. These acts can bring joy at helping others, the warmth of connecting with others, and the sense of belongingness of

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<sup>5</sup> Note that negative reinforcement is often misused to mean "punishment," probably because of the word *negative*. Punishments reduce behavior, reinforcements increase behavior. Here, a similar analysis can be made using "punishment," with the discomfort of the visit serving as a punishment – again, not in the sense of a consequence for doing something wrong, but as a behavioral deterrent of sorts – that would likely reduce the frequency of the behavior in question – going to visit the elderly or sick.

contributing to one's community. These reactions, too, should be acknowledged and reflected upon (as discussed earlier).

### Careful Consideration of Context

While pedagogy and milieu are often discussed as separate entities of the education process, it is important to keep in mind their interdependence. A pedagogy that values self-reflection has the potential to color the larger setting in which that pedagogy takes place. The environment can come to be seen as safe and open for self-expression. Environments, in turn, can shape pedagogy. If participants don't feel a sense of emotional safety, they are unlikely to engage in meaningful reflection. The importance of milieu can be obscured by the breadth of what that term may cover, everything from proximal relationships (e.g., friendships) to group functioning (e.g., the climate of a learning environment) to distal societal structures (e.g., the way some outcomes are prioritized in the community at large). The intertwining of pedagogy and context has important implications, some of which have been discussed in this paper and will be reiterated, briefly, here.

First, and perhaps most obviously, relationships within a learning environment matter. There is a rich history of research on class- and school-climate showing that the relational context in which learning occurs is important to promoting both learning outcomes and personal growth (e.g., Adelman & Taylor, 2005; I. Cohen et al., 2002; J. Cohen et al., 2009; Kress & Ben-Avie, 2010; Thapa et al., 2013)<sup>6</sup>. An educator's facility with group dynamics, promoting dialogue, conflict resolution, and such must accompany prowess with lesson planning,

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<sup>6</sup> See Wolfson (2006, 2013) for a broader overview of the centrality of relationship within Judaism.

curriculum design, and facility with Jewish text and tradition. This is true in all educational settings and for all age groups. Of course, Jewish wisdom has much to say about the nature of relationships, so there is potential for overlap between process and content. This should not obscure the importance of the relational climate. It is, unfortunately, very possible to teach about Jewish wisdom related to positive relationships while failing to exemplify Jewish wisdom related to relationships.

Second, it is important to consider how efforts to promote Jewish wisdom can manifest throughout a learner's ecology. As a fairly obvious example, the degree to which an educator engages with Jewish wisdom is relevant to the experience of the learner. This plays out on at least two inter-related levels. First, in order to help learners develop the competencies needed to enact Jewish wisdom, we must help the educators do the same. If a group leader lacks, for example, the self-management skills to handle the stressors that are bound to come up in the course of everyday work, the educational endeavor is heading for failure. The development of these competencies should be deeply and cohesively integrated into educator preparation and in-service efforts. Similarly, those involved in the promotion of Jewish wisdom should be able to look at their work through a motivational lens.

This also involves considering how the environments we create allow room for agency, belonging, and competence (as discussed earlier) on the part of participants. So, as we bemoan the post-bnai-mitzvah "drop off" in religious school, we might ask questions about the synagogue context. What opportunities are there for, say, a 15-year-old to meaningfully contribute to the functioning of the congregation? What competencies does the teen have that can be called upon? Which competencies need to be developed?

Looking beyond individual, proximal learning environments, consideration must be given to the broader context in which learning occurs. It is more likely that wisdom will not only be applied but also be incorporated into one's identity if the promotion of wisdom takes place in an environment that

- (a) Values these desired outcomes;
- (b) Involves multiple relationships and roles (particularly roles with increasing centrality) related to these outcomes; and
- (c) Addresses these outcomes in multiple, interconnected ways.

Social context can provide both motivation to enact values and guidelines for their enactment.

Communities reward certain behaviors and discourage or punish others. To become a competent member of a community means adhering, at least to some extent, to its framework of accepted behavior. Above, values were described as providing guidelines for social and emotional behaviors. A communal framework provides yet another level of input in shaping how values are manifest. A value such as *kavod* means that we would use appropriate communication skills to borrow a pencil to finish an assignment and not to poke someone with it. But who is deserving of *kavod*? Does one deserve *kavod* by nature of one's position, is it earned in some other way? Should *kavod* be universally applied to all in a society? What about animals? And...what constitutes *kavod*-demonstrating behaviors? Making eye-contact? Avoiding eye contact? These are largely culturally determined, though there are various cross-cultural consistencies. All of this plays out within the context of roles and relationships available to the learner for which the application of Jewish wisdom is salient.

Our contemporary context provides some challenges in this regard. There is a common tendency to push back an ideas of commandedness or obligation. By and large we observe *mitzvot* because we want and choose to, not because we think we have to (S. M. Cohen & Eisen, 2000) . Technology has changed the nature of communities, diffusing norms among multiple shifting affiliations of choice. And, overall, one can say that at best, our society does not always provide a normative sense of taking positive action in the social sphere. At the same time, however, the death of communal norms may be highly exaggerated. One may not feel a deep sense of connection to their neighbors but still adhere to norms (written and unwritten) of behavior associated with the neighborhood. And technology brings opportunities as well as challenges. As has become very evident during this time of COVID-19, *virtual* communities can have *real* power. As such, efforts at promoting Jewish wisdom can take place on a local level (e.g., building norms within a congregation) and beyond (e.g., virtual wisdom-oriented communities).

Finally, an ecological approach to thinking about developmental-educational contexts calls on us to think about how our goals (here, the application of Jewish wisdom) can be traced throughout the components of a system. Given the interconnectedness of elements of ecological systems, thinking about them from any starting point can lead us to think more broadly. Let's take as a starting point a youth in a "formal" educational setting (supplemental or day school). Of course, we can wonder about the way that Jewish wisdom is manifest in the interactions between that youth and her teacher. Broadening our ecological considerations would lead us to consider how, if at all, Jewish wisdom permeates:

- The professional development and supervision of educational staff members in that setting;
- The pre-service preparation of these educators;
- The training and supervision of other staff (office administrators, custodial staff, etc.);
- The everyday life the youth experiences at home with their parents;
- The sermons that the youth's parents hear from their rabbi when they attend synagogue;
- Articles or podcasts available to read/hear;
- Other educational settings that youth may attend (for example, youth groups, camps).

The list can keep going but suffice it to say that it is worth considering how to develop an ecology of Jewish wisdom.

## Section 2b: Mussar as a Case Example

The initiative with which I am most familiar that exemplifies many of these ideas involves Chanoch LaNa'ar (CLN), a mussar-based program developed by Rabbi David Jaffe at Gann Academy, a pluralistic Jewish high school in Waltham, MA. I've written about this program in detail elsewhere (Kress, 2017) and will recap briefly here, with an emphasis on connections to the ideas in this paper.

Mussar emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as an approach to character development that emphasized self-examination using *middot*, perhaps best translated as character traits, as guides (Claussen, 2010; Etkes, 1993). The process involved studying wisdom texts such as Moses Hayyim Luzzatto's *Mesillat Yesharim – The Path of the Upright* (Stone, 2010). In addition to study, mussar practice involved introspection, group confessionals, and personal affirmations. In recent times, mussar has had a modern resurgence; study groups have been formed by various organizations and modern interpretations of *middot* and mussar literature have been published (e.g., Levites & Stone, 2013; Morinis, 2007; Stone, 2013).

CLN emerged from this resurgence and involved mussar study taking place in groups of students and staff (some groups were comprised of both students and staff). The mussar group (or Vaad) process took various forms, but a prototypical session included:

- A brief good and welfare check in, generally in pairs (sharing “something good” and “something they want to let go of”).
- Individual review of journals, which were used to keep notes about work with a focus *middah* from the previous session.

- Paired discussion of progress and challenges in working on the past session's *middah*.
- A brief presentation by a "focus person" on a "question of practice" related to the previous session's *middah*, followed by a structured group discussion of the issues raised.
- Individual journaling about reactions and connections to the focus presentation and group sharing of what was learned by each participant.
- Presentation by the Vaad facilitator of a new *middah* to be the focus for the coming month, including study of related texts.
- Action-planning for using the newly-introduced *middah* in one's life. Participants were encouraged to choose a mantra-like *focus phrase* related to the *middah*, to be repeated regularly throughout the subsequent month; to select a *kabbalah*, a specific action related to the *middah*; and to maintain a journal of progress.

While the Vaad was the primary venue for mussar study and discussion, mussar also became an option for tefillah (prayer; as a pluralistic school, many prayer options were offered). Though, participation in CLN was not required, even non-participants encountered the language of middot throughout the school. Some faculty brought elements of mussar with them into their classrooms, sometimes in unexpected ways. For example, a math teacher used mussar concepts to address math-anxiety and, more generally, the stressors encountered by students throughout the school day. Some faculty called upon the ideas during student advisories. The Head of School used mussar language and concepts in his communications with

students and parents. Dr. Alan Morinis, whose book *Everyday Holiness* (Morinis, 2007) served as a sort of textbook for the program, was invited as the keynote speaker at a major parent event. The language of mussar became so ubiquitous that it was the subject of satire in the student-run newspaper.

There are several elements of this program that exemplify core ideas in the application of Jewish wisdom discussed throughout this paper.

- a. A basis in Jewish text/tradition: Here, this included mussar literature filtered through contemporary sources.
- b. Establishment of a Jewishly-rooted framework for understanding everyday inter- and intra-personal life: Text study took place in the service of developing concepts through which one's everyday experiences could be understood. One's impatience, for example, became linked to the notion of *savlanut*.
- c. Development of habits of reflection: Both individual and group reflection was built into the process.
- d. Attending to the realities of change in the social and emotional spheres: Change was framed as an ongoing process; the aforementioned reflection helped participants unpack the complexities involved in enacting *middot* in the real world. *Savlanut* (and other *middot*) takes skill.
- e. Cultivating contexts that foster agency, belonging, competence. Multiple ways into mussar study were offered. Participants could shape their efforts to meet their own needs and interests. Activities were easy to grasp and well scaffolded when more

complexity arose (e.g., “focus person” presenters went through an extensive preparatory process with the Vaad coordinator).

- f. Situating the process within a broader community of meaning, multiple related roles and relationships. The language of mussar permeated the setting. Even those not participating had basic knowledge of core concepts. Faculty and administrators, not only students, were involved.

## Section 3: Concluding Remarks

## Summary

In my first semester in graduate school, I took a course titled, unhelpfully, Doctoral Seminar (I've since learned that this is code for "whatever the professor feels like teaching;" I find myself continuing in this tradition with my own Doctoral Seminars). The major assignment was to write a lengthy paper about "Why do we do what we do?" I don't recall the details of what I typed into my MacIntosh computer, but I do remember experiencing rapidly cycling feelings of a) confusion about what to write; b) excitement at being able to engage with such Big Ideas; and c) frustration at realizing that the task was not one that I or anyone else could possibly complete. Writing this manuscript brought back memories of that long-ago graduate experience. I've tried to provide a framework for understanding the conditions under which Jewish wisdom would be most likely to be applied, in the sense of both a behavioral application and a sense of connection to its Jewish roots.

As shown in the Figure 1, this model includes:

1. The enactment of Jewish-wisdom-oriented behaviors, accompanied by...
2. Self-reflection that would result in the development of schemata or worldviews that allow for the generalization of an element of Jewish wisdom, taking place within...
3. A web of proximal and distal relationships, including both direct relationships and a broader sense that one is embedded within a community in which applying Jewish wisdom matters, resulting in...
4. Integration of the element of Jewish wisdom into one's identity.

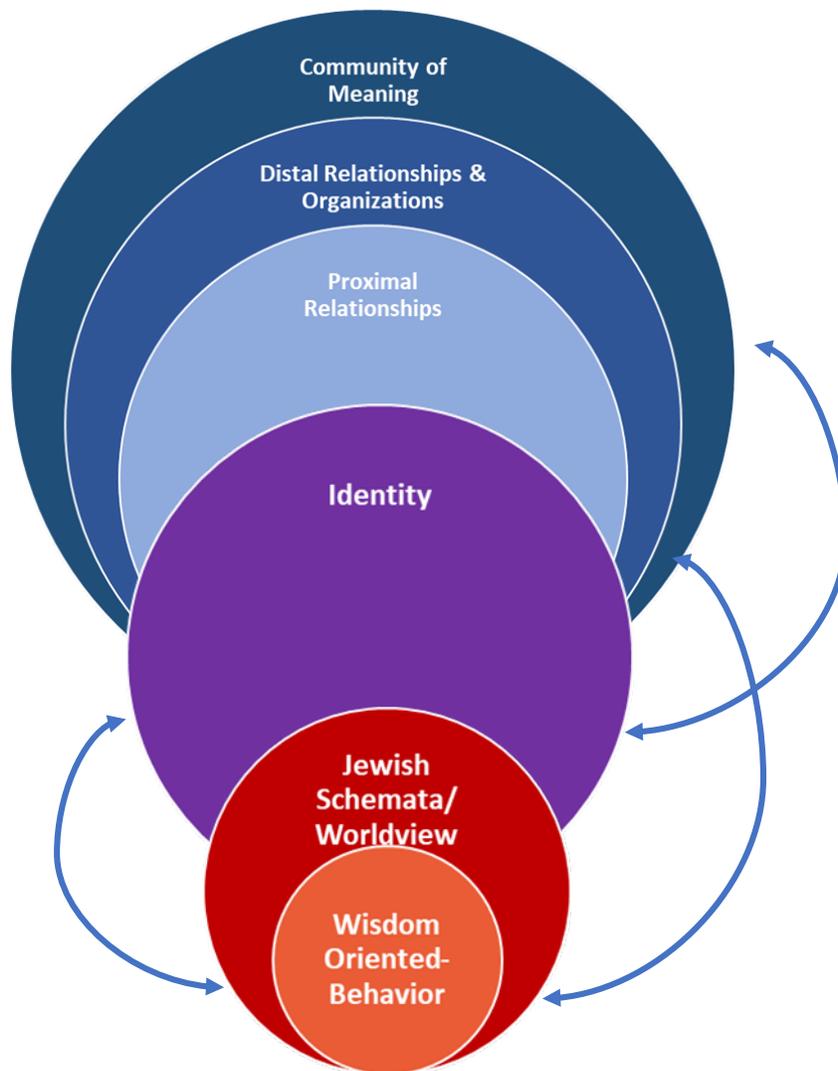


FIGURE 1 A MODEL OF EDUCATION FOR JEWISH WISDOM

I am hampered not only by my lack of artistic prowess but also by the dictates of linearity through which diagrams and, more to the point, manuscripts, are generally crafted. For the manuscript, and the diagram, I've divided the model into two sections – one having to do with an individual's behavior and worldviews, the other having to do with the contexts in which the individual operates – with identity serving as a bridge. The two-headed arrows show the

artificiality of trying to segment what is in reality a complex ecology. Some, but by no means all, interconnections to illustrate this point:

- By reflecting on our behavior, we can expand our schemata and worldviews; our schemata and worldviews shape the expectations and interpretations which guide our behavior.
- Our schema and worldviews about the self, our behaviors, and our social groups form the basis for personal identity; our projected future identity can shape our current construction of reality and associated behaviors.
- The roles and relationships which we inhabit solidify identity; identity leads us to pursue certain roles and relationships.
- Societal norms inform behavior, shape identity, and provide meaning that are incorporated into our schemata and worldviews...and vice versa.

Not surprisingly, most if not all of these observations can be found in Woocher's prescient analyses (Woocher, 2008, 2012).

### Limitations and Future Directions

In writing my graduate school paper, I came to a point at which I felt that I had said a lot, had a lot more to say, but that it was worth setting at least a temporary boundary. I've come to that point here as well. Any of the topics covered in this paper could be further expanded; I've tried to distill what I see as the major connections to applying Jewish wisdom. In addition, there are many related topics that could have been included but weren't, or were given short-shrift, due to an attempt to actually present a finished work!

- I am not a philosopher, and this is not a work of philosophy. I waded, with trepidation, into philosophical waters only so far as this was clearly needed to contextualize elements of the behavioral research. There is much more to be said about how the ideas in the paper intersect, or fail to intersect, with ideas from Jewish thought and philosophy writ large. Likewise, I dodged the issue of what constitutes *Jewish* wisdom. One might infer a, perhaps circular, definition that posits Jewish wisdom is that which is construed in a particular community of meaning as Jewish wisdom. Like I said, I'm no philosopher.
- The paper does not delve into developmental issues. I believe that many of the same basic principles of learning and development apply throughout the lifespan, though the way one notices them and works with them would be tailored to the age or stage of the learner. I don't mean to imply that this "tailoring" is in any way simple. In emphasizing continuity of learning theories, I may be at odds with Mezirow (discussed earlier) who sees adult education as of a different sort than youth education. However, as noted, Mezirow does describe something quite similar to schema-based learning (which is an idea applied to youth as well). We might be able to reconcile our views through an acknowledgement that though similar processes are at hand, the dissimilarities between the contexts of youth and adults (the latter having a greater hand in shaping their learning environment and in re-shaping their experiences once "transformation" occurs) are strong enough to suggest a qualitative difference.
- There is the potential for the discussion to be read as endorsing an unhealthy emphasis on the self. While I did include discussion of linking individuals and communities, I did

not touch on another important aspect, that of transcendence or connection to something larger than one's self (which may take the form of connection to a community or a connection to God, to nature, etc.). This is another topic omitted not because it is unimportant, but rather because I'd want to pick this up in further exploration. For now, suffice it to say that many theorists have noted that we have a drive for meaning and purpose in our lives (e.g., Fowler, 1981; Frankl, 1962; Kress, 2007; Sarason, 2001), and Jewish educators need to think in terms of the spiritual dimensions of their work.

### Broadening the Jewish Educational Domain

Though I entered graduate school thinking that I'd emerge as a clinical child psychologist, my journey took a different direction. My research and practice have been in the area of Social and Emotional Learning or, in a more wordy formulation, the school-based promotion of social and emotional competence. The goal was for school personnel to be as intentional about *who students become* as they are about *what students know*. And, this was to be achieved through a multicomponent approach that involved both group/communal development and pedagogies that addressed character growth along with subject matter expertise (e.g., Kress & Elias, 2020; Novick et al., 2002).

Early on, I discovered that people who did similar work could be found in a variety of places. In the academic world, some were in psychology programs in a variety of areas: clinical, community, or applied developmental. Others were based in schools of education or social work programs. My previous job was at a program doing school-based consultation through the

auspices of a medical school! I mention this to highlight the multi-dimensional nature of this work. While we may come from different academic disciplines, it is wise to recognize, as did the blind men touching the elephant, that success requires a diversity of perspectives; we are all working on the same project.

It was this belief that provided reassurance when I took a position in a graduate program in Jewish education with neither a degree in Jewish studies nor education. My experience, however, leads me to be concerned about the potential of dis-integration within the field. To what extent are those thinking about Jewish education through a teaching and learning paradigm coordinating efforts with those applying a communal development lens? How do we bring text-study and relationship- building together in meaningful ways?

There are traces of these questions in the perennial questions about the intersection of formal and informal/experiential education. While the conversation often gets bogged down in definitional issues (looking to map out the parameters of each approach in a way that emphasizes the distinctions between them), the focus should be on integration. All learning settings have an “experiential” component, whether we plan for it or not. The social and emotional dynamics color a learning space and mediate the learning that goes on (Kress, 2014).

There are encouraging examples of this willingness to focus simultaneously on content and process, such as those that build on the interpersonal dynamics of *hevrutah* study (Holzer & Kent, 2013; Kent, 2006). Yet, the distinctions persist. Text may become the province of classrooms, while community-building and emotional connection are relegated to occasional co-curricular activities (Kress, 2012a). The “Director of Education” at summer camps may work closely with the “educational staff” (meaning a cadre of rabbis and teachers who ply their craft

throughout the camp) but no one else (i.e., bunk counselors and specialists closest to the daily activities of the campers), despite our insistence that the power of camp can be found in everyday Jewish living. It is understandable that “studying texts during *Yahadut* period or on Shabbat” is seen as Jewish education, but why aren’t “the way we treat each other on a daily basis in our bunk” or “how I make health-related decisions in my day-to-day life?”

For a holistic approach to work, Jewish educators must be able to work on multiple levels simultaneously. First, we need to take seriously the idea that no matter what “subject” we’re teaching, what setting we’re in, or what age group we’re working with, we have the potential (and, I’d argue, the responsibility) to attend to both subject matter expertise and personal Jewish development. Elsewhere (Kress, 2012a), I’ve suggested that Pedagogic Content Knowledge (Shulman, 1986), or the specific knowledge needed to teach a particular subject area, be accompanied by knowledge about how personal reflection and growth can be fostered through the study of that subject area. [I referred to this as Jewish Developmental Process Knowledge, but the term did not seem to take root.] Lest it seem that I am holding Jewish education to an unreasonably high standard, or downplaying the importance of Jewish content, be assured that I and others (Armstrong, 2006; Kress & Elias, 2020) make the same argument for general education: math, science, and social studies teachers should also connect their content-oriented work with the developmental needs of their students.

Second, we must keep in mind Kurt Lewin’s famous dictum  $B = f(P, E)$ , or, behavior is a function of both the person and their environment. Applying Jewish wisdom will not result from excellent lesson plans alone. We need to create the proximal (such as classrooms and

congregations) and distal (such as the Jewish media and funding priorities) in which the application of Jewish wisdom matters.

For this to occur, those with multiple perspectives on Jewish education must put their heads together. There are several steps that could help. First, we need to ensure that Jewish educational thought leaders (academics, lead practitioners, funders) represent a wide range of perspectives – learning scientists, developmental psychologists, community developers, group dynamicists along with various subject matter experts. Then, we need to make sure that there are sufficient venues for these people to collaborate in teaching and research. A collaborative, interdisciplinary approach is key.

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