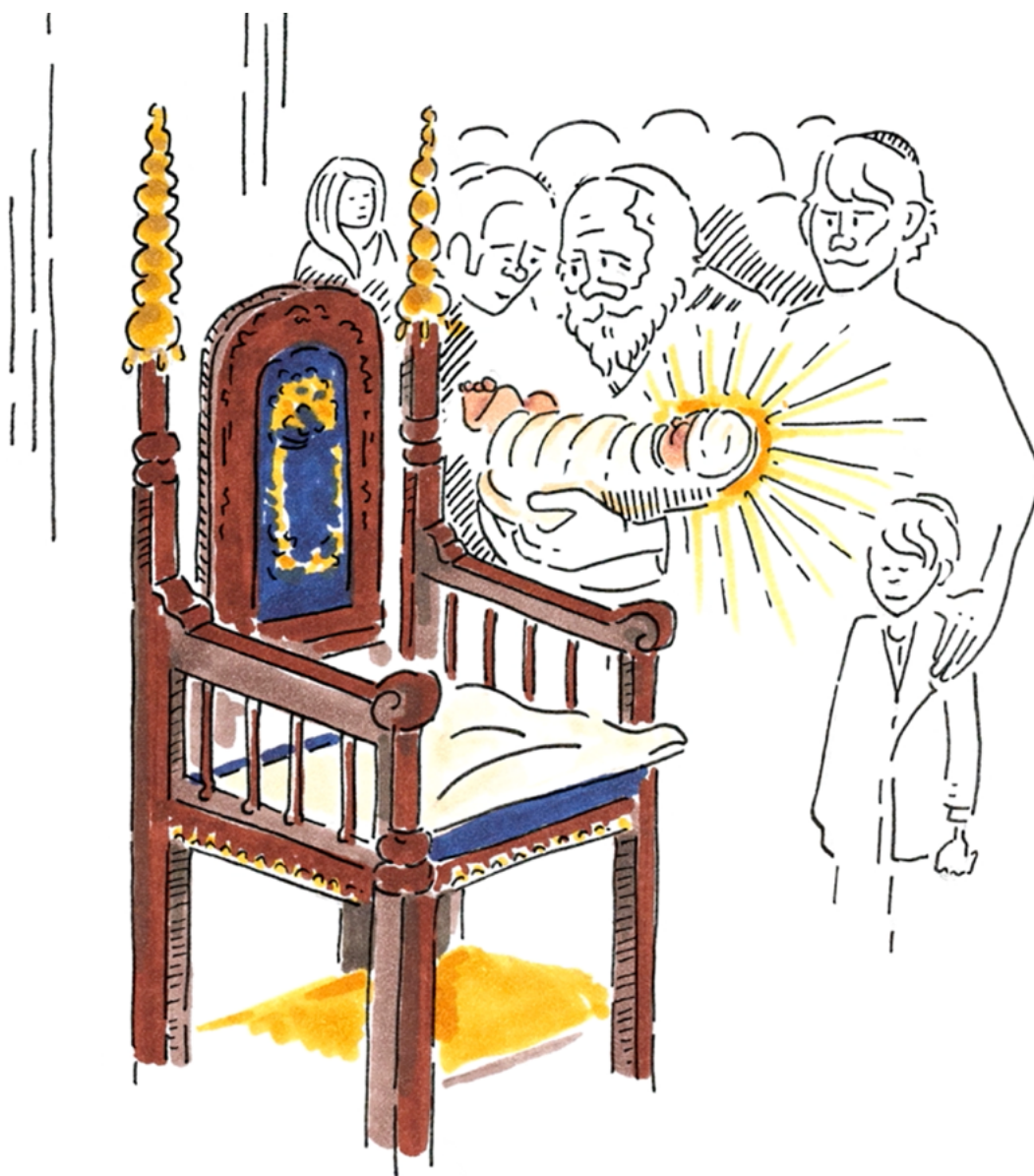


Lesson Guide: Class Fourteen

From Generation to Generation



Miller Introduction to
Judaism Program

OF AMERICAN JEWISH UNIVERSITY



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Lesson Guide for Class #14: “From Generation to Generation”

Class Summary:

Reflection on the meaning and practice of Judaism as something passed “from generation to generation” through rituals (Brit Milah, Simchat Bat, B’nai Mitzvah), parenting, and education.

Objectives:

Students will:

- Understand the basic concepts, vocabulary, and practices related to ceremonies for new Jewish babies.
- Understand the different modalities of Jewish education and b’nai mitzvah ceremony.
- Consider ways to integrate Jewish ritual and content into the life of their current/future family.

Key Vocabulary:

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| ▪ Brit Milah/Bris | ▪ Bar/Bat Mitzvah |
| ▪ Mohel | ▪ Tallit |
| ▪ Sandek | ▪ Tefilin |
| ▪ Kvatter/Kvatterin | ▪ D’var Torah |
| ▪ Simchat Bat/Brit Bat | ▪ Aliyah |
| ▪ Eliyahu ha-Navi | ▪ Mensch/Menschlikeit |
| ▪ Sheva Brakhot | ▪ Middot |

In-Person Teaching Materials:

- Room and door signs
- Name tags and pens
- Chalkboard, white-board, or large flip chart
- Colored markers or chalk
- On One Foot course books or printed PDFs
- Projector, computer & screen if using Class Slide Decks, On One Foot videos

Online Teaching Materials:

- Zoom Pro Account
- PDF of On One Foot chapter
- PowerPoint Class Slide Deck
- Appropriate background, lighting, and sound setup.

Set Induction: “What Makes a Mensch?”

Menschlikeit is a difficult word to translate. While it literally means “human-ness,” when applied in the context of child-rearing, it represents the embodiment of all the positive values that one hopes to imbue in the next generation.

Ask students to look at the list of middot (character traits) that might be considered part of being a mensch in the coursebook or slide deck. Then, ask students to mentally identify 2-3 traits that are particularly important to them and think of who the most significant person(s) was who taught them those middot.

Break them into small groups/breakout rooms and ask them to share who taught them to be a mensch and how they conveyed those middot to them. Then come back together to share.

Note from the sharing that, likely, most people will reflect that the most crucial character lessons are modeled rather than directly taught. We’re going to speak about how Jewish values get modeled, taught, and passed from generation to generation.

Lecture: “Newborn Rituals”

The Jewish Tradition provides rituals for welcoming newborn boys and girls into the covenant. The ritual of brit milah is one of the most ancient Jewish customs, while the practice of simchat bat/brit bat is something much newer. That means

that there is more to say about brit milah in terms of traditions and customs because it has been fixed for longer, not because the birth of boys is something to be taken more seriously than the birth of baby girls.

A further note for teachers about circumcision: For many Intro to Judaism students, circumcision is a source of anxiety and questions. It is important to allow lots of questions about what takes place at a brit milah, and to provide reassurance that a bris is safe and important. If it is possible to invite a mohel to come to this class and give a presentation, that would be tremendously useful and informative. You may also wish to study the texts in the coursebook and the helpful “Interview with a Mohel.”

Also, keep in mind that some adults going through the process may be considering circumcision for themselves, or at least hatafat dam, which may be a different source of anxiety. Make sure that this is not the first time that a man who is taking the class to convert learns that he may need to have something done to his genitals to complete the process—that is a better conversation to have privately!

Key Terms:

Brit Milah/Bris: The ceremony of circumcision and naming, performed by a mohel, initiates a Jewish baby boy into the covenant. The ceremony takes place on the eighth day of life, as prescribed by Genesis 17.

Simchat Bat/Brit Bat: The ceremony welcoming a baby girl and giving her a Hebrew name. Sometimes referred to as a “Brit Bat.” Since it is a modern ceremony, there are fewer halakhic requirements than at a brit milah. Parents often incorporate creative ritual moments, like lighting a candle, wrapping the baby in a tallit, or touching the baby to a Torah scroll, to mark her entrance into the covenant.

Hebrew Name: Many Jews are given a Hebrew name at birth in addition to their English name, some use the simple Hebrew equivalent of their English name, and some were never given a Hebrew name at birth. It is a long-held custom for Jews to be called by this special name at life’s most significant moments-- at birth, upon being called to the Torah as Bar or Bat Mitzvah, under the huppah, when they are sick, when they are publicly honored in the synagogue, and in the funeral prayers when they are remembered. In Ashkenazi communities, it is common to name for a deceased relative, while in Sephardic communities, it is common to name for a living relative.

Mohel: A Mohel is a person trained to perform ritual circumcisions (milah). Today, many mohelim are also physicians; though some who are not doctors are highly experienced in the procedure (the Queen of England used a mohel, rather than a doctor, to circumcise her son and grandchildren because of their expertise. The “royal moyl”)

Sandek: The sandek is the individual given the honor of holding a baby boy during his circumcision. This is the highest honor given at a Brit Milah and is often given to a family patriarch, such as a grandfather or uncle.

Kvatter/Kvatterin: The honor of carrying the baby into the room for the brit milah or simchat bat. From the German word for “godparent.”

Chair of Elijah: A chair left open at every Brit Milah and Simchat Bat to welcome Elijah. According to Tradition, Elijah was a Biblical prophet who never died and instead was brought to Heaven alive in a fiery chariot and will return to be the herald of the Messianic Age. Therefore, Elijah is said to visit every Brit Milah/Simchat Bat to indicate that every child has the potential to bring about the redemption of the world.

Break

Lecture & Discussion: “B’nai Mitzvah”

To begin this discussion, ask students who had one to reflect on their own B’nai Mitzvah experience. What do they remember most? What did it mean to them at the time, and what does it mean to them now?

Explain that there are two types of life-cycle rituals. One type of ritual *enacts* a change in status (i.e., a wedding), and another type *marks* a new status (i.e., a birthday). B’nai Mitzvah is of the latter type – one becomes a Bar/Bat Mitzvah simply by reaching the Jewish legal age of majority. The ceremony that we associate with that moment celebrates that new status by demonstrating their newly minted ability to lead prayer, read from the Torah, deliver a d’var Torah, and wear ritual items (tallit and tefillin.)

Divide students into small groups/breakout rooms to read and discuss Rabbi Ed Feinstein’s article on the value of thirteen. Do students personally resonate with the different archetypes of what early adolescence represents?

Discuss the purpose of a Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony at this particularly tumultuous time of life. What rationales for having the ceremony at this age do they find most and least compelling? What additional reasons might there be for having the ceremony at this age?

Lecture: “Jewish Education and Parenting”

Discuss different options for Jewish education for kids — including Jewish preschool, day school, supplementary schools, camps, and youth groups. Think about the pros and cons of each method of education (including immersive vs. non-immersive experiences, impact vs. cost, formal vs. informal, homogenous vs. diverse, etc.) Ask those who were raised Jewish to reflect on their Jewish education. What methods were most effective/least effective, and why?

Also, discuss strategies for creating a “thick” Jewish environment in the home. The prolific Jewish author, Anita Diamant, articulates four principles in her book *How to Raise a Jewish Child*. Write the four principles on the board and have students brainstorm different ways to achieve the following:

- 1) **Model Jewish learning** (e.g., Sign up for PJ Library and read Jewish books with your kids, discuss the parsha together on Saturdays, have Jewish books on the shelf, model lifelong learning)
- 2) **Identify Jewish teachable moments** (e.g., Learn the prayer for seeing a rainbow and recite it together with your kids whenever you spot one, visit Jewish sites when traveling, light candles together on vacation to mark Shabbat, explore Jewish stores and kosher restaurants in your city)
- 3) **Create positive Jewish memories** (e.g., Make Shabbat dinners sacred lifelong memories, go “all-out” in celebrating Jewish holidays, make sure that Judaism is alive and fun rather than a burden.)
- 4) **Make room for the holy** (Children have a natural spirituality, which adults would do well to cultivate. Pray together at bedtime, encourage God-talk, and don’t be afraid to answer big questions with “I don’t know.” For help with this, see Harold Kushner’s “When Children Ask about God” and Ed Feinstein’s “Tough Questions Jews Ask.”)

Wrap Up and Reflection

Journal Prompt: "What were some of the most important values passed down to you in your childhood. What important values do you want to see passed to the next generation?"

Instructors should be checking for understanding throughout the lesson and regularly pausing for questions. However, it is essential to do so at the close of each class. In addition to using the journal prompts included in coursebook, the instructor may wish to do a group check for understanding using one of the following methods:

- As a whole class, have students go around and briefly state/write in chat one thing they learned/that surprised them/that interested them in class.
- Have students divide into pairs and share with their partner something they learned/that surprised them/that particularly interested them.

If you want to check that the students understand primary content, at the end of this class, students should be able to define the key vocabulary and speak about the ways in which Jewish identity is taught and passed down.

At Home Work

Students should be told to watch the "From Generation to Generation" video and answer the review questions and journal prompt.