Approaches to Jewish Literacy:

An Exploration of Purpose and Values within Jewish Learning for Jewish Leaders

Master's Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
Brandeis University
Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies
Professor Sharon Feiman-Nemser, Advisor

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts
in
Near Eastern and Judaic Studies

by
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May 2017

ABSTRACT

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In the context of Jewish education, "literacy" is a word often used to describe a desirable educational outcome. Yet, there is no clear definition of what constitutes Jewish literacy. The criteria of literacy are further complicated when the term is linked – as it frequently is – to Jewish leadership. What kind or level of Jewish literacy should Jewish leaders possess? The ambiguity of the term leaves room for a diversity of approaches to defining and promoting Jewish literacy for Jewish leaders. Underlying these divergent approaches to literacy are variant assumptions about what Jewish literacy represents, how it functions, and why it matters.

The central question of this project is: what approaches to, assumptions about, and goals for Jewish literacy are present in contemporary approaches to Jewish leadership? To explore this central question, I investigated three core areas of inquiry:

1. In what ways do contemporary leadership programs with a literacy agenda promote and value literacy?
2. What is the import of Jewish literacy to Jewish leadership within these frameworks?

3. What assumptions about Jewish peoplehood and learning underlie these approaches to Jewish literacy?

In order to explore existing models of Jewish literacy, I identified three programs with diverse ways of approaching Jewish learning and its role within Jewish leadership. I interviewed program graduates and program staff to learn about the values and goals of Jewish learning within the programs. My research results combined with my literature review led me to identify three distinct approaches to Jewish literacy: 1) the *Shanda* Approach, 2) the Personal Approach, and 3) the Continuity Approach.

The *Shanda* Approach prioritizes Jewish literacy as an essential component of belonging, emphasizing the way in which Jewish literacy can make one an "insider." The sense of legitimacy created through the *Shanda* Approach is both practically significant for making leaders "part of" the groups they lead and is internally validating for the leaders themselves.

In contrast to the *Shanda* Approach, the Personal Approach does not view Jewish literacy as a series of essential pieces of knowledge. Rather, Jewish literacy is seen as a tool for creating deeply personal and meaningful relationships to Jewish life and community. In other words, the Personal Approach focuses less on the specific content of learning and more on the effect that learning has on an individual's sense of meaning, motivation, and identity.

Finally, the Continuity Approach understands Jewish literacy as a practical tool. When individuals acquire Jewish literacy, they are then able to share it with others. Ultimately, the goal of imparting Jewish literacy is to enable and empower the learner to become the teacher. In short, those who receive Jewish learning can be involved with the Jewish learning experiences of others.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Purpose and Personal Connections

In the context of Jewish education, "literacy" is a word often used to describe a desirable educational outcome. Yet, there is no clear definition of what constitutes Jewish literacy. The criteria of literacy are further complicated when the term is linked – as it frequently is – to Jewish leadership. What kind or level of Jewish literacy should Jewish leaders possess? Moreover, what type of literacy is expected from Jewish leaders? Do leaders have unique literacy needs? The ambiguity of the term leaves room for a diversity of approaches to defining and promoting Jewish literacy for Jewish leaders. Underlying these divergent approaches to literacy are variant assumptions about what Jewish literacy represents, how it functions, and why it matters.

I am drawn to this topic of study through a blending of personal and professional interests. As both a Jewish professional and an individual who has primarily engaged with serious Jewish learning as an adult, I have frequently felt acutely aware of my own degree of knowledge and how this impacts my leadership roles. Additionally, my personal path of learning and observance has led me to participate in a variety of learning and professional development experiences, spanning the Reform, Conservative, Traditional, and non-denominational sectors.

The role of Jewish learning, the perceived purpose of such learning, and the approach to imparting Jewish literacy has varied greatly in these diverse settings. While all of these programs spoke, in some way, about Torah, Jewish history, and Jewish values, I often felt that they were

emphasizing these topics towards different ends. The differences among the approaches were not limited to theological or ideological disagreements. Rather, there seemed to be fundamental differences about what constitutes Jewish literacy, why it matters, and how it intersects with the role and responsibilities of Jewish leaders.

When exploring topics for this research project, I was once again drawn to the question of Jewish literacy. Why does it matter? Or, put better, what does Jewish literacy promote? I chose to pursue this question, seeking to identify some of the underlying approaches to promoting and valuing Jewish literacy. My purpose in this project is not to offer a single definition or picture of what constitutes Jewish literacy and why it matters. Rather, my goal is to explore a few specific approaches through which one could understand, define, and value Jewish literacy.

Core Research Questions

The central question of this project is: what approaches to, assumptions about, and goals for Jewish literacy are present in contemporary approaches to Jewish leadership? To explore this central question, I investigated three core areas of inquiry:

1. In what ways do contemporary leadership programs with a literacy agenda promote and value literacy?
2. What is the import of Jewish literacy to Jewish leadership within these frameworks?
3. What assumptions about Jewish peoplehood and learning underlie these approaches to Jewish literacy?

The Emergence of "Jewish Literacy" Literature

Interest in the concept of Jewish literacy increased in the 1980s after the publication of E.D. Hirsch's book, *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*.[1] Hirsch popularized the concept of "cultural literacy," focusing on the necessity of a shared cultural language within American society. In Hirsch's view, a shared cultural language is foundational to communal cohesion, and moreover, it is a necessity for thriving in community. From this position, Hirsch argues that defining the parameters of cultural literacy would allow for a shared communal standard and, more importantly, enable the effective transmission of literacy to all community members. Thus, in Hirsch's view, the elements of cultural literacy should be clearly defined, thereby allowing all group members to have equal access to participating in that group's culture.

Joseph Telushkin responded to Hirsch's concept of cultural literacy by producing the book *Jewish Literacy: The Most Important Things to Know about the Jewish Religion, Its People, and History*.[2] Telushkin argued that contemporary American Jews lacked the shared language of cultural literacy that Hirsch described. Telushkin sought to address Jewish illiteracy by identifying the essential facts of Jewish texts, history, and practice. Both Hirsch and Telushkin present a picture of literacy that is defined by knowledge. More specifically, they present a picture of literacy that is defined by the type of knowledge that one can acquire through reading a book. If one knows certain facts, stories, and reference points, then they are literate in that particular subject. Since Hirsch's and Telushkin's contributions to the field, scholars and Jewish leaders have put forth several challenges, additions, and modifications to what constitutes

[1] E. D. Hirsch, Joseph F. Kett, and James S. Trefil, *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).
[2] Joseph Telushkin, *Jewish Literacy: The Most Important Things to Know about the Jewish Religion, Its People, and History* (New York: Morrow, 1991).

Jewish literacy, how such literacy is acquired, and why literacy matters. In the sections that follow, I will explore more deeply the conceptions put forward by Hirsch and Telushkin, and I will also utilize the contributions of other authors to illustrate varied approaches to Jewish literacy.

Contribution to the Field

While some literature has drawn connections between Jewish literacy and Jewish leadership, two significant components of the intersection between Jewish literacy and Jewish leadership have been largely neglected.[3] First, while diversity among definitions of what Jewish literacy means is acknowledged, there is little discussion about how different definitions of Jewish literacy affect the ultimate role of literacy for leadership. Secondly, there has been little exploration of the underlying assumptions behind different models of Jewish literacy and different conceptions of its import. Better understanding these underlying assumptions may fill gaps in the existing literature and reveal how different approaches to Jewish literacy represent alternate understandings of peoplehood, knowledge, and leadership.

What's more, discussions of Jewish literacy often begin in the theoretical realm and move towards the practical.[4] In other words, the focus is on Jewish literacy's import and function in an

[3] Bradley Shavit Artson offers a list of Jewish books that Jewish leaders should read in his "Canon of Jewish Literacy: Guide for the Thoughtful Jewish Leader" (New York: American Jewish Committee, 2005). Erica Brown offers an exploration of creative and meaningful ways to develop strong Jewish communal leaders in "Making Inspired Leaders: New Approaches to Jewish Leadership Development" in the *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* Vol. 81, No. 1-2 (2005): 63-72, and she identifies Jewish literacy as one potential source of inspiration for Jewish leaders. This concept of inspiration and Brown's work on the subject is more thoroughly explored in Chapter Three.

[4] This practice is well illustrated by David I. Bernstein in "Overcoming Jewish Illiteracy," eJewish Philanthropy (January 29, 2015, online access), when he first discusses the merits of

abstract sense. My study moves beyond the abstract value placed on Jewish literacy, focusing on specific approaches to the value of Jewish literacy and how these approaches are reflected in specific leadership programs.

In my study, I aim to articulate clear distinctions between different approaches to Jewish literacy. I explore what these divergent approaches look like both in terms of how they value Jewish literacy and how they relate to Jewish leadership. While acknowledging the ambiguity of Jewish literacy as a term, my goal is to explore both the assumptions and outcomes resulting from particular approaches to this concept. My work adds to the existing field of scholarship by providing three specific frameworks for understanding the variant purposes of Jewish learning and its value for leadership.[5]

Methodology

In order to explore existing models of Jewish literacy, I sought to identify and examine three contemporary Jewish leadership programs with literacy agendas. My goal was to identify three programs with diverse ways of approaching Jewish learning and its role within Jewish leadership. To identify three programs with divergent approaches to Jewish literacy, I surveyed the landscape of existing Jewish leadership programs. I gathered the names of programs through

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Jewish literacy, followed by an imaginative exploration of possible programmatic remedies to the current state of widespread illiteracy.

[5] It is worth noting that Jewish literacy is just one way of measuring Jewish leaders' effectiveness. In "Making Leaders: How the American Jewish Community Prepares Its Lay Leaders," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* Vol. 80, No. 2-3 (2004): 151-159, Hal Lewis criticizes the assumption that Jewish literacy is the most essential category of knowledge for Jewish professionals. Lewis states, "Jewish literacy is not the same as Jewish leadership," arguing that too much Jewish leadership training has focused on Jewish literacy while neglecting other, more essential leadership skills (156). In other words, Lewis says that Jewish leaders need to have skills beyond the Jewish bookshelf, and he encourages leadership development to strive for more than Jewish literacy.

identifying those mentioned in academic literature and contemporary Jewish publications, my own preexisting knowledge, and suggestions from others in the field.

Once I compiled a list of leadership programs that included an element of Jewish learning, I explored the information about each program on their websites. My goal was to identify programs that described Jewish learning and study as integral to their goals and vision. After identifying three specific programs that served different populations and seemed to have different emphases, I interviewed program graduates and program staff to learn about the values and goals of Jewish learning within the programs. My interview questions were designed to enable me to understand the program goals, how each program valued Jewish learning, and what the intended impact of the learning was for participants' leadership. My questions were intended to provide data about three primary questions:

1. How do the shapers of programs for Jewish leaders understand the purpose and content of Jewish literacy?
2. What values and assumptions do these programs reflect in their approach to Jewish literacy?
3. What is the import of Jewish literacy to Jewish leadership?

In conducting and analyzing my research, I sought to avoid evaluating the programs, their outcomes, or the value of their particular approach to Jewish learning as it pertained to Jewish leadership. Rather, I aimed to clarify what purpose Jewish learning served within each program, what the goals were, and why this mattered for Jewish leadership. Ultimately, my goal was to identify the underlying assumptions and values behind each program's approach to Jewish learning. My research results combined with my literature review led me to identify three distinct approaches to Jewish literacy and its role within Jewish leadership.

The data I collected through research had three primary shortcomings. First, I gathered qualitative data from a small number of interviewees from each program, leading me to have small samples from each respective program. With those whom I interviewed, I probed for a descriptive picture of the goals and values behind the Jewish learning within the program. I did not, however, focus on gathering thick description of the program experience. While this was a shortcoming in my methodology, it was sufficient for my course of study because – as stated above – I did not seek to evaluate the program's method or success.

Additionally, my interview questions invited participants and program leaders to reflect on the purpose and role of Jewish learning within the program, particularly as it related to participants' leadership skills and abilities. As a result, the data did not allow for a description of the participants' experience in the program. Rather, the data enabled me to analyze the assumptions, goals, and values embedded within the learning. The data did not provide a picture of the participants' learning experience in the program. Still, I believe that the data are useful for framing divergent approaches to Jewish literacy in leadership training.

I did not choose interviewees through a process of randomization. I needed to interview program leaders, and I chose participant interviewees through a combination of recommendations from program staff and other program participants. The size of my sample may limit the applicability of my findings to the program as a whole. Yet, the non-random methodology was sufficient for my purposes given that my goal was not to make claims about the insides of the programs.

Despite these methodological limitations in the empirical side of my project, I was able to generate a framework of approaches to Jewish literacy. These frameworks can be tested and refined through future research based on larger data sets from more programs and participants.

While a more robust interview process and data set could have provided a picture of what Jewish learning was like for participants, my current research is a useful starting point for identifying and exploring divergent approaches to Jewish literacy.

Significance of the Study

My study identified three distinct approaches to defining and valuing Jewish literacy. By explicitly naming and elaborating the different assumptions and priorities embedded within these approaches, one can better understand both the rationale for promoting Jewish learning and its intended outcome. The identification of diverse approaches to Jewish literacy is important for determining what constitutes programmatic success and also for conceptualizing the broader purposes of Jewish literacy. Moreover, clarifying the distinctions among approaches to Jewish literacy is helpful for framing the import of Jewish literacy within Jewish leadership.

What Jewish knowledge should Jewish leaders have and for what reason? What material is "necessary" vs. "supplemental?" What role does the learning play in supporting and strengthening the broader Jewish community? All of these questions can be best answered when placed within a clear framework of what Jewish literacy is and why it matters. Moreover, these inquiries may illuminate the broader value of Jewish learning within contemporary Jewish society. Rather than decry the ignorance of American Jews and bemoan the loss of traditional knowledge, the Jewish community must ask: What diverse approaches to Jewish literacy exist today? And what do these methods signify?

Why, though, approach the topic of Jewish literacy through the context of Jewish leadership? My answer to this question may be best expressed through a Talmudic vignette. In Erchin 17a, a disagreement emerges between Rabbi Yehudah Nesi'ah and the Rabbanan. One

says "As the leader, so the generation" while the other maintains "as the generation, so the leader." In the grand tradition of rabbinic dispute, I see truth in both of these perspectives. What is expected of and desired from Jewish leaders reflects aspirations for the broader community. At the same time, the expectations placed on leaders reflect the community's independent needs.

In the context of Jewish literacy, this means that Jewish leaders are expected – in some sense – to "know" what is ideally known by all. At the same time, they are accountable for knowledge only through the expectations of the communities they serve. By examining the diverse approaches to Jewish literacy within the context of Jewish leadership programs, something is revealed about both the aspirations for Jewish knowledge within the broader community and also about the presumed needs and expectations of the community with regard to leadership.

Road Map

This paper presents three distinct approaches to Jewish literacy.[6] My goal is to illuminate the values, assumptions, and desired outcomes embedded within each approach. Ultimately, I aim to explore how each approach understands the connection between Jewish literacy and Jewish leadership, and I expand upon what this approach suggests about the value of Jewish learning for both Jewish leaders and the broader Jewish community.

[6] This is intended to be a non-exclusive list. Many other approaches to Jewish literacy may exist, and there is undoubtedly overlap between the three approaches that I introduce. I find the distinction between these three approaches helpful in this context in order to highlight dissimilarity of assumptions and goals.

In Chapter Two, I discuss the *Shanda* Approach to Jewish literacy.[7] The *Shanda* Approach prioritizes Jewish literacy as an essential component of belonging, emphasizing the way in which Jewish literacy can make one an "insider." For the *Shanda* Approach, knowing specific pieces of information constitutes Jewish literacy, and this knowledge enables Jewish leaders to feel legitimate and authentic in their communal roles. The sense of legitimacy created through the *Shanda* Approach is both practically significant for making leaders "part of" the groups they lead and is internally validating for the leaders themselves.

The second approach to Jewish literacy, discussed in Chapter Three, is the Personal Approach. In contrast to the *Shanda* Approach, the Personal Approach does not view Jewish literacy as a series of essential pieces of knowledge. Rather, Jewish literacy is seen as a tool for creating deeply personal and meaningful relationships to Jewish life and community. For Jewish leaders, the meaning that emerges from Jewish learning serves to create, sustain, and maintain one's commitment to and motivation for keeping Judaism an integral part of their lives. In other words, the Personal Approach focuses less on the specific content of learning and more on the effect that learning has on an individual's sense of meaning, motivation, and identity.

In Chapter Four, I present a third approach to Jewish literacy: the Continuity Approach. For the Continuity Approach, Jewish literacy is a practical tool. When individuals acquire Jewish literacy, they are then able to share it with others. For leaders specifically, attaining Jewish literacy means an ability to bring that literacy to the environments in which they lead and, in effect, pass it on to their communities. Thus, Jewish literacy is a practical skill for Jewish leaders. In contrast to the *Shanda* Approach or the Personal Approach, the Continuity Approach views Jewish literacy as a vehicle for making individuals active agents in the continuation of

[7] This name comes from Jon Levisohn who introduced me in conversation to his idea of "the *shanda* approach to Jewish education." This idea is explored in more detail in Chapter Two.

literacy. Ultimately, the goal of imparting Jewish literacy is to enable and empower the learner to become the teacher. In short, those who receive Jewish learning can be involved with the Jewish learning experiences of others.

For each of these three models, I explore examples of the approach in action, its understanding of how literacy works, and why it matters. Additionally, I examine how each model intersects with Jewish leadership and the claims this makes about the role and responsibility of Jewish leaders today. In Chapter Five, I also explore some of the intersections among these different approaches. I conclude in Chapter Six with a brief review of my work and a discussion of the broader value in recognizing multiple approaches to Jewish literacy.

Chapter Two: The *Shanda* Approach

Framing the *Shanda* Approach

"Shanda" is a Yiddish word used to indicate that something is a waste, a shame, or an embarrassment. "The *Shanda* Theory of Jewish Education" – a term coined playfully by Jon Levisohn in conversation – suggests an educational theory that determines priorities based on what would be a *shanda* – a shame – if people did not know.[8] The logic of the *Shanda* Theory works in the following way: if it would be a *shanda* if someone left this program/school/etc. and didn't know ____, then people should learn ____. Ultimately, the *Shanda* Theory assumes that there are essential pieces of information, and knowing these essentials is the highest priority. Given that most educational programs function with limited time and limited resources, the *Shanda* Theory asks – what pieces of information are *most* essential to know?

The *Shanda* Theory itself, however, must be applied to a particular setting. Put differently, both the content of the *Shanda* Theory's "essentials" and the utility of its import exist specific to a particular setting. For example, public schools in America use a *Shanda* Approach when curriculum is determined by the minimal knowledge one needs to possess in order to be a capable American person and citizen. If, for instance, a curricular designer thought, "it would be a *shanda* if people left fifth grade and didn't know how the Great Depression effected America, what an amendment to the Constitution is, or how to analyze a graph," then these "essentials" for

[8] Jon A. Levisohn, Associate Professor and the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Chair in Jewish Educational Thought at Brandeis University, in conversation with the author in September 2016 and through e-mail correspondence with the author in January 2017.

fifth grade would presumably be built into the curriculum. Yet, these essentials would likely be different in the context of a fifth grade class at a Canadian public school or in a private Catholic high school. Lastly, it is important to note that one who utilizes the *Shanda* Approach does not presume to be functioning in a world of ideals. The question is not, "what is ideal for this population to know" but, rather, "what would it be a *shanda* if this population did not know."

E.D. Hirsch and Cultural Literacy

In 1987, E.D. Hirsch utilized a version of the *Shanda* Approach in his book *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*.[9] In *Cultural Literacy*, Hirsch outlined the knowledge one must know in order to fully understand the cultural language of American society, thereby introducing the concept of cultural literacy. Instead of defining literacy as the ability to decode and to understand written symbols as words, Hirsch defined literacy in the context of culture. For Hirsch, literacy is much more than decoding; literacy allows one to recognize and translate cultural references into their broader meaning.[10] Central to Hirsch's contribution is the assertion that "reading is a culturally located enterprise of meaning-making."[11]

For Hirsch, human beings require shared information to communicate effectively. In other words, the distinctive communal bonds that connect Americans together as a group –

[9] E. D. Hirsch, Joseph F. Kett, and James S. Trefil, *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).
[10] Hirsch's ideas and contributions to the concept of literacy are discussed at length in many instances, see: Yaacov J. Katz, "Jewish Cultural Literacy: A Core Curriculum" in *Perspectives on Jewish Literacy and Education,* edited by Y. Rich, Y.J. Katz, Z. Mevarech, and S. Ohayon, 247-261 (Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 2013); Steven M. Brown, "Toward a Core Knowledge for Jewish Education" in *Melton Gleanings* Vol. 1, no. 1 (1997): 2§7; Jon A. Levisohn, "Redeeming Jewish Literacy" in *Hayidion* Spring 2016 (2016): 12-13.
[11] Jon A. Levisohn, "Redeeming Jewish Literacy" in *Hayidion* Spring 2016 (2016): 12-13§12.

distinct from Canadians or Europeans – are based upon shared cultural knowledge *specific to* Americans. Speaking the American cultural "language" makes one culturally literate in American society, thereby enabling one's full participation within that society. Hirsch argued that effective communication depends upon the development and transmission of shared cultural references. In brief, culture is a form of communication, and "communication requires shared knowledge."[12]

Out of Hirsch's theory comes his assessment that contemporary Americans have lost much of their cultural literacy. The consequence of this loss is a diminished ability to communicate effectively and, as a result, individuals with the lowest levels of culturally literacy are the most disenfranchised. Advancing cultural literacy for all American children would, in Hirsch's view, help to reduce the inequality among different segments of the American population. Ultimately, possessing cultural literacy would enable the disadvantaged to advance their education with greater "motivation and intellectual self-confidence."[13]

With this goal in mind, Hirsch introduces both a curriculum and pedagogical strategy for bolstering cultural literacy in America. The curriculum that Hirsh identifies is a collection of "isolatable facts," and his pedagogy is one of "direct instruction."[14] The only way for children to know the pieces of information required for cultural literacy, Hirsch reasons, is for them to be taught.[15] The loss of cultural literacy cannot be blamed on the youth but, rather, on the false assumption that this crucial information will be organically acquired.[16] In order to effectively

[12] Hirsch, *Cultural Literacy*, 4.
[13] Ibid., 111.
[14] Levisohn, "Redeeming Jewish Literacy," 12.
[15] Hirsch, *Cultural Literacy*, 14.
[16] This line of reasoning is how Hirsch claims that gaps in cultural literacy are a cause of social disparity. Hirsch suggests that children from privileged backgrounds will be better situated to naturally acquire cultural literacy, while those from less privileged backgrounds will not enjoy

teach this information, Hirsch's book includes a comprehensive list and description of "what every American needs to know."[17] In Hirsch's view, if an individual were to acquire all of the essential pieces of knowledge contained in his book, then that person could more fully participate and effectively communicate in American society.

Joseph Telushkin and Jewish Literacy

Hirsch's concept of cultural literacy inspired Joseph Telushkin to propose a similar catalog of essential pieces of knowledge for Jewish literacy.[18] Like Hirsch, Telushkin's book included a list and description of the essential pieces of knowledge one needs to know in order to acquire Jewish literacy. Although heavily connected to the Jewish canon, literacy for Telushkin also includes knowledge of Jewish history, philosophy, and holidays.[19] Seeing America as a place of Jewish success and also of Jewish ignorance, Telushkin sought to produce a source to both define Jewish literacy and to enable its attainment.[20] Telushkin understands illiterate Jews as feeling embarrassed by their ignorance:

> Tens, if not hundreds of thousands of teenage and adult Jews are seeking Jewish involvements – even Jewish leadership positions – all the while hoping no one will find out their unhappy little secret: they are Jewishly illiterate.[21]

Telushkin's goal is to provide the antidote to this unhappy ignorance. The knowledge presented by Telushkin – like the knowledge of Hirsch – must be taught. Ignorance stems from a

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this education. This disparity will only widen as time continues, essentially making those who lack cultural literacy increasingly less effective in their ability to fully communicate and understand their cultural context.

[17] Hirsch, *Cultural Literacy.*

[18] Joseph Telushkin, *Jewish Literacy: The Most Important Things to Know about the Jewish Religion, Its People, and History* (New York: Morrow, 1991).

[19] Telushkin's book includes several thematic divisions, but most section are related to the broad categories of text, history, and Jewish practice.

[20] Telushkin, *Jewish Literacy,* xi.

[21] Telushkin, xi

lack of exposure; after being exposed to the essentials, one's status can shift from illiterate to literate. Although not explicitly stated, it appears that Telushkin understands the "unhappy little secret" of illiterate Jews to be a combination of fear and shame. Fear, perhaps, of being outside of the group to which they seek belonging, and shame, perhaps, due to a sense of illegitimately playing the part of an insider. Importantly, this suggests that Telushkin's literacy is a literacy of belonging.[22] Without Jewish literacy, Jews "pass" for literate so as not to expose their separateness from the group. Telushkin suggests that it is only through Jewish literacy that one can belong more fully, openly, and confidently to the Jewish community.

Additional Literature: An Essentialist Approach to Knowledge

The belief that Jewish literacy is best expressed through a standardized approach to what one "must know" has additional support in the literature. For example, Yaacov Katz introduces his own essentialist approach to Jewish literacy in the article "Jewish Cultural Literacy: A Core Curriculum."[23] Katz, like Telushkin, argues that a shared definition of what constitutes Jewish literacy is essential. Without standardized literacy goals, Jewish education will lack direction and coherency. While acknowledging that establishing shared literacy goals may be challenging

[22] Samuel Heilman takes up an interesting discussion of literacy as a form of belonging in *People of the Book: Drama, Fellowship, and Religion* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2002). Documenting the practices of Orthodox Talmud learning circles from a sociologist's perspective, Heilman understands one's ability to comprehend the language of Talmudic debate as a definitive indicator of who is inside the group and who is outside. Heilman writes, "Only the erudite, those *literally versed* in the language of the Talmud and the scriptures can follow the debate. To the illiterate, the uninformed – in Jewish terms the *am-ha-arets* (boor) – the conversation between these men, like the text itself, remains opaque and inaccessible" (53). Thus, for Heilman, literacy is both the literal key to understanding the text itself and the figurative key for accessing the communal dynamic and conversation.

[23] Yaacov J. Katz, "Jewish Cultural Literacy: A Core Curriculum" in *Perspectives on Jewish Literacy and Education,* edited by Y. Rich, Y.J. Katz, Z. Mevarech, and S. Ohayon, 247-261 (Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 2013).

because not all Jews share the same beliefs and practices, Katz also notes "all streams in Judaism stem from the same commonly accepted sources."[24] Thus, Katz promotes the development of a shared core curriculum of Jewish literacy, ultimately aiming for Jews to share a cultural language as a result of their shared knowledge base.

Steve Brown asks a similar question when he wonders, "what should a Jewish teenager graduating from day school, high school, or the synagogue school setting know Jewishly?"[25] Brown considers the "Core Knowledge Sequence" – a concept developed for American public schools – to be a model for establishing a clear and sequential plan for Jewish learning. Brown asserts that a system designed to help students learn the essentials will spare them from repetition and boredom.[26] Brown writes:

> What is the body of knowledge that would create a level of literacy such that it would enable a young person to move on to the next stage of life with a basic shared understanding of Jewish concepts, practice, ideas, and values that make him or her a literate, knowledgeable, Jewish American human being? …We have paid too much attention to affective and self image issues in Judaism, resulting in little attention given to the core body of knowledge it takes to create an informed, knowledgeable Jew who feels mastery over at least a limited number of sources and possesses a shared vocabulary and set of idioms that make him or her conversant with other Jews.[27]

Essentially, Brown assumes that certain fundamental pieces of Jewish knowledge enable successful belonging to the Jewish community as an adult.

Lastly, Stephen Bailey offers another perspective on why it is important to create a shared curriculum of Jewish literacy.[28] Bailey argues that without a shared understanding of what

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[24] Ibid., 256.
[25] Steven M. Brown, "Toward a Core Knowledge for Jewish Education," *Melton Gleanings* Vol. 1, no. 1 (1997): 2§7.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid., 7.
[28] Stephen Bailey, "Jewish Literacy by Design: A Case Study of Developing and Implementing a Jewish Literacy Curriculum," in *Perspectives on Jewish Literacy and Education,* edited by Y.

constitutes Jewish literacy, teachers are left to teach whatever they see as personally important.[29] The result, in Bailey's view, is quite unfortunate:

> The inevitable outcome of the existing system was an insufficient, disordered, and imbalanced Jewish education for most students and, consequently, students' relative illiteracy and negative association with Jewish learning upon graduation.[30]

In sum, Bailey reasons that creating and promoting "a plan to ensure basic literacy" will enable Jewish educational institutions to better reach their goals and improve the circumstance of students and teachers alike.[31] Thus, Katz, Brown, and Bailey all provide additional support for the perspective that Jewish literacy is fundamentally about developing foundational knowledge upon which individuals can better participate in Jewish life and learning.

Leadership Connections: Literacy as Belonging

For all of the authors discussed, literacy is about what people need to know in order to fully participate in and belong to a community. Literacy is gained through the acquisition of knowledge, and it exists – internal to those who possess it – as a reference tool. While this form of literacy ultimately develops from what "is contained between the covers of the book," it is applied constantly to one's surroundings.[32] In other words, it is a tool through which one can both relate to and belong to a community.

If Jewish literacy is the possession of certain pieces of essential knowledge required for full participation in and belonging to a community, then leaders must be schooled in this information. Otherwise, leaders of the Jewish community would themselves not 'belong.' Thus,

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Rich, Y.J. Katz, Z. Mevarech, and S. Ohayon, 69-86 (Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 2013).
[29] Ibid., 70-71.
[30] Ibid., 71.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Levisohn, "Redeeming Jewish Literacy," 12.

this conception of literacy is highly significant for leadership given the need for leaders to feel 'part of' the groups they lead. Put differently, if leaders do not see themselves as legitimately belonging to the group they lead, then they may be likely to suffer the quiet embarrassment that Telushkin described.

Leadership programs that take the *Shanda* Approach to Jewish literacy seek to determine what essential Jewish information their students must know. In other words, "it would a *shanda* if someone left this program as a Jewish leader and didn't know ____." Of course, it still must be determined what precisely each program puts into the "____," but the formulation of the approach stands independent of the specifics of its content. When applied to Jewish leadership, this approach aims to determine and then, to impart, the essentialist knowledge one must know.

Thus, the literacy of the *Shanda* Approach provides leaders with both a practical purpose and an internal benefit. Practically, it provides the necessary reference points for one to understand and participate in their community. Internally, it allows for a sense of belonging and legitimate participation in that community.

The *Shanda* Approach in Action: A Leadership Case Study

The Alef School is a leadership program for nonprofit Jewish professionals.[33] As a full-time, graduate-level academic program, students take several required classes as well as elective courses. The program's curriculum emphasizes the principles and skills of nonprofit management, and students work to complete a Masters degree in Jewish Nonprofit Management

[33] The Alef School represents one of the leadership programs with a literacy agenda from which I collected data. The program name was changed in order to maintain anonymity for individuals who were interviewed as well as for the programs to which they were connected. The three programs discussed in this paper are referred to according to the first three characters of the Hebrew alphabet: *alef, bet,* and *gimel.*

(JNM). Additionally, many students at the Alef School are pursuing second degrees in combination with their JNM degree, and these secondary degrees include Rabbinical ordination, Masters of Business Administration, Masters of Social Work, and Masters of Jewish Education.

Still, some students at the Alef School are exclusively pursuing an MA in JNM. I only interviewed students from this category. I wanted to understand how the Alef School framed and transmitted Jewish literacy to its students on its own rather than in combination with another program.

Coursework at the Alef School focused primarily on nonprofit management skills, including classes such as Organizational Development, Fundraising, Social Research, and Collaborative Communication.[34] Still, some required courses focused on Jewish learning. For example, required coursework exposed students to Biblical and Rabbinic sources, major ideas in Jewish history, and an overview of Jewish practices, rituals, and philosophy. Elective courses offered additional opportunities to engage in Jewish study in both traditional and contemporary ways – for example, elective courses included both a Talmud course and a course about Jews and American popular culture. Lastly, students who wanted more focused Jewish study could opt to do independent study with a professor. Thus, the curricular topics at the Alef School demonstrated a commitment to Jewish learning as an important part of a Jewish nonprofit professional's training.

How do students understand the purpose and function of Jewish learning within the program? How do they understand the value of Jewish learning within their studies? Jewish learning at the Alef School was primarily described as foundational –the Jewish learning

[34] This is only a sampling of the Alef School's required and elective courses related to nonprofit management.

equipped participants with the knowledge they needed to comfortably and confidently participate in Jewish spaces. One program alum explained:

> The Jewish piece was certainly valuable. And for me it's part of feeling like a competent professional in the Jewish world where you are working alongside rabbis and educators who have even more extensive Jewish learning. In order to have the confidence and feel competent, I think that learning is important.[35]

Another graduate of the program noted:

> I think the Jewish learning component was trying to – both trying to give people a baseline of Judaism and to kind of understand religiously what is going on in the world in terms of Jews. It also gives people a common language regardless of where in the Jewish world they are. Even if you're not in America, if you go to India where there are Jews, they might celebrate a holiday a different way but why they're celebrating it is the same as it is here. So I think it allows people to be more conversant. But like I said, I think because the Jewish program is trying to be Jewish but it's also trying to give people a foundation for nonprofit work – not just Judaism – I think that it couldn't entirely invest the student's time in just Judaism. So it tries just to cover enough so that if a student came in knowing nothing they would know the minimum requirement so that they would know what's going on even if they didn't know everything. For some of them I know it created a spark in Judaism for them that they were able to research things on their own and to be self-motivated to continue learning.[36]

These two comments reflect a parallel between Jewish learning and one's ability to feel "conversant" and "competent" as a Jewish professional. Thus, program alumni reflect that Jewish learning – or, at least, a minimum level of Jewish knowledge – is important for doing the work of Jewish nonprofit management. Reflecting on the connection between Jewish learning and Jewish nonprofit management, one graduate stated:

> The imperative to do the nonprofit work in the Jewish world comes from the text and the history our community has. And so knowing the background and the texts and the history allow you to do the work better.[37]

[35] Quoting an interview between the author and a graduate of the program.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.

When pushed to elaborate on what the program hoped to accomplish through its overall structure, the interviewee continued:

> I think the program was trying to give me the tools and resources I need to be a confident, competent, successful Jewish professional. And in terms of the Jewish piece, it's giving me the Jewish knowledge and background and resources in order to succeed in Jewish professional spaces...In terms of the Jewish literacy – it's that comfort that when someone says the word "Torah" or "Talmud" you don't freak out. When you're closed for a holiday you know why or you know how to find out why. When you're confronted with an ethical dilemma, you know how to go about making that decision either from a professional position or guided by Jewish values.[38]

In other words, Alef School participants described their Jewish learning experience as one that developed their foundational knowledge of Jewish texts, history, and practice, thereby establishing a base upon which program graduates could function confidently as Jewish professionals. In addition, the Alef School was described as fostering a feeling of confidence and comfort around Jewish study. "Feeling comfortable in a variety of Jewish spaces" was identified as an enduring effect of the program, and this feeling of comfort occurred as a result of possessing particular bits of knowledge.[39] While the absence of knowledge seemed connected to discomfort and embarrassment, possessing knowledge allowed Jewish professionals to relate to their constituents and work settings.[40] Thus, Alef School participants illustrated a model of Jewish learning that functioned on several levels: 1) it created a common language and knowledge base, 2) it developed a degree of comfort in Jewish spaces, and 3) it enabled professionals to relate to and connect with their work environments and constituents.

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[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] One interviewee used the example of a Jewish professional cultivating a relationship with a donor who is celebrating Sukkot. The interviewee noted that it is helpful to know what the holiday represents and what that person in celebrating. This example highlights one way in which program participants understood the value of feeling conversant in Jewish topics.

The program director also emphasized the connection between Jewish knowledge and working as a Jewish professional, and the director also expanded upon the place of personal reflection within Jewish learning. When commenting on how program participants would ideally be impacted by their experience, the program director stated:

> There are a couple things – we want to make sure they leave with the Jewish wisdom to do this job through a Jewish lens as well as have the context for how Jewish boards work, how Jewish fundraising happens, who are the philanthropists...Jewish learning is a lifelong journey, and we encourage them to begin that journey – many of them have already begun that process when they come to us. But our goal is to keep them going down the journey of Jewish learning in different ways. We want them to understand their own practices and their own interests and we want them to continue learning about the Jewish nonprofit field which can be a different practice. Then, more deeply, what aspects of Jewish wisdom for their own growth and development can they call on?[41]

Thus, for the program director, the confidence and competence developed through Jewish learning is one part of an evolving personal and professional journey. As participants at the Alef School engage in Jewish learning, they also have the opportunity to learn more about themselves and their personal Jewish interests. In other words, participants are acquiring Jewish literacy to understand the Jewish community – but this is a community to which they also belong. Thus, building upon the director's comments, participants will learn how to better understand and make choices about their own Jewish lives just as they learn how to better understand and make choices as Jewish professionals.

With its emphasis on knowledge as a key to understanding, access, and competency, the Alef School provides a picture of one way that the *Shanda* Approach might be put into action. In this case, Jewish literacy is – as Hirsch and Telushkin suggest – about what one knows and how that knowledge is used to better comprehend one's community (and, at times, to better comprehend one's self). The Alef School aims to expose students to essential pieces of

[41] Quoting an interview between the author and the program director.

information that will enable them "to succeed in Jewish spaces."[42] Success in this instance is defined as the capacity to be comfortable and conversant in their professional roles within the Jewish community. Additionally, success occurs when program graduates are familiar with and understanding of "Jewish wisdom" – in other words, they can identify and make meaning from underlying Jewish values and not only explicitly stated facts.

Finally, this model assumes that leaders are particularly susceptible to and disadvantaged by the feelings of embarrassment and separation that come from illiteracy. Making Jewish leaders more literate will not only make them more connected to and comfortable in their communities, but it will also make them better leaders insofar as they will be better equipped to connect with and understand the communities which they lead. Put differently, Jewish literacy is important to Jewish leadership because literacy is the language of belonging, and leaders do best when they belong.

In closing, it is important to note that while this example of the *Shanda* Approach suggests that leaders benefit greatly from Jewish literacy, it does not assume that literacy for leaders is fundamentally different from the literacy required of anyone seeking participation in and belonging to the Jewish community. Thus, this example illustrates a version of Jewish literacy in which the role and responsibility of Jewish leaders is to be, quite simply, insiders to Jewish religious and cultural knowledge. For the Alef School, this outcome is primarily achieved through one's ability to access and understand important facts about Jewish life and community.

[42] Quoting an interview between the author and a graduate of the program.

Chapter Three: The Personal Approach

Framing the Personal Approach

As described above, the *Shanda* Approach focuses on how individuals use internal knowledge to understand and belong to an external environment. A different way to understand Jewish literacy is as a way to develop and strengthen an individual's internal sense of connection to Jewish identity and Jewish life. While the *Shanda* Approach is about how individuals understand and access the community around them, the Personal Approach focuses more directly on emotional processes inside each person. In this framework, the goal of literacy is not to know certain "essential" things. Rather, the goal of literacy is to affect self-perception; literacy is pursued as a way to impact an individual's sense of who they are and how they want to live their life. Thus, the Personal Approach treats learning as a pathway for accessing and influencing an individual's framework of meaning and motivation.

Meaning and Motivation

"Meaning" – like "literacy" – is a word with an imprecise definition. In describing the Personal Approach, I understand "meaning" to denote a sense of self-perceived reward and worthwhileness. More specifically, I understand Jewish learning to create "meaning" for participants when individuals feel personal satisfaction, intellectual and emotional reward, and/or growth from those experiences.

What role does meaning have in Jewish learning? How might it define an approach to Jewish literacy? Meaning has become an increasingly influential concept in recent generations. Jonathan Woocher notes that contemporary Jewish life is highly individualistic, and "the quest for personal meaning, more than a sense of group belonging, is the criterion by which choices of lifestyle and behavior are made."[43] In Woocher's view, people are only motivated to participate in a particular activity or to seek belonging in a particular group if they find meaning in doing so. Thus, meaning can often function as a prerequisite for participation.

The Personal Approach recognizes the centrality of meaning for participation, and it seeks to utilize Jewish learning as an opportunity to cultivate meaningful experiences. In this way, the Personal Approach differs starkly from the *Shanda* Approach in its understanding of the fundamental goal of literacy. While the *Shanda* Approach assumes that group belonging is sufficiently compelling to inspire the pursuit of Jewish literacy, the Personal Approach challenges this assumption. The Personal Approach asserts that one would have little desire to acquire the language of group belonging in the first place if there does not exist a sense of meaning from belonging to that group. In other words, why care about belonging in the first place?

Brown and Galperin capture this challenge to the *Shanda* Approach when they question Telushkin's underlying assumptions about the necessity of Jewish literacy for leadership; "Telushkin tells us the dirty secret of Jewish illiteracy without offering any reasons why literacy is important to leadership."[44] Essentially, the framework of meaning implies that the literacy of

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[43] Jonathan S. Woocher, "Jewish Leadership and the Jewish Renaissance: New Challenges for Leadership Development," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* Vol. 75, No. 2 (1998): 131-135§132.

[44] Erica Brown and Misha Galperin, *The Case for Jewish Peoplehood: Can We Be One?* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2009) 125.

facts is not enough. A literacy of facts – and, by extension, the communities to which they provide access – only matter so far as one cares about being part of that community.

The Personal Approach, however, does not take meaning alone to be an ultimate goal. Rather, meaning is the fuel that powers continued participation in Jewish communal life. Thus, learning that occurs within the framework of the Personal Approach may be understood as learning for the sake of personal meaning that, in turn, motivates continued engagement. In this view, learning itself can inspire involvement. Essentially, the processes of both meaning and motivation reflect what is happening inside a person. Literacy, then, becomes a pathway for individual transformation. The promotion of Jewish literacy becomes, in this conception, an effort to inspire individuals to see belonging to the Jewish people as a worthwhile and fulfilling endeavor. Belonging is not simply about group connection but, rather, it is an action that brings with it personal meaning.

Literature Connections

The potential for Jewish literacy to advance an agenda of meaning-making and motivation is well discussed in literature about Jewish education and learning. For example, Lois Zachary defines Jewish literacy by its functionality, suggesting that functional Jewish literacy is achieved only through sensitivity to the learner's specific characteristics, their specific needs, and what speaks to them at a particular life stage.[45] Zachary's overarching argument is that "in today's world of limitless diversity, functionary literacy can only be considered in the context of

[45] Lois J. Zachary, "The Fourth Decade of Life: Some Ideas and Thoughts About Facilitating Adult Jewish Learning," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* Vol. 67, No. 4 (1991): 337-342§337.

many variables."[46] In other words, literacy cannot be – as Hirsch and Telushkin would suggest – a one-size-fits-all model. Rather, it is highly personal and individualized, tailored to the unique goals, interests, and needs of each learner. Essentially, functional literacy must *mean* something to the learner – it must resonate with the unique motivations of each individual's life.

Hillel Levine also picks up on the significance of meaning to Jewish literacy, commenting that, "learning lists without knowing the interrelationship between ideas turns knowledge into trivia."[47] Levine's argument is that the type of knowledge defined by Hirsch and Telushkin is unable to truly capture the depth of Jewish literacy. "Jewish literacy entails more than going through the Torah," reasons Levine, "it is how much Torah goes through you."[48] In other words, Levine helps us to understand literacy as much more than acquiring knowledge – true literacy is absorbed into the person, affecting them in a deeply personal way. Zachary and Levine's concepts underlie the Personal Approach, suggesting that literacy is first and foremost an individualized process of self-growth.

Lastly, Brown and Galperin make the strong argument that meaning cannot be divorced from content. They understand Jewish literacy to be "the unapologetic assumption that being Jewish means knowing something about your tradition…anything of meaning and substance must be rooted in understanding, not ignorance."[49] In this sense, literacy is tied to personal journey. Through learning, individuals are able to seek out and encounter meaning in ways that

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[46] Ibid., 337.
[47] Hillel Levine, "Jewish Literacy: Will More and More be Known by Fewer and Fewer?" in *Imagining the Jewish Future: Essays and Responses*, edited by David A. Teutsch, 103-112 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 109.
[48] Ibid., 110.
[49] Erica Brown and Misha Galperin, *The Case for Jewish Peoplehood: Can We Be One?* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2009), 118.

would otherwise be inaccessible. In effect, pursuing Jewish literacy allows one to be a "seeker" within their Jewish identity.[50]

Leadership Connections: Literacy as Fuel

How does the Personal Approach intersect with Jewish leadership? In *New Approaches to Jewish Leadership Development,* Erica Brown highlights the significance of leaders finding meaning through Jewish learning and, in turn, using that meaning to motivate effective leadership.[51] Inspiration, according to Brown, is a core element of effective leadership; "leadership courses often fail to communicate leadership skills adequately because they fail to tap into a leader's source of inspiration and translate it into a powerful leadership tool."[52] In other words, Brown suggests that Jewish leadership programs have underutilized the power of inspiration. Brown, like Telushkin, describes the Jewish community today as in crisis. Yet, while Telushkin describes the community to be in a crisis of ignorance, Brown identifies "a crisis of inspiration."[53] Brown is clear about the way out:

> No leadership skill sets or historical knowledge will help solve the generic malaise; it can only truly be solved by addressing issues of motivation and inspiration.[54]

As the community experiences a crisis of motivation, so do its leaders. Leaders must be helped to tap into their own sources of inspiration – only then can they model inspired Jewish life for their constituents. In other words, when leaders model inspired Judaism, they will be followed. Brown identifies Jewish literacy as one such underutilized path to inspiration.

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[50] Ibid., 127.
[51] Erica Brown, "Making Inspired Leaders: New Approaches to Jewish Leadership Development," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* Vol. 81, No. 1-2 (2005): 63-72.
[52] Ibid., 63.
[53] Ibid., 65.
[54] Ibid.

The Personal Approach affirms the significance and impact of personal meaning within learning – a process that Brown describes as particularly essential for Jewish leaders. Without personal meaning, there is little to inspire and motivate leaders for their leadership roles. What's more, the value of a leader who is driven by the meaning of Judaism in their life is not confined to the particulars of their learning. Rather, the value of the learning transcends the details of the specific material covered. Efforts towards Jewish literacy that practice the Personal Approach assume that Jewish leaders are best prepared and most effective when they are inspired by deep-seated meaning and motivation. For leadership programs that operate within this framework, Jewish learning is a strategy for releasing and cultivating the personal meaning and motivation within each individual.[55]

The Personal Approach in Action: A Leadership Case Study

The Bet Program is a Jewish study experience for lay leaders, focusing on both Jewish learning and contemporary leadership. The program takes place over the course of two years and is structured by local seminar groups. Participants are accepted on account of their strong leadership potential as Jewish volunteer leaders, and each group is comprised of twenty individuals. The group meets for four hours every two weeks to learn with prominent Jewish teachers. In addition to regularly learning with their local cohort, participants travel to attend three institutes, ranging from 5-7 days in length.

[55] While Brown describes the pursuit of Jewish literacy as one way in which Jewish leaders are inspired, she also notes that the traditional sources of Jewish inspiration – text, ritual, and Israel – must be expanded upon. She notes that, "text study, although a source of inspiration for many, is not a source of inspiration for all" ("Making Inspired Leaders," 67). Yet, given the focus of my paper on Jewish literacy specifically, I focused my discussion of Brown's work in "Making Inspired Leaders" on the application of her theories to environments that aim to inspire through text.

As a two-year experience, the Bet Program looks for highly committed volunteer leaders who are willing to devote substantial time to the course of study even without being full-time students or paid Jewish professionals. Despite the significant commitment required, individuals are drawn to the program for a number of reasons. The program's prestigious standing and the honor associated with selection for the program are one factor. Additionally, the program makes a large investment in the learning and development of each participant, and individuals are attracted to these benefits. Additionally, the learning within the program connects to both the personal lives and volunteer efforts of participants. For example, one program graduate explained why she decided to participate in the program:

> I was pregnant with our first and I knew that I wanted to raise our children Jewish, and I felt that I wasn't well equipped to do that. So it was firstly about parenting skills. And then secondly I was also getting more and more involved with the Jewish community, and I realized that without a good basis for – without more Jewish literacy that I probably would be a less effective leader.[56]

In other words, this participant approached the program out of a desire to utilize Jewish learning as an instrument for both personal growth (parenting) and leadership enhancement.

Additionally, the comment above highlights an important feature of the role of Jewish learning within participants' volunteer work. Jewish learning was understood not simply to *add* to their capabilities but, rather, to compensate for and address what otherwise might be lacking. One participant framed this feeling in highly personal terms, stating:

> On the one hand, I was hoping to gain a sense of credibility so that I wasn't a fraud. [So] that I [would be] someone who knew a little bit about the history, the tradition, the culture, the heritage, the language, the texts that I was representing – that we were going to make a big effort to support and encourage others to be involved in. So I had to have a core basis of understanding for all of that.[57]

[56] Quoting an interview between the author and a program graduate.
[57] Ibid.

This comment reflects a deep desire to feel legitimacy in the role of a communal leader, and there is an underlying assumption that legitimacy comes through the confidence of knowledge.

Yet, the function of confidence within the Bet Program was understood to do more than give participants a "feeling of belonging around the board table."[58] Confidence also functioned as a means to achieving a broader end. Increased confidence – the ability to not feel like a "fraud" – was understood as a way to sustain leaders' motivation to stay involved. Program staff noted that Jewish learning "gives them [the participants] endurance. With a sense of…belonging in the position of leadership, it helps sustain their commitment over a long time."[59]

This staff comment implies that without confidence, leaders will more readily redirect their leadership energies outside of the Jewish community. Thus, a primary goal of the Bet Program is to use learning as a way to motivate Jewish leaders to continue and expand their leadership roles. In this case, the acquisition of knowledge functions primarily as the process through which the ultimate goal – to motivate continued leadership in the Jewish community – is achieved. Put differently, the primary objective of learning in this case is not knowledge acquisition. Rather, learning reinforces and strengthens the motivation that keeps one committed to service. Or, to echo Erica Brown's language, learning is the platform through which one finds "inspiration."[60]

To achieve the goal of strengthening the Jewish community by inspiring dedicated leadership, the curriculum in the Bet Program is centered around – in the words of a program director – "certain fundamentals of Jewish knowledge that we think people need to have."[61] This comment echoes some of rationale behind the *Shanda* Approach as discussed above, suggesting

[58] Ibid.
[59] Quoting an interview between the author and program staff.
[60] Erica Brown, "Making Inspired Leaders," 63.
[61] Quoting an interview between the author and program staff.

that "certain fundaments" are the antidote to "feel[ing] incompetent in the Jewish realm."[62] Yet, this essentialism was accompanied by a strong emphasis on the personal impact such learning could have on participants. When speaking about the type of learning experience that the program seeks to create, a program director reflected:

> Learning and study energize a lot of people. It refills their energy – it refills the tanks…We also realize that real impactful and purposeful Jewish learning has to be reflective, it has to be conversational, it has to be open to the feedback, input, and knowledge of the members of the class. It's not enough just to get a good teacher to get up and talk for a few hours. It must be reflective and engaging and have high expectations of the leaders to really give back…Learning doesn't only come through the head, it comes through the heart.[63]

This comment reflects a deep belief that knowledge acquisition is a process that extends beyond what one can read between the pages of a book. The ultimate value of knowledge is not the possession of certain facts. Rather, Program B desires learning of the "heart" and aims to facilitate learning that will impact learners in a personal way.

One way that participants experienced learning of the "heart" was through their relationships to the teachers and fellow students in the program. One participant spoke about the impact of the learning cohort on her experience:

> You don't do these kinds of things by yourself. You're doing it with other highly selected individuals with whom you're working. For example, as a result of the program and my interaction with this group they ended up asking me – even though I had barely a one-year-old – to chair the capital campaign for the Jewish elementary day school. And I agreed to do it because I had become good friends with these folks, so I had to step up into a leadership situation very, very quickly as a result of the program. And I agreed to do it even though my children weren't even close to being able to go to school there. Yes, it definitely impacted me that I was with others who were inspirational to me and encouraged me to get more involved.[64]

Speaking about the way teachers impacted her learning, the same participant continued:

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[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Quoting an interview between the author and a program graduate.

> There was a particular woman who I became extremely close with. And the moment that I met her I knew she was extremely special – her name was Rabbi Shoshana. And she became basically my personal rabbi. I remember meeting her through the program at one of the summer institutes I think and she's so inspirational and so spiritual – she's so beautiful inside and out, and I really wanted to stay deeply connected to her. So, we've had a Torah study group that we've convened in our home in Colorado every September for the last twelve years and she leads it.[65]

These comments highlight the ways in which meaningful personal relationship helped to shape both participants' personal commitment to Jewish learning and their commitment to continued Jewish leadership.

It is worth examining, however, why the Bet Program utilizes an essentialist model of Jewish learning to cultivate meaning in and motivation for Jewish leadership. Why is the study of Jewish history, thought, and fundamentals the right topics through which to achieve the program's aims? Staff members at the Bet Program answered this question by way of an even broader question: What is the "why" of Jewish engagement and leadership? One program leader articulated the challenge of lacking a "why:"

> Someone can't lead without knowing their business; the business of the Jewish people is our history, our theology, our text. When we treat Jewish leadership as just transactional, when we perpetuate it without understanding why we're perpetuating it, then we're missing the big picture.[66]

This comment suggests that leaders must believe that they are leading *for* something. What is the value of the enterprise to which their volunteer efforts are directed? To use the language from above, what is worth perpetuating from the "business" of Judaism? The Bet Program's approach assumes that 1) leaders must *know* what they are promoting and 2) they must personally *value* what it is they are promoting. Essential to the Bet Program's emphasis on

[65] Ibid.
[66] Quoting an interview between the author and program staff.

learning is the belief that "without knowledge, it's easier to not know why."[67] Thus, the process of Jewish learning helps participants to understand the "why." When leaders undergo this process, the result is a commitment to and passion for leadership that can strengthen the entire community.

Thus, the Bet Program understands fundamental knowledge as benefiting leaders in both practical and psychological ways.[68] At the same time, the Bet Program understands the primary objective of Jewish literacy to be more than knowledge – its aim is to make deep and lasting personal impact. The Bet Program values Jewish literacy as a piece of Jewish leadership because it understands Jewish learning as influential to the way that leaders care about and commit to their work. The role of Jewish leaders is to lead with commitment and vision – a responsibility one may be unlikely to accept or excel at if their work is not done from a place of personal conviction. Thus, as an example of a program that aims to affect leaders in personally inspiring and impactful ways, the Bet Program illustrates one picture of the Personal Approach in action.

[67] Ibid.
[68] Practically, it allows these leaders to better understand their work. As one alum said, "on boards after the program, I was able to evaluate proposals more effectively…When these programs said they wanted to do Torah study, I knew what they were talking about." Psychologically, knowledge allows greater confidence, as discussed above.

Chapter Four: The Continuity Approach

Framing the Continuity Approach

A third approach to Jewish literacy focuses neither on the acquisition of facts nor on the emotional impact of learning. Rather, literacy in the Continuity Approach is pursued as a way to ensure that Jewish learning continues into the future. The Continuity Approach aims to give learners the skills to be teachers, enabling the continued perpetuation of Jewish learning. Here, the continuation of Jewish literacy is understood to be possible only if there exist individuals who can pass it on to others. In this conception, Jewish literacy is both the means and the ends.

How is content defined in this model? Content may be determined in two ways: 1) that which is most valuable to pass on or 2) that which the particular group of learners will be most able to pass on. The second criteria, for example, would differentiate between literacy goals for supplementary school educators and summer camp counselors. While it may be considered worthwhile for summer camp counselors to know about the fall holidays of the Jewish calendar, given the timeframe in which they interact with students (i.e., the summer), they will have fewer opportunities than a supplementary school teacher to transmit this information. Thus, the Continuity Approach would understand literacy around fall holidays to be a greater imperative for the supplementary school teacher than for the summer camp counselor.

In sum, the Continuity Approach – unlike both the *Shanda* Approach and the Personal Approach – is not primarily concerned with what is happening within an individual. More specifically, the Continuity Approach is not ultimately interested in individuals' internal

knowledge structures or their sense of personal meaning. Rather, the Continuity Approach aims to empower people to teach those around them, and it understands Jewish literacy to be the tool through which such influence can occur.

Literature Connections

Several authors present Jewish literacy as a necessary prerequisite for Judaism's continuity in the future. Barry Holtz, for example, understands Jewish learning to be "the dominant religious preoccupation throughout the history of Judaism," and as such, to engage in Jewish learning is to participate in an act of Jewish continuity through the past, present, and future.[69] Yet, Holtz also recognizes that "what previously defined us as a people now both literally and figuratively feels like a foreign language."[70] In other words, decreased literacy has made it more difficult to connect with the defining act of Jewish continuity, i.e. text study. Holtz's response is to reimagine how the great Jewish texts might speak to the modern reader, and in this way, he attempts to reclaim the continuity that might otherwise be lost.

Mark Kramer makes another case for Jewish literacy's role in continuity in his article "Beyond Identity: Day Schools Deliver Jewish Literacy."[71] Kramer argues that "'Jewish identity' is a flimsy shingle to hang on a school door" and that only literacy – not identity – will leave a lasting imprint on its learners. [72] In other words, Kramer understands literacy as the only

[69] Barry W. Holtz, *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986), 12.
[70] Barry Holtz, *Finding Our Way* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2005), 7, as brought by Brown and Galperin, *The Case for Jewish Peoplehood* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2009), 122.
[71] Marc N. Kramer, "Beyond Identity: Day Schools Deliver Jewish Literacy," eJewish Philanthropy, August 27, 2013, online access.
[72] Ibid.

sure pathway for ensuring continued Jewish engagement and that Jewish connections will persist into the future.

The idea that future connections to Judaism depend upon literacy is also reflected in the reasoning of authors who understand literacy as the only way to be informed about and committed to the choices involved with Jewish life. For example, Bernstein argues that "Jewish illiteracy" goes hand in hand with "not hav[ing] a strong stake in raising Jewish children."[73] Moreover, Bernstein understands illiteracy to underlie the problems of "alienation and dropouts" from Jewish life, suggesting that literacy is the way to maintain connection to this and future generations of Jews.[74] Leon Wieseltier echoes this sentiment in Abigail Pogrebin's book *Stars of David*:

> The great historical failing of American Jewry is not its rate of intermarriage but its rate of illiteracy…the problem is that most American Jews make their decisions about their Jewish identity knowing nothing or next to nothing about the tradition they are accepting or rejecting.[75]

In sum, the literature presented above understands Jewish literacy to be a method of encouraging individuals to participate in Jewish life and, more broadly, to perpetuate Judaism into the future.

Leadership Connections

What unique role do leaders have within the Continuity Approach's framework? The Continuity Approach assumes that it is inherently valuable for Jewish literacy to exist now and in the future. As such, it is further assumed that effective Jewish leaders should be concerned

[73] David I. Bernstein, "Overcoming Jewish Illiteracy," eJewish Philanthropy (January 29, 2015, online access).
[74] Ibid.
[75] Leon Wieseltier interview in *Stars of David: Prominent Jews Talk about Being Jewish* by Abigail Pogrebin (Broadway Books, 2005) 155, as quoted in Brown and Galperin, *The Case for Jewish Peoplehood* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2009), 119.

with the continuity of Jewish literacy. Moreover, Jewish leaders are expected not only to care about Jewish continuity but, also, to be active contributors to its perpetuation. The Continuity Approach assumes that it is only when one personally possesses a skill that they can pass it on to others with sufficient depth and rigor. In this conception, Jewish leaders are responsible for acquiring literacy to a degree that enables them to pass it on to others. Jewish literacy – as the chosen tool for ensuring Jewish continuity – is understood here as a Jewish leadership skill, and Jewish leaders should be proficient enough in their literacy skills to use them effectively in their work places. In sum, the Continuity Approach understands Jewish literacy as an essential skill within the Jewish leader's toolbox.

Significantly, the Continuity Approach assumes that the perpetuation of Jewish knowledge is not the sole responsibility of educators. Rather, all Jewish leaders should see it as part of their work to be involved with Jewish literacy. What's more, all leaders are seen as uniquely situated for passing literacy on to others. While different leaders may have different areas of influence, it is part of each leader's role to promote Jewish literacy within their spheres of influence. Jonathan Woocher captures this sentiment in his essay "Jewish Leadership and the Jewish Renaissance: New Challenges for Leadership Development," asserting that the value of learning for Jewish leaders is not just about their own self-growth.[76] Rather, learning is effective for leaders when it makes them "prepared to lead the effort to transform hundreds of settings into compelling and effective Jewish learning communities."[77] Fundamentally, Woocher

[76] Jonathan S. Woocher, "Jewish Leadership and the Jewish Renaissance: New Challenges for Leadership Development," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* Vol. 75, No. 2 (1998): 131-135.
[77] Ibid., 134.

suggests that when leaders themselves lack Jewish literacy, it is difficult for them to cultivate literate communities.[78]

The Continuity Approach in Action: A Leadership Case Study

The Gimel Fellowship is a Jewish study program for full-time camp directors. In the fellowship, twenty camp directors learn together as a cohort during seminars held both in North America and in Israel. The program consists of five four-day intensives held within North America and a ten-day Israel seminar. In addition to the full-group learning during seminars, program participants meet virtually twice a month in small learning groups.

Gimel Fellowship participants emphasized the role of community and the cohort dynamic as significant to their program experience. One participant explained:

> In that first meeting [with my smaller group], one of the women in my group – she and I did not know each other at all when we walked in, and in truth, if we weren't in this fellowship together our paths would cross very minimally because our jobs and camps are so different – she said something and it was like this red carpet rolled out for me and two double doors opened and it was this whole vast world of new ideas. She grew up in a very Orthodox family and has been exploring different ways of living Judaism. I grew up in a secular family, and I am exploring ways to deepen my Judaism. And we have this interaction. I imagine studying with and learning with and growing personally and professionally from this program for years. It's very cool that programs like this exist so camping professionals can meet people we wouldn't have otherwise.[79]

This comment highlights two key features of the Gimel Fellowship. First, the learning is participatory in a way that enables cohort members to learn from one another. Second, the program provides an important opportunity for camp professionals to connect with one another

[78] David Resnick formulates a compelling version of this idea in his essay "Literacy in Hebrew Schools: Views from the Field" in *Jewish Literacy and Education,* edited by Yisrael Rich, Yaacov Katz, Zemirah Mevarekh, and Shimon Ohayon, 225-245 (Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 2013). In the case of Hebrew school teachers, Resnick notes that "When teachers' own literacy is wanting, they will be hard-pressed to upgrade their students' literacy" (232).
[79] Quoting an interview between the author and a program participant.

as professional colleagues and peers. The value of this cohort dynamic is reinforced by the comment:

> The life of a camping professional is super lonely. We pack up and go away for three months of the year. We're out of sight, out of mind. When we experience different things, we're experiencing them in a bubble. There's not a ton of people in this world who understand what we're experiencing, and having a network of people who you're comfortable with and you've learned with and from is incredibly important to me. The cohort learning piece of it makes a difference.[80]

In other words, the program offers an opportunity for participants to focus on connection and self-development – a practice that may otherwise feel difficult to achieve in their workplace.

While the opportunity to connect with other camp professionals was an essential part of the program experience, Jewish learning was central to the program's content. What function and value did participants understand this learning to have? Echoing the language used to describe the Alef School and the Bet Program, interviewees from the Gimel Fellowship spoke a lot about confidence. Yet, Gimel Fellowship participants framed the benefits of confidence in a different light. While interviewees from the Alef School and the Bet Program described confidence primarily in terms of its impact on learners' sense of self and belonging, Gimel Fellowship participants described confidence as enabling them to contribute to their external work environments. More specifically, Gimel Fellowship participants emphasized how learning within the program enabled them to increase their educational involvement at camp. For example, one program graduate explained:

> [When I started the program] if you told me to plan an evening program right now – totally fine. But if you had told me to do a *dvar Torah*, I would have not been able to do that. Now I feel no hesitation. Now I look forward to the learning. Before being part of this cohort, when it came to the Jewishness of summer camp, the scheduling and programming was easy. But there was one part that I outsourced – the education. I delegated without really

[80] Ibid.

> having any input or say because I didn't have that knowledge base. Now I'm more involved.[81]

This comment reflects how increased confidence as a Jewish learner enabled this participant to increase their involvement with the Jewish educational environment at camp. Inspiring camp leaders to feel that they have the ability to meaningfully contribute towards Jewish learning at camp was a central goal articulated by program staff. The program director understood the typical program participant to have a minimal background in Jewish education and to lack confidence in their ability to contribute to Jewish learning at camp:

> They understand camp has to have a Jewish component, so they think, "I'm going to hire a Jewish specialist and they'll do whatever they do, and I'll think about that the same way I think about archery. I don't know anything about it but I'll hire someone else." We want to take those people and have them say "'Jewish' is something powerful and important to me. I'm going to be involved with 'Jewish,' take a leadership role in 'Jewish,' and I'm going to elevate it way beyond where archery might have been. Because it can change my life and change the lives of Jewish campers."[82]

In essence, this statement describes the program's goal of providing camp directors with a powerful personal learning experience, thereby leading them to expand their role in and emphasis on education at camp; "We want them to understand themselves as Jewish educators so they can…grab educational opportunities as they come up."[83] In other words, the Gimel Fellowship assumes that personally impactful learning can and will inspire camp directors to transfer their personal engagement with Jewish learning to educationally enriching environments for campers.

It is important to note that this model assumes Jewish education to be a central goal of the summer camp experience. Additionally, the program is designed to address the perception that there are "many camps that fall short on fulfilling the totality of their potential for the simple

[81] Ibid.
[82] Quoting an interview between the author and the program director.
[83] Ibid.

reason that the camp directors themselves are not personally comfortable with their Jewish identity and their role as Jewish educators."[84] As such, the program aims to enable the fulfillment of each camp's educational potential.

Yet, the program director was careful to note that the program does not have a specific agenda about what that educational framework should look like:

> Our educational vision is that every camp should be what it is Jewishly. They should identify what it is Jewishly and then take that seriously and fulfill it to the greatest potential. We do not have a particular vision of what Jewish life at a Jewish summer camp should look like. We are very aware that there are camps where *aliyah* is a central value, other camps where *halakhah* is a central value, other camps where Israeli dance is a central value, social justice, etc. Whatever your camp's central value is, we want the camp to be aware and focused and centered on it. Want them to be the best them.[85]

This comment reflects the belief that while Jewish life is central to camp, the specific nature of this "Jewishness" varies from camp to camp. As a result, camp directors are given room to decide for themselves how to bring their learning back to camp. One participant explains:

> It's not directly laid out for us how this impacts our professional careers – that's up to us how we want to incorporate this into our profession. It's not proscribed – which I love. There's nothing we're supposed to do except continue our own self-study and self-growth. This does force us to think critically about it. If I really want this to be meaningful for my career, it forces me to be thoughtful and intentional and think critically about what I want this to be in my profession.[86]

Thus, while the Gimel Fellowship assumes that a powerful personal learning experience will make camp directors both more capable of and more committed to enhancing education at camp, the program does not explicitly instruct participants how to do this.

While the program chooses not to provide a clear blueprint for how to bring learning back to camp, the curriculum is designed to be particularly relevant in the camp setting. For

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[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Quoting an interview between the author and a program graduate.

example, program participants focus their study on the Torah portions read during the summer months while camp is in session, and they also explore rituals and themes that are particularly relevant to camp life – such as Shabbat and mutual responsibility. Thus, the Gimel Fellowship promotes a model of essential literacy – but in a way that is particular to certain individuals in a certain setting. Put differently, to lead a Jewish camp, one needs to have Jewish camp literacy. More broadly, this suggests that literacy for leaders is determined by their setting of leadership. Thus, the Gimel Fellowship illustrates an individualized relationship between literacy and leadership. While all leaders are expected to possess literacy in some form, the content of that literacy differs according to the particular place of leadership – i.e., the leaders of Jewish summer camps need Jewish summer camp literacy.

This understanding of literacy reflects a broader assumption about the nature of knowledge transmission. As one former program participant stated, "I'm just way more comfortable talking about things that I've learned."[87] In other words, to pass something on, one must "learn" it first. In this way, the Gimel Fellowship employs the Continuity Approach as an opportunity to perpetuate the continued transfer of Jewish literacy. In the Gimel Fellowship, camp professionals acquire literacy in order to transfer that literacy to their camp environments. By helping "camping professionals find an entry point into this kind of study and Judaic learning" they can, in turn, "bring it to their camp communities, their staff, and create a new generation of people who are committed to this type of study."[88] In sum, the Gimel Fellowships illustrates one way of putting the Continuity Approach into action, advancing Jewish literacy in order to facilitate a subsequent transfer of literacy in the future.

[87] Ibid.
[88] Quoting an interview between the author and the program director.

Chapter Five: Overlap and Interconnection

While the *Shanda,* Personal, and Continuity Approaches emphasize essential knowledge, meaning and motivation, and continuity respectively, each approach also recognizes (implicitly or explicitly) the interdependency of all three elements. For example, David Resnick comments on the problematic nature of trying to separate essential knowledge from motivation, noting that there is a "motivational dimension" to any learning:

> Literate Jews not only understand a lecture (and ask intelligent questions at the end), but take the time and trouble to *attend* a lecture, synagogue service, or other Jewish activity.[89]

In other words, an essentialist approach to learning assumes motivation even if it does not make it an explicit goal. Essentialist knowledge, meaning and motivation, and continuity are all interrelated factors that support both the assumptions and the methods present in all three approaches.

Additionally, each approach and its corresponding program understand Jewish literacy to be a useful and important skill for Jewish leaders. Yet, while the three approaches share the assumption that literacy is valuable and important for Jewish leadership, there is no consensus about what constitutes literacy or what defines the goal of its transmission. This lack of consensus results in multiple understandings of what Jewish leaders should know.

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[89] David Resnick, "Literacy in Hebrew Schools: Views from the Field," *Jewish Literacy and Education,* edited by Yisrael Rich, Yaacov Katz, Zemirah Mevarekh, and Shimon Ohayon, 225-245 (Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 2013), 226.

Is this problematic? Marsha Katz Rothpan comments on the difficulty of maintaining professional cohesion without defining what education qualifies one for that career.[90] In her article, "The Covenant of Jewish Professional Leadership: *Brit HaMiktzoa* – Standards of Excellence for Jewish Communal Professionals," Rothpan argues that without a required body of knowledge or standard of education, Jewish communal service is not truly a profession. Rothpan asserts that in order to "change a field into a profession," then an educational standard must be established.[91] Essentially, Rothpan asserts that Jewish leadership – as a profession – would improve if there were a clearly articulated expectation of what skills and knowledge Jewish leaders should possess (and, thus, be trained for).

Yet, articulating a defined standard of knowledge as Rothpan suggests may require a shared understanding of what is accomplished by promoting Jewish literacy for leaders. The three approaches all present parallel – yet varied – understandings of the role of Jewish literacy within Jewish leadership. First, each approach presents a specific way in which Jewish literacy is professionally purposeful (i.e., it serves a specific leadership role or aim such as belonging, motivation, or capacity to educate others). At the same time, the programs brought forward to illustrate these approaches all put forth the message that Jewish literacy is inherently significant for leadership. The difference between literacy as professionally purposeful and literacy as inherently significant is subtle but important: the former treats knowledge as a resource to be applied externally and the latter sees knowledge as internally valuable. Thus, each of the programs examined assigns a double value to literacy – it is a skill that makes leaders more capable, competent, and committed, and it is also valuable as an internal source of inspiration,

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[90] Marsha Katz Rothpan, "The Covenant of Jewish Professional Leadership: *Brit HaMiktzoa* – Standards of Excellence for Jewish Communal Professionals," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* Vol. 84, No. 3-4 (2009): 195-203.
[91] Ibid., 195.

confidence, and self-legitimatization. It is, in other words, both instrumentally and intrinsically valuable.

Lastly, it is noteworthy that data from all three programs revealed a shared belief in the ability of learning to impart confidence. In each approach's understanding, leaders became more Jewishly confident when their Jewish literacy increased. The precise benefit of becoming more confident, once again, varied from approach to approach. Confidence was valued – in different instances – for its ability to enable communal participation, to sustain leadership commitment, or to encourage the transmission of Jewish learning to others. In this way, the variant understandings of what constitutes Jewish literacy reflect a deeper variance about what purpose literacy serves. Ultimately, each program attempts to teach Jewish leaders essential knowledge – a category defined by each program's particular approach to and belief about the underlying value of literacy.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

To conclude this study, I will briefly review the core features of the *Shanda,* Personal, and Continuity Approaches and then discuss the practical applications of this framework. Introducing this framework helps to identify and to explore the significance and value of different approaches to Jewish literacy. Given that all three approaches share the belief that knowledge acquisition for leaders is important, it may be easy to overlook the fact that there are still very different ways to understand what constitutes "essential" Jewish knowledge and what purpose such learning serves.

The *Shanda* Approach thinks in terms of essential facts. Echoing Telushkin, essential Jewish literacy is primarily informed by the fundamentals of traditional Jewish text, thought, and history. Moreover, for the *Shanda* Approach, learning essential knowledge is an end in and of itself; the goal of Jewish literacy is to acquire knowledge that may then be used as a frame of reference.

In contrast, the Personal Approach understands the ultimate end of literacy to be emotionally affective. In this approach, essential knowledge reflects that which is likely to facilitate connection to and caring about Judaism. In other words, it is the feelings elicited by the process of learning which are most essential – not the content of the learning itself. Thus, the Personal Approach values literacy not for the factual knowledge contained within it but, rather, for the meaning and motivation that literacy can generate. The Personal Approach sees learning as primarily valuable for its role in the process of acquiring a stronger and more enduring relationship to Judaism.

Finally, in the Continuity Approach, essential knowledge is defined according to that which each individual is positioned to pass on to others. For example, essential knowledge for camp directors in the Gimel Fellowship is comprised of the information that they are well-positioned to transmit to campers during the summer. Thus, the Continuity Approach understands each instance of learning as an opportunity to enable the further transfer of learning to others.

In sum, while essential knowledge has a role within each approach, the content of essential knowledge as well as its purpose differs in each case. In short, valuing the acquisition of certain facts as an essential component of Jewish literacy does not necessitate agreement about *what* those facts are or *why* they are essential. Similarly, the fact that all of these approaches value knowledge acquisition for Jewish leaders does not indicate agreement about the role/purpose of that knowledge within leadership work. Ultimately, different approaches to Jewish literacy vary in their understandings of what knowledge should be imparted and why.

As discussed at the beginning of this study, Jewish literacy is a phrase with ambiguous meaning. Clarifying the assumptions and goals embedded within the approaches to Jewish literacy discussed above is valuable for three primary reasons. Firstly, articulating the characteristics of divergent approaches to Jewish literacy will allow for more clear communication. Echoing Hirsch's perspective, effective communication requires a shared understanding of what terms mean. By elucidating some of the ways in which Jewish literacy is understood and to what it refers, it will be easier to communicate about this topic with clarity.

Secondly, if there were to be – as many of the authors mentioned in this study suggest – a recognized standard for Jewish literacy, then such a standard must be sensitive to the different ways of defining, promoting, and valuing Jewish literacy. In other words, standardizing Jewish

literacy would require a clarification of goals. Such a clarification would be hard to do without a clear concept of how one might value and promote Jewish literacy.

This leads to the third contribution of this study – a practical application for individuals and programs seeking to promote Jewish literacy. Programs that strive to promote Jewish literacy will be most effective when they are able to clarify, precisely, their literacy goals. Does a program want its participants to know certain essential facts? To what end? Does the program hope to affect the actions of program participants? In what way? Are program participants expected to share their learning with others? How are they enabled to do so? These questions represent but a few of the ways that programs promoting Jewish literacy might start to clarify their goals, purpose, and values around Jewish learning.

Outside of clarifying their mission and vision, greater precision when thinking about Jewish literacy will help programs to determine the specific strategies that will be most effective for reaching their goals. While my small sample sizes and the limits of my data collection do not allow me to analyze the effectiveness of specific program models and strategies or to provide a precise picture of what it is like to be a learner in the respective programs, this presents an important area for future research. Such future research efforts might ask: How do methods of imparting literacy reflect and align with broader approaches to literacy? What programs are successful in meeting their literacy goals? How do different approaches to literacy impact the participant experience?

Even without the data of a more focused study, it seems likely that program success will depend upon some coordination between educational methods and desired goals. For example, imagine a program that seeks to impart Jewish literacy in order to enhance personal meaning for its participants. Yet, program content and the way that learners encounter that content does not

allow space for personally exploration and connections. In this case, the method does not facilitate the intended outcome. When programs with a learning agenda become more aware of the different ways to approach and understand Jewish literacy, then they can more successfully pursue methods and outcomes. In sum, through my analysis of the *Shanda,* Personal, and Continuity Approaches to Jewish literacy, I aim to provide language and a theoretical background for a grounded and strategic conversation about Jewish literacy in the future.

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