

# JEWISH YOUTH PLEDGE OVERVIEW

Educators have the distinct responsibility to empower students to create meaning through helping to build skills, knowledge, values and lived experiences for Jewish youth. In turn these can help stimulate a sense of ownership, attachment, and connection. As educators, we need to cultivate an experience that resonates with the diverse participants that we encounter. Ultimately, we are not looking to define their journey or impose specific value systems and practices – we want to inspire them to actively engage – encouraging them to ask themselves whether they feel a sense of responsibility and if they will take any action to affirm their commitments to their Jewish identity as they complete a meaningful Jewish experience.

## What We Offer

The Jewish Youth Pledge empowers young people to make a powerful commitment among thousands of their peers across the globe to actively strengthen the Jewish people and Israel. Participants sign the pledge following a powerful educational program, delivered by educators they know at the end of a peak immersive Jewish experience. The program culminates with a deeply reflective moment where participants envision who they want to become, consider how to make that happen and commit it to writing in a letter to their future selves. The letter is stored in a tailor-made digital Time Capsule that participants will receive at key junctures throughout the next two decades of their life.

On an individual level, the Jewish Youth Pledge Program empowers participants to internalize their experience, concretize their aspirations and translate the inspiration into meaningful actions. For participating organizations, this provides the opportunity to continue connecting with participants throughout the journey of life, while reminding them of the transformative experience. While communication with participants will only come from organizations that facilitated the program and the letter in the Time Capsule will only be read by the participant themselves, undergoing this process alongside so many others around the world represents the added message that we are greater than the sum of our parts in this generation and, each of us represent a unique link within the incredible chain of generations.

## Your Program, Your Way

This lesson plan was designed by seasoned educators with the input from many diverse experts to be a comprehensive guide for the guide, with activities that have been adapted or restructured according to different ages and stages. These lesson plans differ slightly but enable the content to be utilized across multiple forms and settings. You will be able to select from different versions and the architecture is modular, allowing suitability for multiple settings (indoor with AV equipment or outdoor), ages (mid-teens or university age), settings (camps or Israel programs) or lengths of time (a 15-minutes to 1 hour). As educators and facilitators, regardless of where or for whom you are running this program – choosing the lesson place and time most appropriate for your group is imperative and will contribute to its successful implementation.

# JEWISH YOUTH PLEDGE WRAP-UP PROGRAM

## Preface

We all struggle to capture the magic that happens in an immersive Jewish experience and help the participant internalize and carry it forward to commit to the Jewish future.

This program aims to help participants capture the magic of your experience, channeling the passion from this experience to commit to strengthening the Jewish future. Through identifying the leaders and actions that have influenced them, they can think about how they are going to transform themselves from being passive recipients to actively engaging and contributing as leaders. Through articulating in their own language what motivates them to move from cognition to active participation, they feel a more personal commitment and greater sense of ownership and responsibility.

This program can be run as-is or can serve as a basis to suit your specific educational needs. Please ensure that the participants sign the Jewish Youth Pledge at the end and submit their letter to the **Time Capsule** so that the journey can continue through:

1. Reflecting on and concretizing their experience
2. Reconnecting with that moment in the future
3. Having touchpoints for your organization to trigger memories and future action

Ultimately, we are not looking to define their journey or impose a specific value system or practices but aim to inspire them to deepen their Jewish moral compass and become participants in the story of the Jewish people.

This program can be used prescriptively, following the clear method and discussion points, or descriptively, where you apply your own experiences through additional, personal examples, ideas and activities. Either way, it is about you feeling comfortable to facilitate the journey. We have provided time suggestions, but if you have the time this can be extended. Different groups will need to work through the program and consider how it might need to be adapted to suit their demographic at camp in the best way possible. **The educational journey includes 5 key stages:**

- A** Recognizing pivotal moments in participants Jewish experiences
- B** Identifying and defining personal Jewish identities
- C** Drawing inspiration and applying this to the participants own lives
- D** Taking the Pledge
- E** Entering the Time Capsule

## Lesson Objectives

1. Define pivotal experiences from the program.
2. Discuss acting on positive inspiration.
3. Set a practical goal/resolution to maintain their memories of these programs and sign the Pledge.

## Lesson Resources

- This lesson requires a cell phone or electronic device for participants to take the Pledge (if certain movements would prefer to NOT use a cellphone in the program, then they would need to have participants take the Pledge at a later time)
- Students will require writing material.
- The cards in Appendix A will need to be cut out.
- There are optional videos that require a screen and audio system.

# A Introduction: Picking Pivotal Moments

*(Approximately 15 minutes)*

Before the students arrive, ensure the cards in Appendix A are cut out. Set the tone for the participants regarding the program and explain what they put into it is what they will get out of it:

1. The images on the cards display various impactful moments in a Jewish person's life. Ask participants to examine the various images and choose three which they believe are the most impactful in Jewish life and should be prioritized. Put calming Jewish music on in the background and spread the cards in front of them *(3 mins)*.
2. Initiate a discussion on what the participants chose:
  - Why are these experiences most impactful for you?
  - In what ways or how do you think the community you were raised in influenced these choices?
  - Is there anyone in particular who has inspired you or that you look up to that has made a difference in your diverse Jewish experiences.
  - Has this experience been impactful or influenced what you would like to accomplish one day? *(5 mins)*
3. Ask students to reflect on 1–3 of their most impactful moments throughout this experience. Ask them to close their eyes and picture themselves at that moment and write about the experience. Offer the opportunity for students to share once they have written it out. *(7 mins)*

**B**

# The Jewish People and Me

*(Approximately 15 minutes)*

It is important to remember that we are giving the participants a sense of ownership over their Jewish identities here, we are not trying to tell them what to do, but rather we are allowing for a sense of momentum that extends beyond these particular reflections.

Having grounded ourselves in the concept of pivotal moments, we now move beyond that experience, towards helping facilitate a sense of ownership for the participants over their Jewish identities, creating a platform for them to articulate their own thoughts and reflections that can be directed into meaningful action.

Begin by asking the participants: "What is one thing in your life or within the world around you that you truly care about, enough to take action and do something about it?"

These are two videos that you can choose between to include at this point (we recommend using only one). They are great for the participants to reflect on at this point because they assist with sparking ideas and contextualizing personal conversations about Jewish identity. This should contribute toward shifting their emotional experiences and feelings of inspiration into potential action – all through developing a genuine sense of accountability and responsibility as Jews (the pledge) and within their broader community moving forward.

If there is no access to a screen, the audio can be used alone and if this doesn't exist, print the script in (Appendix B) to have a participant read or share a personal reflection. (5 mins)

## [Play the Jonathan Sacks video](#) ["Why I am a Jew"](#)

*In this whiteboard animation, Rabbi Sacks explains why he is proud to be a Jew and what it is about Judaism that makes it so unique. This passionate appeal calls on Jews around the world, from across the political and religious spectrum, to connect to their people, heritage and faith.*

OR

## [Play the Andrew Lustig video](#) ["I Am Jewish"](#)

*In this piece of slam poetry, Andrew Lustig beautifully expresses and illustrates what it means to be a proud Jew and member of the Jewish people, widening the reference point to be more unique and diverse.*

Ask the participants to think about what being part of the Jewish People means to them. They must condense their answers into one word and write it onto a large piece of paper and draw a picture that represents this. Go around the circle and ask them to share their thoughts. Participants can then draw connections between their word and that of others they connect with in the discussion group.

After participants have shared their thoughts, the following questions could serve to assist with the discussion:

1. Which answers did you connect with?
2. Which answers were the most surprising?
3. How would you define your connection to the Jewish People two years ago? What about now? What do you hope it will be in 2 years?

This might be the first time that the participants have thought about or connected with their Jewish identities in this way and it is certainly the first time in this unique moment, which is why it is important for them to reflect on how this particular experience has impacted the narrative of being Jewish for them and how it has inspired them to practically and actively live their identities moving forward.

The educator can of course lead the discussion in a direction suitable for the group. The aim, however, is for participants to define their place within the Jewish community so that when it comes to signing the pledge or writing a letter for the time capsule, they can identify and acknowledge what it means to them more authentically. (10 minutes).

# C Inspiration from the Greats, Great Inspiration

*(Approximately 10 minutes)*

"A generation that does not remember the past does not deserve to be remembered in the future"- this is the part of the program where we need to take their inspiration and drive it into action by placing them in the line of history of people who have taken their own 'pledges' to Judaism in diverse ways. We want them to begin thinking how they can impact such that their future remembers them, using meaningful content that can translate into multiple discussions- giving them a platform in which they can infuse with meaning.

It might be important to highlight for the participants here how their role and responsibility to the Jewish people is beginning to evolve as they enter new phases of their lives and the needs of the Jewish community at large are beginning to change with time.

We are part of a larger community, not just individual Jews which is why we need to encourage them to question how participation in their most recent experience/program brings them into the larger community and their community? The purpose of this is to widen the definition for the participants around being part of the Jewish people so that they choose for themselves what making a pledge means on an individual or personal level.

Ask the participants whether their most recent experience has made them feel a greater sense of responsibility to the Jewish people and/or Israel or whether it has impacted their Jewish identity at all?

While they consider it there will be stories about two different people who act as historic examples and illustrate the above in alternative ways (5 mins):

## Akiva

One day, while sitting by a stream, Akiva noticed a steady trickle of water dripping on a rock. It was only a drip, but it was constant – drop after drop after drop. Akiva observed something incredible: A hole had been carved out by that steady drip of water.

'How could it be?' he wondered.

'If something as soft as water can carve a hole in solid rock,' he concluded, 'how much more so can words of Torah – which are as hard as iron – make an indelible impression on my heart.'

That marked a turning point in Rabbi Akiva's life. He committed himself to learning and went on to become the greatest sage and leader of his generation, with 24,000 disciples.

This is a powerful analogy that small steps can make a much bigger difference or impact, and when you see or experience something small, you can implement it into significant change.

## Sivan Ya'Ari

The first time Israeli Sivan Ya'Ari visited Africa, she was only 20 years old in a factory for Jordache Jeans in Madagascar. While in Madagascar, she had the chance to spend time with women and children from a nearby village and one night, they took her to a medical center where she saw women waiting to give birth in complete darkness, doctors could not treat their patients and the only light was a candle and a small kerosene lamp. It was then that she understood that without energy, medical centers can't store vaccines and medications, people can't access the water that exists just meters beneath their feet, and without water, people cannot drink, they cannot grow food, children are unable to attend school as they spend their days searching for water. By simply harnessing the energy of the sun, it was possible to make a real and immediate change. This is how her non-profit organization Innovation: Africa was born.

For the past 13 years, this women-led non-profit organization has deployed clean power technology to schools, medical centers and communities, providing access to clean water. To date, the organization has completed over 500 solar and water projects with the aim to complete an additional 2,000 projects over the next five years by bringing Israeli solar, water and agricultural technologies to rural African villages across 10 African countries: South Africa, eSwatini, Uganda, Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia, Cameroon, DRC, Senegal and Ethiopia.

Sivan's commitment to Tikkun Olam and the pursuit of social justice is what drives one of the core Jewish values that she wants to impart to others-to not be bystanders. She emphasizes how "we need to help others, but at the same time we shouldn't act out of mere compassion. We should do it because what is still happening right now in parts of the world is unjust. I'd also like to teach the importance of curiosity, asking questions and finding a solution".

Discuss the following questions (5 mins):

1. What is the message of Akiva and Sivan?
2. How can we apply it to our lives?
3. Does anyone want to share a moment where they experienced this desire to take action and do something, when they recognized the need?
4. How could you utilize your knowledge and skills to help strengthen your local Jewish community and the Jewish community in its entirety?
5. What actions and deeds would you think you could do to best contribute to your broader communities moving forward?

Have the group split into pairs, think for a minute, and then describe their own brief biography – like what was done with Sivan and Akiva relating to what they hope they could accomplish or have achieved by the time they are 50. Encourage each participant to pick 1-3 practical ways in which they will strengthen their Jewish self.

# D Taking the Pledge, Taking the Plunge

(Approximately 5 minutes)

## What is the Jewish Youth Pledge?

The Jewish Youth Pledge asks Jewish teens and young adults to commit to strengthening the Jewish community throughout their lives. It calls on them to actively contribute their unique talents in a range of ways to build up their local communities and global Jewry. The Jewish Youth Pledge addresses a critical need: To present Jewish teens and young adults with a connection to their Jewish identity and Israel that is anchored in personal responsibility and agency. The goal of the pledge is to ignite a surge in Jewish pride that will equip young people with the confidence to contribute to a strong Jewish future.

1. *The Jewish Youth Pledge video can be played for the participants at this point.*

**THIS generation writes the next chapter of the Jewish story and remains a strong link in the chain of generations.**

The goal is to transform them from remembering something to re-membering, becoming members again of this commitment, Pledge and community. Explain that tens of thousands of Jewish youth from around the world are signing a Pledge to ensure we are part of the Jewish future. It is general and you can make it what you want, but the idea is we are part of something greater than ourselves.

2. *Then distribute the pledge and asks a camper to read it aloud.*

I hereby pledge to act today and throughout my lifetime **to strengthen the Jewish people and Israel**. I make this commitment because I have a responsibility to ensure that my generation **writes the next chapter of the Jewish story** and remains a strong link in the chain of generations.

3. *Facilitator encourages campers to sign the pledge as a way of acknowledging all that came before them and committing to provide for those who come next.*

Share with the participants – that sometimes we have moments of clarity. This is one of them. When we leave these moments, we need to remind ourselves what is truly important, regardless of what we are doing.

# E

## Writing a Letter for the Time Capsule

*(Approximately 10 minutes)*

After signing the Youth Pledge, the participants are encouraged to experience the Pledge on a deeper and more personal level, by writing a letter to their future selves. This allows the Pledge to be a significant part of their own journey into self-discovery and what is important to them. The letter will sit in a tailor-made digital Time Capsule and will be sent to the participant on the 20th anniversary of its submission by the organization through which they signed the Pledge with. In the intervening years, the participant will be sent periodic texts reminding them of their participation on the program and allowing them to reflect on their experience at different points in their lives, as time goes on.

Explain to the participants that we need to find a way to tap into what we are feeling or experiencing right now so that we can feel impacted and inspired by this particular experience, regardless of where we are or what we are doing in our lives. Share with them that they are about to write a letter that no one will ever read except themselves and will receive this at a future point in their lives.

Ask them to think about the following question before writing their letter?

"If you could meet yourself in the future, what would you hope to hear that you had accomplished or contributed? Will what you wrote down that you cared about in the beginning of this program be part of your mission toward tikkun olam?"

Invite them to write their letter to their future selves in the Time Capsule by following [this form](#).

(Perhaps as part of the type form the following questions can be used to prompt)

Conclude with the fact that today is the first day of the rest of their life. They were here for a reason and should take the inspiration to accept the mantle of responsibility and write the next chapter of our people with distinction.

# APPENDIX A: MEANINGFUL MOMENTS



**Passover Seder**



**Brit Milah**



**B'nai Mitzvah**



**Jewish Pride**



**Wedding**



**Jewish Camp**

# APPENDIX A: MEANINGFUL MOMENTS *(cont'd)*



**Shabbat Dinner**



**Synagogue**



**Purim**



**Chanukah**



**Visiting Israel**



**Jewish Classes**

# APPENDIX A: MEANINGFUL MOMENTS *(cont'd)*



**Chesed**



**Learning Torah**



**Tzedakah & Philanthropy**



**Israel Advocacy**



**Honoring Our Jewish Past**

**Other**

# APPENDIX B: SCRIPTS FOR VIDEOS

## Why am I a Jew?

*By Rabbi Jonathan Sacks*

The deepest question any of us can ask is: 'Who am I?' To answer it we have to go deeper than 'Where do I live?' or 'What do I do?' The most fateful moment in my life came when I asked myself that question and knew the answer had to be: I am a Jew. This is why. I am a Jew not because I believe that Judaism contains all there is of the human story; I admire other traditions and their contributions to the world. Nor am I a Jew because of anti-Semitism or anti-Zionism. What happens to me does not define who I am; ours is a people of faith, not fate. Nor is it because I think that Jews are better than others, more intelligent, creative, generous or successful. It's not Jews who are different, but Judaism. It's not so much what we are but what we are called on to be. I am a Jew because, being a child of my people, I have heard the call to add my chapter to its unfinished story. I am a stage on its journey, a connecting link between the generations. The dreams and hopes of my ancestors live on in me, and I am the guardian of their trust, now and for the future. I am a Jew because our ancestors were the first to see that the world is driven by a moral purpose, that reality is not a ceaseless war of the elements, to be worshiped as gods, nor history a battle in which might is right and power is to be appeased. The Judaic tradition shaped the moral civilization of the West, teaching for the first time that human life is sacred, that the individual may never be sacrificed for the mass, and that rich and poor, great and small, are all equal before God. I am a Jew because I am the moral heir of those who stood at the foot of Mount Sinai and pledged themselves to live by these truths for all time. I am the descendant of countless generations of ancestors who, though sorely tested and bitterly tried, remained faithful to that covenant when they might so easily have defected. I am a Jew because of Shabbat, the world's greatest religious institution, a time in which there is no manipulation of nature or our fellow human beings, in which we come together in freedom and equality to create, every week, an anticipation of the messianic age. I am a Jew because our nation, though at times it suffered the deepest poverty, never gave up on its commitment to helping the poor, or rescuing Jews from other lands, or fighting for justice for the oppressed, and did so without self-congratulation, because it was a mitzvah, because a Jew could do no less. I am a Jew because I cherish the Torah, knowing that God is to be found not just

in natural forces but in moral meanings, in words, texts, teachings and commands, and because Jews, though they lacked all else, never ceased to value education as a sacred task, endowing the individual with dignity and depth. I am a Jew because of our people's passionate faith in freedom, holding that each of us is a moral agent, and that in this lies our unique dignity as human beings; and because Judaism never left its ideals at the level of lofty aspirations, but instead translated them into deeds which we call mitzvot, and a way, which we call the halacha, and thus brought heaven down to earth. I am proud, simply, to be a Jew. I am proud to be part of a people who, though scarred and traumatized, never lost their humor or their faith, their ability to laugh at present troubles and still believe in ultimate redemption; who saw human history as a journey, and never stopped traveling and searching. I am proud to be part of an age in which my people, ravaged by the worst crime ever to be committed against a people, responded by reviving a land, recovering their sovereignty, rescuing threatened Jews throughout the world, rebuilding Jerusalem, and proving themselves to be as courageous in the pursuit of peace as in defending themselves in war. I am proud that our ancestors refused to be satisfied with premature consolations, and in answer to the question, 'Has the Messiah come?' always answered, 'Not yet.' I am proud to belong to the people of Israel, whose name means "one who wrestles with God and with man and prevails." For though we have loved humanity, we have never stopped wrestling with it, challenging the idols of every age. And though we have loved God with an everlasting love, we have never stopped wrestling with Him, nor He with us. I admire other civilizations and traditions, and believe each has brought something special into the world, *aval zeh shelanu*, "but this is ours". This is my people, my heritage, my faith. In our uniqueness lies our universality. Through being what we alone are, we give to humanity what only we can give. This, then, is our story, our gift to the next generation. I received it from my parents, and they from theirs, across great expanses of space and time. There is nothing quite like it. It changed, and still challenges, the moral imagination of mankind. I want to say to Jews around the world: Take it, cherish it, learn to understand and to love it. Carry it and it will carry you. And may you in turn pass it on to future generations. For you are a member of an eternal people, a letter in their scroll. Let their eternity live on in you.

# APPENDIX B: SCRIPTS FOR VIDEOS *(cont'd)*

## I am Jewish *By Andrew Lustig*

I am the collective pride and excitement that is felt when we find out that that new actor, that great athlete, his chief of staff... is Jewish

I am the collective guilt and shame that is felt when we find out that that serial killer, that Ponzi schemer, that wife beater... is Jewish

I am the Jewish star tattooed on the chest of the teenager who chooses to rebel against his parents' and grandparents' warnings of a lonely goyim cemetery by embracing that same Judaism and making permanent his Jewish identity

I am all the words in Yiddish I've been called all my life that I still don't understand.

I am going to all three Phish shows this weekend.

I am my melody of Adon Olam. I am my melody of Adon Olam. The words may be the same but I am my melody of Adon Olam.

I am not getting Bar Mitzvahed. I am a Bar Mitzvah.

I am a concept foreign to the rest of the world. I am not Judaism. I am sleep-away camp.

I am your grandmother who's seen Chortkov and Auschwitz, who's seen '49, '67, and '73 and whose tired of trying to make peace with those people who just want to blow up buses and destroy her people.

I am the 19 year old who's seen Budrus, Don't Mess With the Zohan, and Waltz with Bashir and who thinks – who knows – peace is possible.

I am the complicated reason you take the cheese off of the burger you eat at the Saturday morning tailgate

I am constantly struggling to understand my Jewish identity outside of religion.

I am the Torah and not the Old Testament

I am a Kepah and not a Skull Cap

I am a Jew and not an Israeli

5,000 years old... not 60

A religion, not a country

I am never asked if I have horns or a pot of gold, if I rule the world or why I killed Jesus.

I am asked where my black hat is, if I really get 8 presents on my Christmas, why my sideburns aren't super long, and if I've really never tried bacon.

I am asked what a Gefilte Fish is. I say, "I don't know. I don't like it. Nobody does. But we eat it because its what we do."

I am asked if my dad's a lawyer. I say "no... my mom is... my dad's an accountant."

I am asked if my grandparents were in the Holocaust as if it were a movie. "Yeah, they were. But luckily they were also on Schindler's List."

I am on JDate and not Match.com because, well, it's just easier that way.

I am that feeling of obligation to buy the Dead Sea salt at the mall kiosk because you know the woman's Israeli.

I am an IDF sweatshirt and the Chai around your neck. I am a \$100 Challah cover you will never use and a 5 Shekel piece of red string you will wear until it withers away. I am your Hebrew name. I am your Israeli cousins. I am your Torah portion and your 13 candles. I am your Bat Mitzvah dress and the cute Israeli soldier on your Birthright trip.

I am 18 when I discover that Israel is not actually a garden of Eden of milk and honey where Jews of all backgrounds, ethnicities, and styles of worship come together – eternally happy and appreciative – to do a constant Hora in the streets of the promised land.

I am still confident it will be.

I am the way your stomach forgets to be hungry and your lungs forget to breathe when the Rabbi commands the final Tekiah Gadolah and an entire congregation – a congregation that is not any one synagogue but an entire people – listens to what on January 1st is a ball dropping in Times Square, but today – any day in late September or early October for the 5770th time is a Ram's horn being blown into for what seems like 10 minutes, like the 8 days the oil burned, and how David defeated Goliath, and how Moses parted the seas – it would have been enough, dayenu – how we won the war, and how your grandparents survived, Nes Gadol Haya Sham – Shana Tova – time for bagels and lox. I am Jewish.