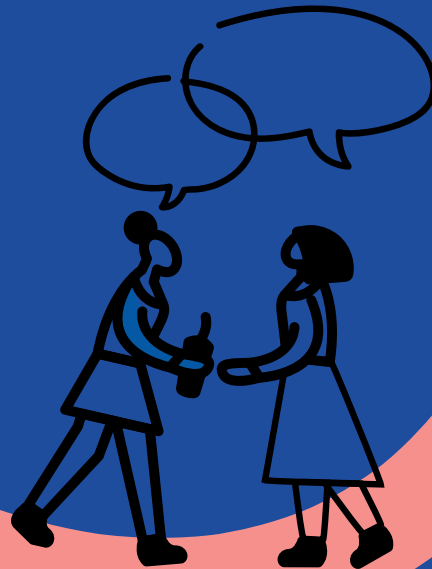


SESSION

5



From Sinai to Self

Writing Your Ethical Will

May • Shavuot



JOURNEY OF GROWTH
Exploring Jewish Values
and Inspiring Action

In partnership with



**Ministry for Diaspora Affairs
and Combating Antisemitism**

This session
was created in
collaboration with



JADE
JEWISH ASSOCIATION
FOR DEATH EDUCATION



VALUE

Faithfulness & Trust

Emunah

Shavuot celebrates the giving of Torah at Sinai, a moment when our people received not only laws and teachings, but a legacy of Faithfulness & Trust that continues to guide us through times of uncertainty. The covenant we received standing at the mountain can be described as an ethical will passed from generation to generation. Rooted in the Jewish value of *emunah*, an ethical will is a testament to a belief that our wisdom, values, and truths will endure beyond us. Today, we will reflect on what matters most, name the values that shape who we are, and begin to put them into words so that our legacy can continue to live through those who come after us.



TIMELINE: 90 MIN

BEGIN WITH INTENTION | 5 MIN

FRAME: SHAVUOT, TORAH, AND ETHICAL WILLS | 10 MIN

PERSONAL REFLECTION | 10 MIN

ANTICIPATING CHALLENGES | 20 MIN

START YOUR ETHICAL WILL | 15 MIN

FULL GROUP SHARING | 20 MIN

BRING YOUR LEARNING HOME | 5 MIN

END WITH MEANING | 5 MIN



MATERIALS

- Pens
- Participants should bring either a notebook or laptop, whatever they prefer for writing
- Relaxing/contemplative background music (optional)



WHO FACILITATES THE SESSION

This session is co-facilitated by the Community Leader and the participants:

The Community Leader's role is to open and guide the flow of the session, introduce activities, keep track of time, and model openness by sharing a personal example.

The participants' role is to engage fully in both the activities and the facilitation. This can include reading source material aloud, introducing prompts, leading small-group conversations, and inviting others to share.

Everyone in the room is responsible for creating a warm, respectful environment where honest reflection is encouraged, silence is welcomed, and all voices are valued. The goal is to learn with and from one another, not just from a single facilitator.



FACILITATOR PREPARATION

Please remind participants to bring a notebook. There is also space for writing on p. 49 of this book for those who forget.

You don't need to be an expert or have written an ethical will yourself. Your role is to create a **warm, thoughtful** space for **reflection** and **conversation**. Encourage **honesty** over polish, and **process** over product.

- **Model vulnerability:** Share something brief from your own values or a story to open the space.
- **Honor silence:** Don't rush to fill quiet moments.
- **Make it spacious:** There's no right way to do this. Affirm that everyone is on their own journey.
- **Review:** The Additional Resources on p. 51, which can be helpful if someone feels stuck in writing.



VIDEO GUIDE

Want a helping hand (and heart) from Momentum Educators on how to facilitate this session? Follow this QR code to access the **training video** library:



PART I

Begin with Intention



5 MIN

Looking for ways to start your session with purpose?

Turn to p. 4 for simple, meaningful ideas to open your gathering with presence, connection, and shared energy.

PART II

Frame: Shavuot, Torah, and Ethical Wills



10 MIN

Shavuot commemorates the moment we received Torah at Sinai. We often think of Torah as a set of laws, but another framework to understand Torah is as a **legacy of values**. In this way, Torah is a kind of **ultimate ethical will**, transmitted not just to one generation, but to the entire Jewish people for all time. An ethical will passes down what matters most: values, life lessons, memories, and love. Jewish tradition includes many ethical wills, from Jacob's blessings to his sons to Moshe's final speech in the Book of Deuteronomy. Ethical wills focus on **spiritual wealth** rather than material wealth.

Today, we will ask: *What values do you want to pass forward? What wisdom defines you? What legacy do you hope to leave?*

PART III

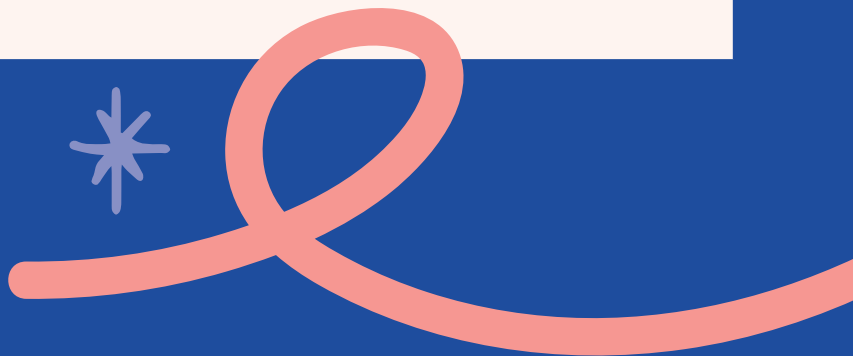
Personal Reflection



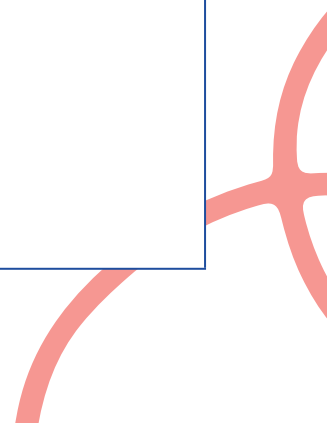
10 MIN

Creating an ethical will is an invitation to focus on what truly matters: the beliefs, values, stories, and memories you hope to pass on.

This table is a starting point. Take about 10 minutes now to begin filling it out. You are not expected to finish it, and you shouldn't feel pressure to write complete sentences or polished thoughts. This is a chance to pause, reflect, and jot down what comes up for you, whether in words, phrases, doodles, or symbols. *Let it be messy. Let it be real.*



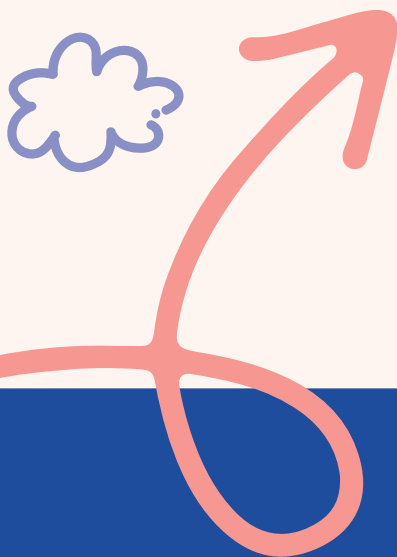
<p>VALUES</p> <p>What principles and values guide your choices?</p>	
<p>WORLDVIEW</p> <p>How do you make sense of the world and your place in it? What stories shape how you see others?</p>	
<p>MEMORIES</p> <p>What moments have shaped who you are and how you live?</p>	
<p>LEARNING</p> <p>What wisdom have you gained about living, relating to others, and navigating the world?</p>	



PART IV

Anticipating Challenges

20 MIN



Now, before you begin drafting your ethical will, take a few minutes to reflect with a partner or in a small group. The process of writing something so personal and meaningful can bring up unexpected resistance. Talking through these challenges can help you move forward with greater clarity and kindness toward yourself.

In your group, explore one or more of the following questions. You don't have to cover them all. Just notice what resonates.

1. **Who** am I writing to, and if it's hard to name, why is that so?
 - Are you writing to a specific child? All your children? A future generation? A friend, a student, your community, or someone who isn't here yet?
 - What feelings come up when you imagine that person reading your words?
 - Is there someone you wish you could write to, but feel unsure how?
2. What **relationships** feel too complicated to include, but too big to ignore?
 - Are there people or situations in your life that stir pain, anger, or unresolved tension? Are you tempted to leave them out completely, or to over-explain?
 - How might you acknowledge complexity without having to solve it?
3. What if **I don't know** what I want to say?
 - Do you ever feel like you're "supposed" to have something wise to pass on, but you're not sure you do?
 - What happens when you hit a blank page, or worse, a blank mind?
 - What's one way you can move forward even if you don't have the perfect words?
4. What if **I'm not ready**?
 - What's making you hesitate?
 - Is it perfectionism? Emotion? Fear of saying too much, or not enough? Or is it something deeper, like the fear of facing your own mortality?
 - What would it take to write as you are, not as you think you should be?

Encourage one another to be **honest**, not polished. **The goal isn't to fix these challenges now, but to name them so they don't hold all the power when you begin to write.**

PART V

Start Your Ethical Will

You will have space to write on p. 49.



15 MIN

You've reflected on what matters most, your **values, worldview, memories**, and learning and named some of the **challenges** that may arise.

Now, it's time to begin.

Over the next 10 minutes, give shape to your thoughts. Sometimes the best place to start is with basic biographical facts, rather than the "big picture" of who you are. You might only capture a single idea or write a few short lines. That's enough.

Use any format that feels natural: letter form, journal entry, notes to your future self, or even fragments. **There's no right way to begin—only the courage to do so.** Allow your words to come however they come.

PART VI

Full Group Sharing



20 MIN

Let's come back together as a full group to reflect on the process so far. This is not a time to read your ethical will aloud, rather a **space to share what surfaced for you along the way.** You're invited to speak from any part of the journey:

- A moment of insight or surprise during the personal reflection or small group conversation
- An emotion, hesitation, or breakthrough that showed up during the writing
- A sentence or phrase you wrote that felt true or meaningful
- A challenge you're still sitting with
- A personal reflection on mortality—perhaps sparked by something in the glossary

You don't have to have it all figured out. This is about going through a process together.

PART VII

Bring Your Learning Home



5 MIN

Here are a few ways you might bring this learning home:

- **Invite a partner, sibling, or friend to join you:** You might carve out time together to each create your own ethical will—or reflect on your values side-by-side.
- **Explore other creative mediums:** Your ethical will doesn't have to be a letter. It can include a recorded video, a playlist of meaningful songs, a photo montage, or even a slide deck. Choose the formats that feel most true to you.
- **Choose one small step to continue the work:** Maybe it's writing one more story, asking a loved one about *their* values, or setting a reminder to revisit your ethical will during a future holiday or family moment.

You don't have to finish it now. But you've started. And just like Torah, the transmission of wisdom begins not with knowing or doing it all, but with the choice to engage and pass something on.



START YOUR ETHICAL WILL



A series of horizontal dotted lines providing a template for writing an ethical will.

PART VIII

End with Meaning



5 MIN

As we close, may this work remind us that how we live now becomes the legacy we leave, shaped by the values we choose to carry forward and pass on.

Head back to p. 4 for thoughtful ways to close your gathering with reflection, gratitude, and a sense of shared purpose.

PART IX

Continue the Journey



[Order your copy here](#)

For deeper reflection, we recommend *The Art and Practice of Living Wondrously*, especially the chapter “Wisdom for Times of Loss.” It offers gentle, grounding insights for navigating grief with presence, compassion, and meaning.



[Listen to the audiobook](#)

For those who want to go deeper into the Jewish wisdom around loss, mourning, and the values we carry forward, we recommend *Remember My Soul* by Momentum founding director **Lori Palatnik**. It’s a compassionate, accessible guide to Jewish mourning practices, and a window into how values and memory are transmitted through time.



[Purchase the book](#)

PART IX

Continue the Journey



Additional Resources

OUTLINE IDEA

- **Opening:** I write this to share what matters most—what I’ve lived, learned, and hope to pass on.
- **Family Legacy:** Stories and events that shaped our family.
- **Personal Journey:** People and experiences that made me who I am.
- **Spiritual Life:** Rituals, texts, and moments of meaning.
- **Ethical Commitments:** Values I tried to live by; one piece of guidance I’d offer.
- **Closing Blessing:** My hopes and blessing for your journey.

WRITING PROMPTS

- These are the moments that shaped me the most.
- This is the world I came from and how it shaped me.
- These are the lessons life taught me, sometimes the hard way.
- These are the causes I hope you’ll carry forward.
- I hope you know how deeply I love you, and how grateful I am for...

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What 3–5 values are essential for a good life, and where did they come from?
- How have they shaped your choices?
- What’s one way you’ve passed them on?
- What advice would you give your younger self?
- What’s one way you’ve passed on your values, or hope to?



About Our Content Collaborator

JADE (Jewish Association for Death Education) is dedicated to bringing Jewish wisdom, ritual, and meaning into one of life’s most challenging experiences: death and dying. Recognizing that many Jews lack education about Jewish death practices, JADE provides spiritual and educational resources to help individuals and families navigate end-of-life moments with clarity, dignity, and comfort. Their resources on ethical wills invite individuals to reflect on the values they want to pass forward, not just at the end of life, but throughout life.



JADE website



The Hineni Tool