

On Your Doorposts Spring 2001 And Beyond Your Gates

Reclaiming Tradition

Making Age-Old Rituals Meaningful Today

Four-year-old Jack Lavey has always been soothed to sleep by the sound of his father's singing. But recently, a new tune was added to their bedtime repertoire. *Shema Yisrael Adonai Elohenu Adonai Echad*. "It's a nice way to say good night and to elevate things at the end of the day," says his father, John.

The Lavey's are among the thousands of Jewish families looking to reclaim old traditions, to incorporate Jewish ritual into their lives in a way that is meaningful and relevant. "During the last century, Jews wanted to distance themselves from seeming too Jewish," says Lavey. "As a result, many in my generation grew up with nothing. Now we want to know what we've been missing."



The bedtime routine for the Lavey family includes singing the *Shema*.

Gladys Crown Charitable Income Trust. The programs teach families how to "do" Judaism, how to perform the rituals, how to interact Jewishly with their children. At one such program, the Lavey family learned how to find more Jewish moments in their daily lives.

In the multi-purpose room at Central Reform Congregation, families with young children gathered four times last fall for "Creating Ritual," a class that connected them with people from the past thousand years. "Through crafts, stories and discussion, we reintroduced families to rituals that were abandoned by their relatives years ago and suggested how they could be meaningful in a present day context," says Virginia Horowitz, director of education

at CRC. Families left the class with personally crafted ritual objects and with ideas on ways ritual can enhance nighttime, mornings, Shabbat and birthdays. Plans are underway for a second session this spring.

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Jewish Everyday Moments

Temples and synagogues have responded with an ever-increasing number of family education programs — many of them funded by grants from the Jewish Federation of St. Louis' Henry and

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Interactions: Programs that Work

For more than 5,000 years, the Jewish family has perpetuated our traditions. And in recent years, area synagogues and temples have made Jewish family education a priority. Each issue of **Doorposts** features family education programs that have successfully promoted intergenerational interactions in the St. Louis Jewish community.

Sing a Song of Shabbat

Temple Emanuel families can listen to the liturgy of their Shabbat service in their family rooms, in their kitchens, in their cars. And for many of them, it's their own voices they hear emanating from cassette players. Last fall, these children, parents and grandparents spent several weeks together learning prayers and their melodies — a lesson that culminated with a trip to a recording studio to produce a professional-quality audio tape. They then created an accompanying prayer booklet, complete with translations, transliterations and their own interpretation of each prayer's meaning. More than 200 kits were distributed to temple families. The result: Temple Emanuel families have become more familiar with the Friday evening service in a way that is empowering, inclusive and non-threatening. To learn more, call Ellyn Polsky, (314) 576-6117.



hangings and metal menorahs. The program culminated with an all-out family celebration, complete with candles, latkes and Chanukah tunes.

The Chanukah Extravaganza was part of "Jewish Encounters of the First Kind," a program that emphasizes the rich traditions and celebrations that fill each Hebrew month. At each "Encounter," participants study first with their Jewish peers, and then with their families. To learn how you can give your congregants something to celebrate each month, call Rabbi Aaron Winter, (314) 469-7060.

World Wide Wrap

In the chapel at Congregation Shaare Zedek, synagogue members learned how to wrap themselves in the words of God. Leather straps wound seven times around the arms of young and old, then three times around their middle fingers until a two-inch square box containing Torah passages was correctly situated on their biceps. A second leather box was fixed around their foreheads between the eyes. Then, wrapped in tefillin — and thousands of years of tradition — teens, parents and grandparents recited the morning prayers together.

The dozens of Shaare Zedek families present were among more than 9,000 Conservative Jews throughout the world learning how to wrap tefillin that morning. The National Federation of Jewish Men's Club organized the event and developed an instructional video, display boards and a web site. To learn how to teach this age-old tradition to your congregants, check out www.worldwidewrap.org, or call Rabbi Hillel Gold, (314) 727-1747. ●

Jewish Encounters of the First Kind

Like every other Hebrew month, Kislev offered the members of Tpheris Israel Chevra Kadisha Congregation an opportunity for study and celebration. That month, nearly 120 members of the congregation — practically every family — gathered together to learn about Kislev's most celebrated holiday. While adults engaged in Torah study about miracles, their teenage children discussed the miracle of Chanukah, and their young children made dreidel window

More than Matzah

Creating a Meaningful Passover

"And you shall tell your child on that day saying. . . ." (Exodus 13:8)

True, Passover Seder kicks off a week of matzah brei, matzah balls and macaroons. For your children, it's a week-long culinary adventure. But getting a peanut butter and matzah sandwich to school unscathed is not the object of the holiday.

Passover's dietary restrictions constantly remind us of our relationship with God, our exodus from Egypt, and our imperative to discuss both with our children. That makes Passover one long teachable moment. Take advantage of the moment at your house. Here are a few ways you can add meaning and memories to your family's Passover observance.

Inclined to Recline?

We recline on pillows at the Seder because rest is a privilege of the free. Your children will love leaning on pillows covered with personally crafted pillowcases. They can use fabric crayons, markers or paints to decorate a white or light-colored pillowcase with Passover symbols, sayings from the Haggadah or illustrations of the Exodus story. Be sure to follow the manufacturer's directions for making the color permanent.

Table Talk

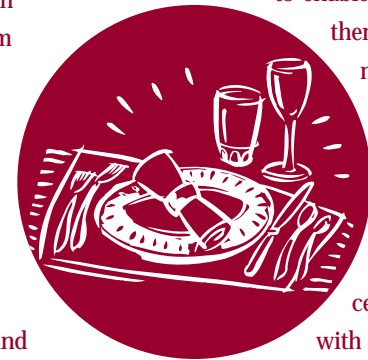
When we gather with family and friends at the Seder table, we become a link in a chain of tradition that stretches back throughout the centuries. And though each of us is instructed to feel as though we personally went forth from Egypt, sitting at the Seder shouldn't be comparable to wandering in the desert for forty years. Enliven your

Seder with table talk that invokes all generations to reflect on the Exodus story, and how it impacts their own values and Jewish identity.

- The Passover story is the history of our people. Ask your guests to retell historical events in their own families. These could include stories of immigration and adjustment to a new land.
- The Passover song "Dayenu" gives thanks for the miracles which led to our freedom. Ask those seated at your Seder table to mention special moments or miracles which have occurred since last Passover.
- We are commanded to "welcome the stranger" to our Seder table. If your children could invite anyone in the world to their Seder, whom would they invite and why?

"Let all who are hungry come and eat." (Passover Haggadah)

Throughout the generations, Jewish communities have established an annual fundraising campaign — ma'ot chittim — to enable the poor among them to purchase the matzah and other items needed to observe Passover. Teach your children how they can help others celebrate properly and with dignity. Decide as a family how much to donate, and make the delivery with your children. Your second stop can be at a local food bank where you donate unopened chametz — leavened products — that you've removed from your cupboards in preparation for the holiday. ●



Reclaiming Tradition

(continued from cover)

Bringing Judaism Home

The Noss family attended Congregation Kol Am's "Home for the Holidays" last fall looking for ways they could enhance their home celebrations of Jewish holidays. But that's not all they walked away with that September morning. Through a random drawing, they won the opportunity to bring home a sukkah — and a holiday observance they previously celebrated exclusively at temple.

"Our intention in lending the sukkahs was to encourage families to try out new ways of observing the Jewish holidays," says Rabbi Holly Levin Cohn. "Rituals can add meaning and excitement to holiday celebrations that have become routine. The important thing is that they cause us to slow down and appreciate the moment."

"Home for the Holidays" replaces regular religious school classes once a month with family programs, each focusing on a different holiday. The interactive mornings of cooking, crafts, songs and discussion are consistently well-attended — even on the coldest, snowiest days of December. "Our Chanukah family day had a phenomenal turnout," says Rabbi Cohn. "More importantly, our families were able to enhance their own home celebrations with the resources, recipes and ritual objects we provided and created that morning."



Dressing for Success

But home celebrations aren't the only ones that can be enhanced through ritual. Just ask the families of teenagers at B'nai El Congregation. For four weeks in January, they worked with their parents to create their own "Four Corners" — a tallis that reflects their personal Jewish identity. "I'd like every bar and bat mitzvah to wear a prayer shawl and a kippah," says their Rabbi Solomon Agin. "They add a certain sanctity to prayer."

Bob and Rachel Rifkin create their own "four corners."

And, according to Shera Kafka, family educator at B'nai El, the garments give them confidence. "If you are a police officer, you might feel more official wearing a uniform," she says. "So in terms of dressing for success as a Jew, a tallis and kippah help us feel more confident in our ability to do Jewish work — to read from the Torah, to pray, to perform rituals."

Such confidence also comes from the family education programs that provide the understanding and tangible objects to perform rituals long-ago abandoned. That confidence will envelop the b'nai mitzvah at B'nai El as they ascend the bimah wrapped in their fringes. It empowered families like the Noss' to bring home holiday celebrations. And for Jack Lavey, it provides a meaningful way to end each day. "That's what I like so much about Judaism," says his father. "It takes an ordinary moment like bedtime and makes it holy." ●