



# Becoming the Best You

*Limud v'Hitlamdut,*  
Learning and Growth

## LEARNING AND GROWTH

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

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

Throughout history, Jews have been known as the "People of the Book," who study the world as it is and as it ought to be, approaching everything as learners and questioners. Everyone is encouraged to study – men, women, and children – because knowledge is seen as

the basis for love of and a relationship with God, and for achieving our own perfection. Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, a great leader who made Jewish learning accessible to all, said: "Jewish knowledge is not just good to have. It is essential. Some may think that knowledge belongs to scholars, religious leaders, and the elite. Not so in Judaism. For us, study is an essential for everyone."

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

The following insights from groundbreaking new research, entitled *GenZ Now: Understanding and Connecting with Jewish Teens Today* – which is the largest study ever undertaken on American Jewish teens – reveals insights relevant to parents from survey results and interview responses from over seventeen thousand teens:

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

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

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

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

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

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

## WELCOME BACK FROM THE MOMENTUM TRIP!

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

Have each woman in your group select two sentences from the following list. Then have them take a few moments to reflect and to jot down their thoughts. Next, have each woman pick one reflection to share. Remind them that when sharing, vivid details – sights, sounds, and smells – help paint a picture that enables listeners to imagine the moment with the speaker.<sup>1</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Roni Ezra Friedman.





## DEBATE, LEARNING, STUDY, AND ACTION

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

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

**Rabbi Tarfon and Rabbi Akiva** lived in the Land of Israel during the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries, under Roman rule. Rabbi Tarfon famously taught: “It is not your responsibility to finish the job, but neither are you free to desist from it” (Ethics of Our Fathers 2:7). We will learn more about Rabbi Akiva later in this session.

### Your attitude toward debate and disagreement

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

### Your learning

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



### Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 40b

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

#### קידושין מ' ב

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

### Your study leading to action

- Often, the final opinion in a Talmudic debate is the one favored by the editors. In this case, it is: "Study leads to action."
- Where have you experienced study leading to action or actions becoming more meaningful because of something you studied?
- If a magic wand could make your learning regularly turn into actions, how would that affect you?
- What has helped you turn learning into action? What gets in the way? What is one small thing you could do more consistently in order to turn learning to action?
- How might you teach your children the value of "Study leads to action"?



## IT'S NEVER TOO LATE

### *The Story of Rabbi Akiva*

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

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

#### **Avot d'Rabbi Natan 6:2**

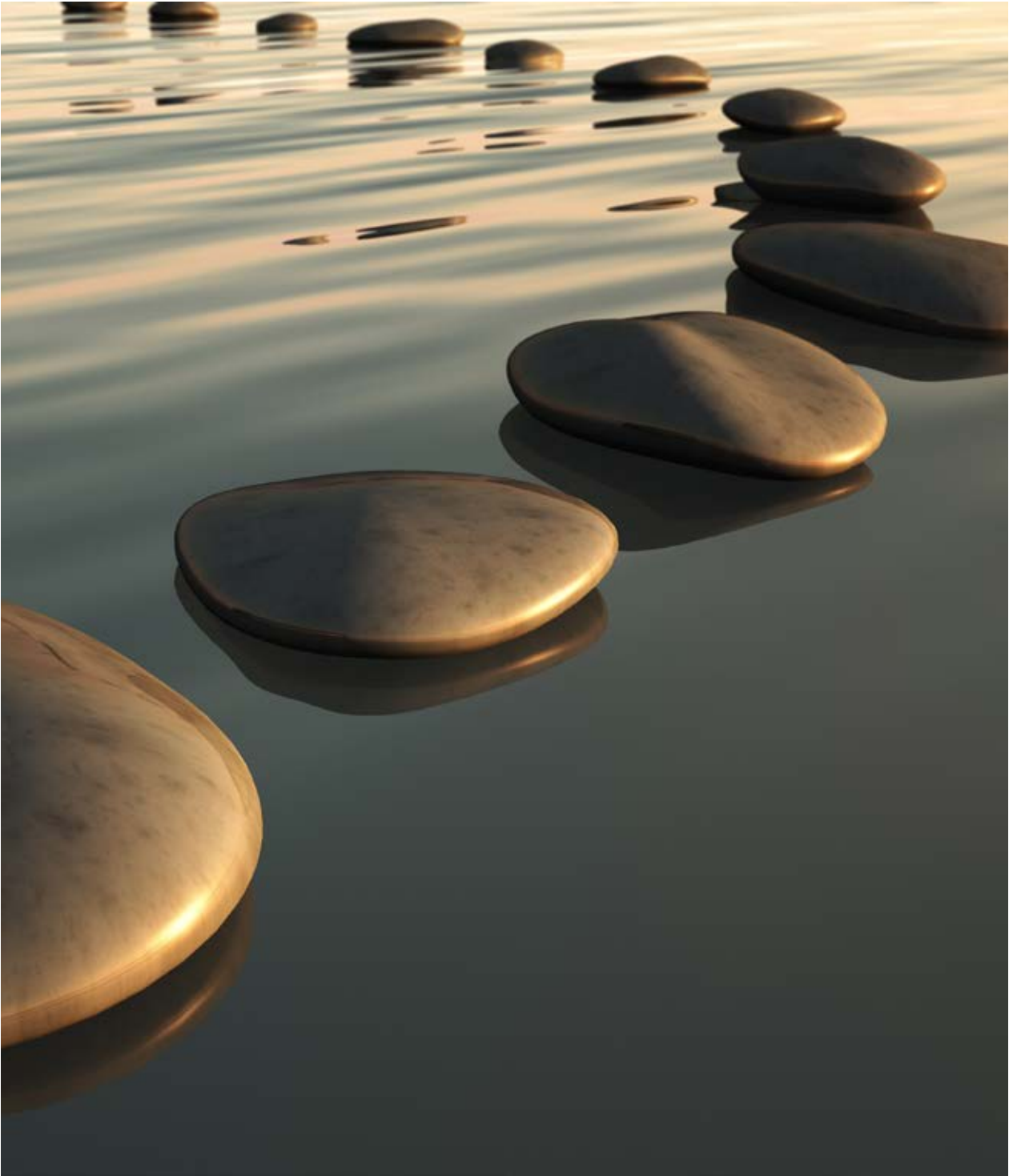
What was the turning point for Rabbi Akiva? He was 40 years old and had never done any formal learning. Once, he was standing next to the mouth of a well and wondered, "Who carved a hole in this stone?" They told him, "Is it not the water which is constantly dripping upon the rock?"... Immediately, Rabbi Akiva reasoned, "If the soft water can carve a hard stone, then surely words of Torah, which are as powerful as iron, can engrave themselves on my heart, which is flesh and blood!" He promptly set off to learn Torah.

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

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

**Avot d'Rabbi Natan** was composed in Israel and Babylonia c. 650–950 C.E. It contains ethical maxims of the sages, along with stories about their character traits and deeds.





## APPROACHING LIFE AS A LEARNING OPPORTUNITY<sup>2</sup>

By Dr. Ronit Ziv-Kreger

What would it be like to approach life as a learner? Whom do you know who does this? In Hebrew, the reflexive form of the word for learning, *limud*, is *hitlamdut*. It refers to the act of approaching everything as a learner and internalizing the lessons that one learns. This mindset compels us to ask ourselves how a situation might apply to our own lives and what we can learn from it.<sup>2</sup>

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

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

Unfortunately, inertia may lead us to maintain old habits or stick to the status quo even when there are good reasons to grow and develop. The Midrash teaches that after the Israelites crossed the Sea of Reeds (i.e. the Red Sea), “Moses had to drag them out of the Sea of Reeds against their will.”<sup>3</sup> Why? Even though their current situation

wasn't good, they were reluctant to change and felt drawn back to Egypt. When we practice *hitlamdut* in our everyday lives, it nourishes our willingness to change. Change is essential for growth, and it builds the self-awareness needed for us to affect even our most engrained habits.

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

Imagine that you are piloting an aircraft. Your dashboard indicates that you need to adjust the plane's altitude. Should you focus on altering the instrument? *Hitlamdut* offers a powerful alternative. “When an instrument gives you an unexpected reading, you need to change your course, not the instrument,” explains corporate coach Rabbi David Lapin. “Think of people's reactions to you and the way they behave around you as a set of instruments that reflect your mood, attitude, and actions. Trying to change

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Rabbi David Jaffe, founder of the Kirva Institute and author of *Changing the World from the Inside Out: A Jewish Approach to Personal and Social Change*.

<sup>3</sup> Midrash Tanchuma on the verse, “Then Moses caused Israel to set out from the Sea of Reeds” (Exodus 15:22).

others is like trying to change the instruments on your cockpit panel instead of moving the levers.”

When my children don't set the table even though I've asked them repeatedly, I might be inclined to ask them again and to focus on changing their actions. Alternatively, I can explore what to do differently. For example, perhaps I can change the tone of voice I'm using. Perhaps I can play with them more before dinner, or invite each child to choose from a list of dinner preparation tasks. *Hitlamdut* orients us to see life as an endless series of learning opportunities.

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

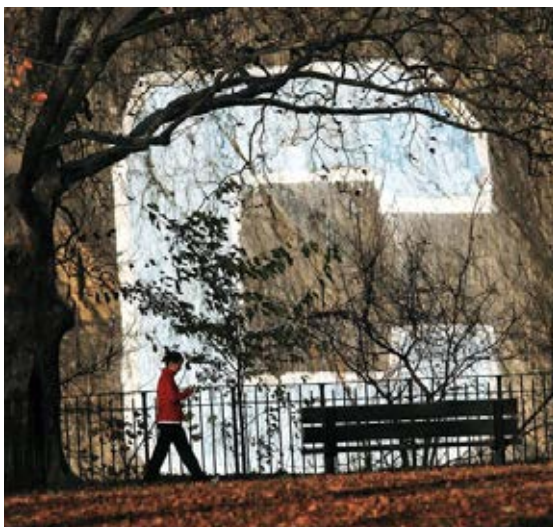
“*Hitlamdut* nurtures an attitude of acceptance toward our imperfections. If we feel like we need to be perfect, we may feel like there is no room for learning,” explains Rabbi David Jaffe. Perfectionism often breeds paralysis and inaction, leading us to fantasize about greatness while not taking the risks needed to build (even if slowly) actual achievement. When I can accept that I'm not perfect at parenting, organizing, dieting, or anything else, I can find room to learn. Rabbi Jaffe observes, “*Hitlamdut* nurtures a mindset that everything we do is practice. It invites us to be self-reflective in order to learn from our experiences – failures included. We are all always just practicing. This mindset also helps us avoid self-righteous or arrogant thoughts that lead us to believe that we're perfect or invulnerable.”

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

## THE POWER OF HAVRUTA: PARTNER-LEARNING

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

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



Suzanne DeChillo/The New York Times/Redux

- *Have different people in your group each share what they saw. You'll likely find a range of insights.*
- *When has hearing another person's perspective on an issue really clarified it for you?*

- *When did the perspective of another sister help clarify, complicate, or deepen what you had heard, seen, or experienced?*
- *How might learning with a partner contribute to your growth?*
- *If you were to consider setting up a learning partnership for the next two weeks, for a short, quick learning at regular intervals, what might work well for you? With whom would you want to learn, and when?*

Rabbi Judah Loew, the Maharal of Prague,<sup>4</sup> noted that profound learning, such as Torah learning, takes us beyond regular thinking and understanding, and enables us to access the “supernal mind.” He believed that accessing such transcended consciousness requires preparation together with a partner.

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

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

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<sup>4</sup> 1525–1609. Source is from his book, *Netivot Olam*, in the section *Netiv HaTorah*, 86.



## ACCOUNTABILITY PARTNERS CAN HELP US TAKE “RESPONSE-ABILITY”<sup>5</sup> TO TURN LEARNING INTO POSITIVE ACTIONS THAT AFFECT OUR LIVES.

To reap the benefits of accountability, follow four simple steps:<sup>5</sup>

**Find** a person whom you trust and who is willing to explore an accountability partnership.

**Share your individual goals** as well as a plan for the specific actions you will each take to meet your goals.

**Set regular, two-way check-ins**, allotting equal time for each partner to speak about her progress, obstacles, and next steps. Practice attentive listening without giving unsolicited advice. Set frequent check-ins. For example, you may want to have ten-minute phone conversations twice a week, with each person speaking for four to five minutes, and short text updates an additional three times per week.

**Revisit your goals** to assess whether you are on track or need to adjust course. Do this periodically, such as once every month or two during a longer conversation.

With regard to the classic teaching, “Acquire a friend,” קנה לך חבר, our sages made a play on words. They point out that the Hebrew word for “acquire,” קנה, also means “pen.” Thus, in addition to acquiring an accountability partner, regular journaling also supports learning and accountability.

While speaking with your accountability partner and journaling, consider the following questions and how they can foster your GROWTH. Each *Year of Growth* session includes a space to reflect on questions such as these:

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

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

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

**Will** – Why is your goal important, and how can you engage your will to move forward?

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

**Help** – How are working with your accountability partner and journaling helping you? What adjustments can better nurture your work? What additional support can further your progress?

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

<sup>5</sup> Term from Steven Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.

## LEARN WITH YOUR SISTER

### *Continue to Grow*

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

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



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

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



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

No one walks away from fun, so get creative! On Shabbat, let your kids choose the menu – especially the dessert. Allow your kids to eat their favorite sugar cereal on Shabbat and call it “Shabbat cereal.” Make Shabbat a day filled with games, stories, building a tent in the living room, and inviting their friends over – whatever

appeals to your children. If your kids love a particular skating rink, make it their Chanukah outing. If they want a certain toy, make it their Passover afikoman present. Turn Shabbat and Jewish holidays into the delivery methods for your kids’ best childhood memories. After all, everyone wants to give their fondest childhood memories to the next generation.

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

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

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

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



### **Adrienne says: Be patient.**

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

#### ***Never stop learning.***

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

#### ***Embrace the growing pains.***

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



### **Ruchi says: Do the hard work.**

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

#### ***Prioritize what’s most important to you.***

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

#### ***Surround yourself with a great community.***

The importance of a peer group cannot be overstated. Be mindful to choose friends who fill you up on an emotional and spiritual level, and then surround yourself with them.

## LEARN NEW HABITS WITH YOUR SISTER

### *A Little Bit Each Day*

By Dr. Ronit Ziv-Kreger

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

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

Our sages observed this long ago, saying: One *mitzvah* leads to another *mitzvah*, and one wrongdoing leads to other wrongdoings.<sup>6</sup> A Duke University research paper titled, "Habits – A Repeat Performance," found that about 45 percent of our waking behavior can be attributed to habits. So what's an effective way to acquire new, healthful, positive habits that stick?

Contemporary neuroscience research, Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, and Jewish wisdom literature point to six steps:

**1. Purpose.** Being clear on why you want a new habit provides the "engine power" to propel you to do what it takes to change. There's a verse in

the book of Psalms<sup>7</sup> that says God satisfies each person not necessarily by giving them what they want, but rather by giving them the *willpower* to want.

Daniel Pink's book, *Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us*, says that contemporary research points to the concept of purpose as a key driver of human behavior. So start with articulating, ideally in writing, *why* you want a new habit. What's the underlying purpose? Narrow it down to a phrase or a quote, and post it where you'll be able to see and review it often. Read it to yourself aloud and passionately. This is in accordance with a Jewish practice called *hitpa'alut*, generating emotional arousal via repeating an inspiring verse in order to imprint purpose in ways that feed our "engine" for change.

**2. Awareness.** This is a key beginning stage. When your learning moves from theory to practice, you develop sensitivity. This includes becoming aware of the physical sensations that precede engaging in bad habits: the tightening of the chest that comes before speaking critically; salivating with craving right before reaching for potato chips; standing up straight when you're about to give advice when sitting and listening would be more helpful.

**3. Self-restraint.** Awareness can put a pause between the stimulus and our habitual

<sup>6</sup> Pirkei Avot (Ethics of Our Fathers) 4:2.

<sup>7</sup> מַשְׂבִּיעַ לְכָל חַי רְצוֹן – "[God] satisfies us with will" (a literal translation of Psalms 145:16).



response, giving us a choice between the old, habitual, well-trodden path of behavior and, in the words of Robert Frost, the road less traveled.

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler describes this *choice point* as the point of push and pull, the inner battle we experience when we want to elevate our behavior. The ability to identify this *choice point* is the first step in exercising self-restraint.

**4. Trigger.** Neuroscientists advise us to identify a concrete trigger in order to help establish a new habit. They suggest choosing something that fits into our daily lives, so we can graft a specific new trigger onto the existing stimulus. This will alert us that we have reached the choice point. Charles Duhigg, in his book, *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business*, underscores the value of making the trigger specific. He suggests choosing one of the following: when, where, who else, emotional state, or the immediately preceding action. For example, a trigger could be at home (where), in the evening (when), when my son (who) makes a big bowl of popcorn before we sit to watch a movie (preceding action), and I'm feeling drained (emotional state).

**5. Micro-habits.** Choose something small for your new habit, something that ideally takes less than two minutes to perform. B. J. Fogg, Stanford psychologist and researcher, says that

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

Perhaps it's a daily, two-minute text-learning. Taking small action regularly is more effective in changing your behavior than setting big goals that are hard to follow through with. As the Talmud says, *Tafasta merubeh lo tafasta* – “If you seize too much, you don't seize at all.”

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

Appreciation is easier from a place of worthiness, knowing that who we are and what we do is enough and worthwhile. This mindset also helps us redirect ourselves when things don't go as planned. King Solomon taught<sup>8</sup> that a righteous person falls again and again, and yet gets up and continues.

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<sup>8</sup> Proverbs 24:16.

## LEARN WITH YOUR SISTER

*Saved by the Daf*

By Dr. Erica Brown



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

study shapes and colors each day before the the daily grind starts.

In the early 1920s, a pioneering scholar, Rabbi Meir Shapiro, was initially ridiculed for suggesting that the Talmud could be studied this way. He had an innovative vision of hundreds of people all learning the same page of Talmud in every corner of the world. He probably could not have imagined tens of thousands of people across the globe learning it in classrooms and on trains, in synagogues and prisons, on hard copy and on iPhones. You can study *daf yomi* in dozens of translations. There are people who write haikus and limericks on the daily daf. One artist-student even draws a picture on the *daf* every day.

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

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

All blessings prepare us to sanctify and elevate ordinary moments. Since study is so fundamental to Jewish life, we make sure that it, too, is preceded by a blessing. The great 20<sup>th</sup> century scholar Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik

observed that we do not bless the study of Torah but rather our engagement in Torah, because study pervades our life, shaping it with constancy and a sacred rhythm.

The way that study creates this anchor was most evident to me years ago when a neighborhood group of us completed a particular Talmudic volume.

In Jewish tradition, when we complete the study of a book, we make a *siyum*, a celebration of our completion and a commitment to keep going. For this *siyum*, we finished Yevamot, a tractate of the Babylonian Talmud about levirate marriage. On page 128a, we read about an influential rabbi, Rabban Gamliel, who saw a ship sinking. He knew that another sage, Rabbi Akiva, was aboard that ship. To his great relief, Rabban Gamliel saw Rabbi Akiva on dry land, teaching Torah. He asked him how he had survived. Rabbi Akiva said that he held firm to a plank and whenever a wave passed over him, he ducked down. He was, in other words, saved by this plank. In this passage of Talmud, the plank is called a *daf*—the same Hebrew word as “page.” A commentary notes this and suggests that those who study are anchored by their learning.

In a cycle of seven and a half years, many of us in the group have passed happy milestones. We’ve had children graduate and marry. Some of us have lost parents. One of us lost a child. Some of us have changed jobs. Some have retired. One friend in another city lost his father, who had completed close to five years of Talmud study before he died. The son decided that he would complete the learning his father could not, in a beautiful act of continuity.

Ilana Kurshan, in a wonderful memoir of *daf yomi*, *If All the Seas Were Ink*, tells the story of how her study stabilized her during a painful divorce. It was a constant in a life that had been thrown into emotional turmoil. The *daf* has saving powers. It connects us to people we know and to strangers. It connects us to a two-thousand-year-old past and to people all over the world. Such is the magic of Torah study.

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

## TRY IT OUT

### PRACTICAL TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

*Ideas for bringing the value of Learning and Growth into your family life*

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

#### For Yourself or with a Partner

- What were your most magical moments on the Momentum trip? Perhaps they were intimate conversations with a friend, folk dancing with dozens of others, a quiet, personal prayer, or something completely different. Many similar opportunities are available in our home communities. Explore the options offered at your local JCC, synagogue, or other Jewish organization for the chance to continue at home some of what excited you in Israel. Museum exhibits, Jewish cooking classes and book clubs, women's Torah study groups, and spiritual retreats are just a sampling of the innovative programming offered these days in our own neighborhoods.
- Invite a friend along with you, maybe some of your Momentum sisters. Sharing experiences with others heightens their impact on us and on those we love.
- Create a vision board using photos and memorabilia from your Momentum trip to bring the experiences into your daily life at home. Hanging the board where you will see it each day will help rekindle the inspiration engendered each time you look at it.
- Reread your Momentum Trip Journal. Take time to contemplate your written reflections, and check in with yourself on where you are with regard to the thoughts and goals you had for your homecoming.
- Consider getting a habit tracker app to document your progress with forming new habits. Search online for one that works for you.
- Select a phrase that inspires you, write it on a card, and place it where you'll see it. Repeat the phrase to yourself a few times each morning with enthusiasm. Phrases you could consider:
  - It's not all or nothing
  - "Who is wise? One who learns from every person" (Pirkei Avot 4:1)



- “A little bit is also good” (Rabbi Nachman of Breslov)
- I engage in words of Torah
- My learning leads to action
  
- Take time to reflect on your Momentum experiences and relationships: Disconnect to connect. Find a cozy, quiet spot to remember how they impacted you. Consider ways to bring them into your present that speak uniquely to you. Ask yourself, “How can I continue to learn more about my Jewish heritage and Jewish values?”
- Pepered throughout Momentum were growth experiences. We humans never stop learning, and we feel alive when we are expanding our horizons. Now that you’re home, discover what your particular learning style is. Are you a visual, aural, tactile, interactive, or kinesthetic learner? Or a combination of styles? Find out by selecting and completing one of the eight learning style questionnaires found at <https://bit.ly/2GV0j8>. What you learn about yourself can inform how and what experiences you seek!
- Check out the podcasts, videos, and articles on [MomentumUnlimited.org](https://www.MomentumUnlimited.org).



- Sarah Margaret Fuller said, “If you have knowledge, let others light their candles in it.” With whom can you share your learning? Our learning deepens when we share it with others.

### For Families with Young Children

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

### For Families with Older Children

- Join a parent-child book club. Reading and learning together in this setting offers an opportunity to explore many of life’s important topics that can be otherwise difficult to broach. Can’t find a group? Start one! Read the linked article to learn how. It even includes suggestions organized according to age: <https://bit.ly/3qaUo6S>.
- Create a new family ritual on Friday nights by introducing the Shabbat Box of Questions to your mealtime conversation. “Designed to... help you connect with your loved ones in a meaningful way,” the questions ignite important conversations about a number of topics rooted in Jewish values. Examples include: If you could stand up and fight for one cause that would make a difference in the world, what would it be? Who is the one person from the Bible or history that you would want to meet? What accomplishment are you most proud of? You can purchase your own Shabbat Box of Questions online on the J&B Judaica website.



- Share with your children the two famous Albert Einstein quotes below. Discuss with them their interpretation of each quote. Ask them if they can think of examples from either their or a friend's experience that illustrate one of the quotes:
  - "Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow. The important thing is not to stop questioning."
  - "The true sign of intelligence is not knowledge but imagination."
- Teach your child the following visual imagery exercise to prime their imaginative muscle.<sup>9</sup> Have them close their eyes and use their imaginations to answer questions such as:
  - *Imagine what a perfect day would be like from start to finish. What is the weather like? Who are you with? What are you doing?*
  - *Imagine where you would most want to go if you could take a trip. What would you do there? What sites would you visit? What foods would you eat?*
  - *Imagine improving in either your academic performance or your athletic abilities. What new practices could you implement to achieve this?*

<sup>9</sup> Adapted from the book, *Nurturing Spirituality in Children*, by Dr. Peggy Joy Jenkins.

## FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

*In this session, we explore the value of limud v'hitlamdut, learning and growth*

This is the “Welcome back from the trip” session, wherein we explore the values of *limud v'hitlamdut*, learning and approaching life as a learning opportunity.

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

### Meaningful Vocabulary

<i>limud</i>	למוד	learning
<i>hitlamdut</i>	התלמדנות	mindset of approaching everything as a learner
<i>havruta</i>	חברותא	partner-learning

The guiding questions in this unit are:

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

### Facilitating the Session

#### 1. Seek Participant Input

Well before the session, invite a few sisters to take a small role in leading it. For example

- Ask a few participants to review their trip journals in order to reimmerse in the experiences, thoughts, and relationships from Momentum. Have them share some of their thoughts and reflections with the group
- Have one woman initiate a discussion about study vs. action by offering an illustrative example from her own life

- Invite a sister to lead a conversation about bringing the value of *learning and growth* into family life. Allow time for others to share ways they have already encountered successes and challenges in doing so

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

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

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

## 3. Prep Your Space

Before the session begins, prepare the room, for example by arranging the space or seating to support connection. Think about what materials you will need and make sure you have everything prepared.

## 4. Welcome and Warm-Up

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

### Reminder! Sisterhood Safe Space

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

## 5. Intro and Inspiration

We suggest using the activity, **Welcome Back from the Momentum Trip!** found on pages 14–19, to begin this first session. To facilitate the activity, make a few copies of the sentences on page 14, and cut them out so that the women can randomly pick one. Alternatively, they can select a sentence directly from the page.

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



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

Introduce the Hebrew term *hitlamdut*, a learning and growth mindset. Ask the women to reflect on the quote found on page 13: “Jewish learning can help us look at the world in new ways, try new things, find added meaning in our personal and family lives, and propel us to a life of kindness and good deeds.” Following individual reflection time, think together about which themes, longings, and conflicts emerged from pondering this quote. Make a note for yourself about which of these is connected to this session, and which ones you would like to follow up on in future meetings.

## 6. Soul Sparks Activities

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

### ***The Power of Havruta: Partner-Learning***

Read the opening two paragraphs of the article on page 22 aloud. Devote a few minutes to

completing the introductory task, in which each participant writes a brief description of the photo on the page. Typically only some participants notice that the back wall in the photo has the letter “C” painted on it. With this in mind, discuss the five questions that follow the task prompt, to explore the power of partner-learning. This activity could be dovetailed with the next, which discusses accountability partners (p. 23). Either way, move the learning into action by having participants figure out guidelines with regard to how pairs of women can support each other with learning and with turning the learning into action.

### ***Accountability Partners: Support for G.R.O.W.T.H.***

In addition to or instead of the previous activity, read the article on page 23 together. Talk through the next steps for finding a *havruta*, and brainstorm ways to make the first move of reaching out and inviting that person to join them in partner-learning that supports studying leading to action.

## 7. Reflection and Closing

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

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

Invite sisters to respond to the prompt by writing, drawing, or thinking silently. After individual reflection time, you might ask them to partner with one other participant and share their reflections, which can be followed with voluntary group sharing.

Direct the women’s attention to the **Try It Out: Practical Tips and Resources for Families** section (pp. 30–33). These suggestions will help them bring home to their families the learning they have done today in fun and interesting ways. Encourage them to choose at least one thing they will do with their families and to report on how it went at the next session. Give a brief overview of the rest of the unit.

Provide an opportunity for participants to arrange a time to connect with another sister to continue exploring, reflecting, and offering each other support and accountability. This **Learn with Your Sister** activity serves as an entry point for conversations that may never otherwise happen. (see pp. 24–29). Let all the women know when you’ll be meeting again and what theme will be explored.

## Extra! Program Ideas

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

- Create vision boards that illustrate the areas in which your participants would like to learn and grow in the coming year
- Create “intention candles” as a physical embodiment of the desire to learn and grow in the coming year. (For instructions on how to create these candles, visit the *At the Well Project* website.)





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