



The Five Foundations of Jewish Learning

by Rabbi Karyn Kedar

Transactional learning

Transactional learning avoids cotton candy education. It provides substance that has staying power. You can't become a part of the legacy of the Jewish people without basic literacy. The Torah is the Five Books of Moses. The bible is Torah, Prophets and Writings. The Jewish calendar sets the rhythm of our souls. Abraham and Sarah began a progeny of characters which form the hero's story of the Jewish people. The stages of our lives are marked with ritual to imbue a sense of belonging, continuity and sacredness to our lives. The Hebrew language is the abracadabra that unlocks sacred text. Blessings and prayers taste good, feel natural, when they are memorized. Israel is both modern and ancient and has geography, culture, and sacred story.

Transformational learning

Transformational learning is the why behind the what, it takes shared knowledge and makes it personal. I take the knowledge that has been passed on to me, and I morph the facts into meaning. How does this knowledge anchor me? How do I tether myself to something grand and eternal? Why am I alive? What is the purpose of my life? Who am I? Touch my soul. Ignite my imagination. Sustain in me a sense of wonder and curiosity.

Community

If our children finish years of school and know who Moses is but do not know who Molly is, we will have failed. To grow up privileged is grow up in a community dedicated to safety and love. We care about what the people in our community think, feel, enjoy, celebrate, and what makes them cry. We show up for each. We say Kaddish together. We dance with bride and groom. Visit the sick. And we notice when one is missing. We feel compelled to care for the wellbeing of the other. We ask *how are you?* and to wait for the answer.

Ethical Living

When we are in the center of our universe we are small and lonely. But when we are a mere speck in a magnificent continuum that spans centuries we are a part of something big. When our lives are in service to something greater than ourselves our lives have purpose. When we are obligated beyond self-interest, convenience, and rote behaviors, then life expands. We belong to a tradition that demands we heal a broken world. That we practice compassion. That we act ethically. That we love our neighbor as ourselves.

Joy and Delight

And how would we be different if we created a generation of people whose experience of Jewish learning was joyful. Could we transform the world if we taught the Judaism implores us to be delighted with our place in world? That beauty abounds? That creation is a continuous miracle? That laughter and joy are the manifestation of spiritual practice, of a sense of belonging, and a commitment to others? What if we knew, even expected to go to synagogue to have fun, rejuvenate, reduce stress, and connect to something that matters?