

Safety and Unsafety in Jewish Life: Jewish Futures
Source Sheet by Rabbi Jessy Dressin

Genesis 22:11-18

(11) Then an angel of God called to [Abraham] from heaven: "Abraham! Abraham!" And [Abraham] answered, "Here I am."...(17) **I will bestow My blessing upon you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands on the seashore; and your descendants shall seize the gates of their foes. (18) All the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants, because you have obeyed My command."**

V'ahavta, Jewish prayer

(6) And you shall love Adonai, your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. And these words which I command you today, shall be upon your heart. And you shall teach them faithfully to your children.

The Hebrew Mamita: What questions does Vanessa Hidary raise here and why should we care as it relates to conversations about the Jewish future?

In Chevruta (pairs): *Consider the following texts and reflect on the following questions:*

1. What seems to be the promise/blessing of the Genesis text?
2. What seems to be the message of intergenerational legacy in these texts? What is each generation responsible for?
3. In the V'ahavta text - what is the image presented for how Judaism ought to be present in one's life? How would you describe a person who follows the instructions or realizes the vision for how a Jewish person might engage based on this text?
4. In Vanessa Hidary's 'Hebrew Mamita', what challenges does she seem to raise around her experience as a Jew. What potential barriers does she seem to highlight in her Jewish experience - both potentially in specifically Jewish spaces and in navigating secular spaces as a Jew?

The Problem With Worrying About Jewish Continuity by Rabbi Elianna Yolkut

Our institutions and donors spend inordinate amounts of money on studies and analyses of rates of intermarriage, affiliation and denominational decline. Rabbis like me are trained nearly from the first day of rabbinical school to worry, to literally stay up late with board members and other leaders, to convene conferences and address the crisis of the numbers in the Jewish community. We define our success on our ability to address the concerns of Jewish continuity. The time has come to change this discussion, to stop the path we have taken and to re-imagine what we should be staying up late worrying about. There is a fundamental problem with these questions, these studies, the time and energy we expend as a community and as leaders on these issues. They are simply not the right ones, perhaps they never were. They do not address what the Jewish community and Jewish leadership should be worried about, should be asking ourselves and with which we should be concerned. The question we should be asking is does the Judaism we teach, that which we share in the boundaries of our institutions, our schools and synagogues and in the boundary-less public discourse, reach out to people and allow them to flourish? Does the Judaism of our hearts and souls reach out to people in times of need to create moments of deep and profound meaning?

In Chevruta (pairs): *Read the excerpt from Kaufman's article and The Kaddish for Black Lives and reflect on the following questions:*

1. What is the essential question Rabbi Yolkut is asking in the excerpt below?
2. What do you make of the idea that Judaism needs to evolve in order for individuals to "see" themselves in the tradition? What does that mean to you? Do you agree or disagree?
3. How do you understand Kaufman's commentary as building on Yolkut's idea around the need for Judaism to evolve? How do you think Kaufman might respond to the Genesis text around Judaism's legacy based on how we do/don't include Jews of Color?
4. As you read The Kaddish for Black Lives, what feelings come up for you? If you are/were a black Jew, how do you think you might experience this traditionally Jewish prayer in this newly interpreted presentation?

[We asked people about their experiences as Jews of Color. Here's what they told us by Ilana Kaufman.](#)

Based on national and local population studies, my organization found in 2018 that one in seven Jews in the United States identifies as a person of color. Other recent estimates have varied, but one thing is clear: Jews of color are underrepresented in organizational boardrooms, executive leadership teams and even in those groups whose explicit aim is to engage in the work of justice. This absence of Jews of color, and by extension the absence of knowledge about our experiences and perspectives, shapes — in truth, distorts — not only organizational missions, visions, values and programs, but how we see our Jewish world.

Kaddish for Black Lives

By Jewish Multiracial Network



Creator of life, source of compassion. Your breath remains the source of our spirit, even as too many of us cry out that we cannot breathe. Lovingly created in your image, the color of our bodies has imperiled our lives.

Black lives are commodified yet devalued, imitated but feared, exhibited but not seen.

Black lives have been pursued by hatred, abandoned by indifference and betrayed by complacency.

Black lives have been lost to the violence of the vigilante, the cruelty of the marketplace and the silence of the comfortable.

We understand that Black lives are sacred, inherently valuable, and irreplaceable.

We know that to oppress the body of the human is to break the heart of the divine.

We yearn for the day when the bent will stand straight.

We pray that the hearts of our country will soften to the pain endured for centuries.

We will do the work to bind up the wounds, to heal the shattered hearts, to break the yoke of oppression.

As the beauty of the heavens is revealed to us each day, may each day reveal to us the beauty of our common humanity. Amen.

Additional Texts Relating to Jewish Futures and Community Considerations:

For additional engagement AFTER the session - not for during tonight's session.

From the 2020 Pew Study on Jews in America

When it comes to religion, U.S. Jews are in many ways distinctive from the wider U.S. public – and not just in their engagement with specifically Jewish beliefs and practices. In general, Jews are far less religious than American adults as a whole, at least by conventional measures of religious observance in Pew Research Center surveys. For example, one-in-five Jews (21%) say religion is very important in their lives, compared with 41% of U.S. adults overall. And 12% of Jewish Americans say they attend religious services weekly or more often, versus 27% of the general public. There are even bigger gaps when it comes to belief in God. A majority of all U.S. adults say they believe in God

“as described in the Bible” (56%), compared with about a quarter of Jews (26%). Jewish Americans are more inclined to believe in some other kind of higher power – or no higher power at all. At the same time, however, the trends playing out among American Jews are similar to many patterns in the broader population. The most obvious of these is growing religious disaffiliation: The percentage of U.S. Jews who do not claim any religion (27%) – i.e., who identify as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular,” religiously – is virtually identical to the percentage of U.S. adults overall in these categories (28%). In addition, intermarriage is not just a Jewish phenomenon. Religious intermarriage also appears to be on the rise in the U.S. adult population more broadly. The same is true for rising levels of racial and ethnic diversity, which is happening in most U.S. religious groups as the country’s population as a whole becomes more diverse. Finally, the fact that Orthodox Jews tend to have more children aligns with a general pattern in which highly religious Americans have higher fertility rates than non-religious ones.

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