JEWISH CREATIVITY: AN ESSENTIAL ASPIRATION FOR JEWISH EDUCATION

MIRIAM HELLER STERN

JACK, JOSEPH AND MORTON MANDEL CENTER
FOR STUDIES IN JEWISH EDUCATION

BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY

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FOR MILLENNIA, Jews have responded creatively to their circumstances. After destruction, renewal. In the face of denial of the Jewish historical experience, insistence on memory. Moving and migrating necessitated reinventing and rebuilding. Reading, translating, and reinterpreting have been a strategy for preservation, adaptation, and transformation over time. Collaborating in community enabled individuals to thrive as a collective. Blending, remixing, and crafting new tastes, music, prayers, foods, rituals, and ideas generated Jewish culture and practice in every new era and geographic arena. This essay reflects a decade of research and teaching on Jewish creative education during one of the most generative periods in Jewish history. On October 7th, the Jewish world awakened to the reality that antisemitism and threats to the State of Israel were not simply chapters of our history, but live existential concerns. Now, a new need for creative approaches to collective coping, healing, resilience, and overcoming has emerged once again. The Jewish community is living through daunting echoes of the past while we continue to enjoy the promise of vast intellectual, spiritual, and cultural resources. Against a landscape as dynamic now as it has been in history, how can we design Jewish education as a tool to navigate this moment and construct a hopeful future?

In this essay, I present a case for why the modern Jewish education enterprise should consciously induct Jewish learners into the habits of creative thinking that have sustained the Jewish people through centuries of crisis and opportunity. Drawing from a wide range of theory and research, including affective neuroscience, Jewish philosophy and education, and studies of creativity and arts education, I construct a definition of Jewish creativity that can be pursued across the Jewish educational ecosystem. Building on this historical and philosophical rationale and putting the definition into practice, I suggest four facets of creativity—interpreting, curating, making, and collaborating—that I believe are essential for ensuring a future where Jews can continue to negotiate the conditions of their day, while pursuing the future they want to see. I will demonstrate through both the rationale and the practical applications how the facets lend themselves to improving the lives of individuals, families, communities, and society. From the conceptual discussion to the applications described, I hope that this essay will inspire conversation and generate new ideas across diverse stakeholders in Jewish education, as we consider current and future priorities and practices for the field.

As an academic practitioner, leader, researcher, and strategist in Jewish education, my interest in Jewish creativity has blossomed over a decade of collaboration with Jewish teaching artists—experts in theater, poetry, storytelling, visual artmaking, music, film, and more—co-constructing learning with them and observing them activate various facets of creativity in their learners through their teaching.[1] I have noticed how they create environments that foster creative thinking and how *chidushim*—novel ideas and interpretations—are generated in their learning spaces. Inspired again and again, I have wanted to convey why and how this teaching is so powerful to a broader audience of practitioners, philanthropists, and scholars of Jewish education. As more practitioners experiment in the arena of creative Jewish education, I hope the aspirations described here will become a more commonplace reality across the field.

There are multiple ways to frame an aspiration for Jewish education, and here I offer a new approach.[2] The evolution in the design and delivery of Jewish education over almost two centuries in America reflects ideological pivots among professional and volunteer educators, clergy, philanthropists, academics, and parents, who have wrestled with competing motivations and priorities in different historical moments. Since the 19th century, we have seen defensive responses to perceived threats external and internal, including missionaries, assimilation, intermarriage, and antisemitism. Jewish educators have also designed schools and programs to reflect various narratives of who we are as Jews in America: morally upright in alignment with 19th century Protestant mores; good citizens of the 20th century who successfully balanced hyphenated identities; agents of *tikkun olam* (a Jewishly-inspired commitment to repairing the world) and social justice in progressive circles; guardians of tradition in the modern world; heroes who overcame the persecutions of the past. [3]

In recent decades, Jewish educational thinkers endeavored to replace a story of Jewish suffering and survival with a story of Jewish living filled with meaning and purpose. These newer visions of Jewish education take for granted the successful integration of Jews into American society. They seek ways to make

1 Much of the experimentation and observation that informs my work has been generously supported by grants from the Covenant Foundation between 2013 and 2023, with the aim of enriching the creative capacities of Jewish educators. The analysis here is my own and does not represent the views of the foundation or its leadership. I am grateful for not only the financial support but the Covenant Foundation's belief in prioritizing the integration of Jewish arts and culture into Jewish education and the development of Jewish artists as Jewish educational visionaries. See also, Stern and Belzer, "The Past as Portal to the Future."

2 While this discussion has the aspirations and concerns of the American Jewish community in primary focus, I have argued elsewhere that creativity can be a unifying aim for Jewish peoplehood (see Stern, "Sustaining a Creative People: Learning the Habits of Creative Thinking"). I am aware of and sensitive to the possibility that at any moment, Jewish communities around the world and in Israel could face more acute threats to their safety, in which case the applications of this vision might be informed by those realities, as they unfold. A more exhaustive review of the similarities and distinctions across Jewish educational aspirations in various countries is beyond the scope of this essay.

3 For recent comprehensive historical overviews of 19th and 20th century Jewish educational design, see Krasner, *The Benderly Boys and American Jewish Education*; Yares, *Jewish Sunday Schools*.

Judaism more attractive in an age of autonomy and choice. Instead of a defensive or guilt-ridden posture, they suggest new emphases on finding personal meaning, happiness, and learning to thrive, with proposals for how Jewish education should be designed and delivered to achieve their respective desired outcomes.[4] Uniting these recommendations is a belief that Jewish education cannot be reduced to the accumulation of knowledge of history, texts, or rituals without being offered in a context in which learners can see the relevance and application of that learning, toward a life worth living. To be effective in any Jewish setting where learners can opt in or out, Jewish education needs to be compelling, guided by a purpose that learners can see, experience, and understand.

This prevailing set of learner-centered frameworks is compelling in its quest for Jewish belonging and purposeful living. However, the current trend does not yet intentionally foster the habits of learning and ingenuity that have fueled the evolution of Judaism and Jews' relationship to the broader society throughout the centuries. Creativity has been a valuable Jewish strategy for adaptation, transformation, and reconstruction. Creative thinking is at the heart of the story of who we are and have been, a way of achieving what we have not yet imagined. The idea of Jewish creative thinking is not new, and yet it can always be renewed. As individuals and as a collective, Jews have responded creatively to social forces and generated new ideas and culture over millennia. Creative thinking can be employed for cultural preservation and forging new pathways forward in the face of obstacles and threats. The Jewish community itself is comprised of a pluralistic spectrum of ideologies, meaning there is a wide range of possibilities as to how the habits of creativity can be applied and to what ends. While other aspirations for Jewish education have seemed more or less immediately urgent

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4 This essay offers a new lens on a discourse on the vision, purpose, aims, and design principles of Jewish education framed notably in Chazan, et al., *Cultures and Contexts of Jewish Education*; Fox, et al, *Visions of Jewish Education*; Jacobs," Problems and Prospects of Jewish Education"; Jacobs and Chazan, "18x18 Framework"; Jacobs and Taylor, "Jewish Education Should have Shoulds"; Kelman and Levisohn, *Beyond Jewish Identity*; Levisohn, "Extending the Conversation on Visions of Jewish Education," "A New Paradigm of Jewish Literacy," "Producers Not Possessors"; Pekarsky, "The Place of Vision in Jewish Education Reform"; Reimer, "Beyond More Jews Doing Jewish"; Stern, "From Thriving to Striving"; Stern, "Jewish Creative Sensibilities: Framing a New Aspiration for Jewish Education"; The Jewish Education Project, "From Census to Possibilities: Designing Pathways for Jewish Learners"; Woocher et al., "Redesigning Jewish Education for the 21st Century."

in the face of different historical crises and social trends, creativity forges a continuous and timeless pathway through Jewish experience, through the difficult and the uplifting moments, from history to the present and the future.

What is Jewish creativity and why is it an essential aim of Jewish education? This paper constructs a working definition of Jewish creativity, articulates why Jewish creativity is important to teach and learn, and finally, suggests a practical framework of four facets of creativity that we might use as a guide to pursue such an aspiration. In Part 1 I begin with "why," presenting a philosophical, historical, and research-based rationale for centering creativity as an aim of Jewish education. In Part 2 I turn to the practical, delving into four facets of creativity as a framework for a serious integration of creative habits into Jewish education. This framework of habits is intended to be pursued across the Jewish educational ecosystem today.[5]

Creativity is certainly not the only way to define the aim of Jewish education and the ideas presented here are not mutually exclusive from all other aims. Indeed, the facets of creativity can be utilized to strengthen other aims of Jewish education, such as literacy and belonging. I will share detailed glimpses of creative Jewish educators who deliver compelling learning experiences worthy of examination. They are exemplars for a broader strategy of teaching and learning creativity and for developing the ecology where creative teaching feels natural. It is my hope that this essay will stir discussion and imagination about how to expand and implement this vision in practice. With a new focus on creativity, we can strengthen in learners the muscles of creative resilience, imagination, and flexible adaptation. Such habits are essential for navigating an unstable world full of possibility and challenge and for shaping the future.

5 The conception of creativity presented here is not limited in its application to the arts, although the arts provide many instructive examples for how to foster habits of creativity. Many types of learning, depending on the learning design, can immerse students in different facets of creativity, which I will reference. It is my hope that this discussion will invite further studies in creative practice across learning settings and domains.

PART I: WHY JEWISH CREATIVITY?

Jewish Education for the Modern World: A Spiritual and Cultural Dimension

The dilemmas of Jewish education today are not new. For an instructive and transformational perspective, we can look back a century to when Mordecai Kaplan issued a bold charge for Jewish education within his 500 plus-page proposal for the architecture of modern Judaism, *Judaism as a Civilization*. "Judaism is a problem to those who have to teach it," he mused in his opening sentence of the preface, "and what Jew is exempt from teaching it?" He went on to explain that the book was his "attempt to come to grips with the problem of getting Jews to live a Jewish life and do it wholeheartedly" (p. xxix). Kaplan developed his vision in era with some parallels to today: it was the aftermath of World War I, on the heels of unprecedented immigration and urbanization, and a society overcoming the Depression. The American Jewish community was eager to secure acceptance in society and address antisemitism. At the same time, the Interwar Period also witnessed the proliferation of youth culture and expanded opportunities for leisure activities and youth education. Such tectonic shifts and social trends required new mechanisms for building Jewish community and culture. Engaging young people in Jewish education could not be taken for granted. Kaplan understood that world events would demand new imagination about how to live Jewishly in the modern world. A new educational strategy would be needed to solve this problem; previewing the challenges Jewish education faces today, Kaplan's approach provides a foundation for the 21st century discussion here.

Kaplan popularized the notion that modern Jews would relate to Judaism differently than previous generations. In an address at the Jewish Theological Seminary's Teachers Institute early in his career, he posited that "the future of Judaism demanded that all Jewish teaching and practical activity be based on the proposition that the Jewish religion existed for the Jewish people and not the Jewish people for the Jewish religion" (p. xxx).[6] The idea that Jews should utilize Judaism to live in the world today, not just protect it for future generations, would entail a practical way of thinking about the ultimate outcome of Jewish education. "To be trained as a Jew," Kaplan asserted, "should mean to be given the habits that would help one function creatively in all of life's

6 Kaplan described this realization as a "Copernican Revolution" in his conception of the relationship between Jews and Judaism, much like Copernicus' revolutionary discovery that the Earth revolves around the sun rather than the sun revolving around the Earth.

situations" (p. 486). The purpose of living Jewishly, in Kaplan's view, was not confined to safeguarding Judaism to enshrine the religion for its own sake and perpetuity. Rather, he envisioned Jews being able to apply Jewish wisdom to function creatively in a mad, dynamic, real world. As such, the aim of Jewish learning, he asserted, was not simply to pass on tradition and texts; Judaism could be reconstructed for a rapidly changing modern world, and Jewish education was an essential tool for achieving that aim.

In this vision for the future of Judaism, Kaplan viewed creativity as an essential Jewish disposition for the development of viable and lasting Jewish life and culture. He identified creativity as one of the five aims of Jewish education. He described creativity as "the result of whole-souled and organic reaction to life's values; and a reaction in which senses, emotions, imagination, intelligence and will are fully aroused" (p. 486). Here Kaplan articulated a spiritual dimension as well as the confluence of emotion and intellect in creative thinking. When this kind of creativity is cultivated, Kaplan argued, artistic expression is possible, along with the production of Jewish culture. He understood creativity to be an essential tool for a vibrant Jewish future.

Creativity can be understood as the work of mind and heart in charting a path of sensemaking through senselessness, striving to bring unity to a fragmented and chaotic world.

The definition itself expresses that Kaplan was not only interested in the sociological utility of creativity as a means to strengthen Jewish culture and civilization. The "whole-souled and organic reaction to life's values" was a way to become grounded emotionally, intellectually, and soulfully. As Kaplan's biographer Mel Scult explains, Kaplan understood creativity as the human act of participating in renewing God's creation every day,[7] as described in the daily liturgy that praises God for renewing creation with goodness every day. Similarly, people can create their reality every day by engaging in sense-making and creating unity amidst the chaos, or *tohu va'vohu*, of one's world. As Kaplan commented on this idea in his diary in 1940:

7 הַמֵּאִיר לָאָרֶץ וְלַדָּרִים עָלֶיהָ בְּרַחֲמִים וּבְטוּבוֹ מְחַדֵּשׁ בְּכָל־יוֹם תָּמִיד מַעֲשֵׂה בְרֵאשִׁית "The one who illuminates the earth and its inhabitants with compassion, and with goodness renews every day, continually, acts of creation" (my translation). Mel Scult, personal email correspondence with the author, titled, "Kaplan on Creation, Creativity, and Us (August 12, 2019)," emailed November 10, 2022.

> *The sense of centrality as the creative activity of the mind gives man his world, i.e. it brings unity out of the chaos of his inner and outer life. As he goes on living, his world is continually being upset, and he is always reconstructing it. Whatever helps to restore the unity, man is deeply grateful for. It enables him to pursue his efforts at self-realization … Every creative act of man adds to the meaning of life and is a revelation of the Divine. This is as true a conclusion in soterics as any theorem in geometry, and for* ***the art of life*** *infinitely more essential.*[8]

These terms evoke a concept of Jewish creativity defined by human beings' process of navigating through chaos and renewing creation itself, in our world today. Creativity can be understood as the work of mind and heart in charting a path of sensemaking through senselessness, striving to bring unity to a fragmented and chaotic world. Scult's commentary on Kaplan puts a finer point on the impact of creativity on humans and their world:

> *The inner life is always a reflection of the larger cosmos. We are connected. Thus, whenever we create, we are in a sense contributing to the greater order and unity that is the ongoing process of creation. Our creative acts are a manifestation of the Divine.*[9]

This partnership in creation operates on both the individual and the collective level. Beyond sensemaking for the self, humans express their creativity by putting ideas into action, especially as a response to the brokenness humans themselves have caused. These human activities bring the Divine into the world by creating meaning and order. With the goal of creating sense, meaning, and order on both a personal and societal level, becoming creative is essential for what Kaplan calls "the art of life."

Students of philosophy of education may notice the possible influence here of Kaplan's colleague at Columbia Teacher's College, Professor John Dewey, whose works of this time famously argued for the necessity of education to be situated in, and a catalyst of, authentic life experience.[10] The fact that Kaplan included creativity so prominently in *Judaism as a Civilization* tells us that the desire to foster creativity was not a matter of progressive educational fad but reflected what he understood to be a key to Jewish flourishing. Offering an additional

8 Excerpt from Kaplan's diary, titled, "The Primary Importance of Creativity and Unity (Kaplan Diary, July 28, 1940)" cited by Scult in unpublished writing, shared with the author, titled, Scult, "Kaplan on Creation, Creativity and Us (August 12, 2019)."
9 Scult, "Kaplan on Creation, Creativity and Us."
10 Dewey, *The School and Society and the Child and the Curriculum; Art as Experience; Experience and Education.*

frame of creativity as a learning objective from the perspective of the student, Kaplan argued further that creativity applied to all areas of Judaism, arguing that a primary activity of Jewish education was "to train appreciation of individual and group creativity in the values of civilization; Jewish creativity in religion, ethics, language and literature, mores, laws and folkways, and the arts" (p. 487). Rather than being a subject or skill like art or engineering, the concept of creativity that propels this educational aspiration is one that permeates the enterprise of learning and living as a whole, across subject matter, far beyond the education of the individual. When we deepen the human qualities of imagination and wisdom, intellect and emotion, we can utilize creativity as a driver for improving the lives of individuals and society.

Why is Kaplan's vision such an instructive foundation for today's discourse on the purpose of Jewish education? We tend to think that today's learners are negotiating unprecedented chaos and change in the world around them. And yet, when we consider the seismic shifts in the economy, industry, immigration, ethnic and religious assimilation, rise of nationalism, and reorganization of world affairs (violent and diplomatic) that defined the early 20th century, Kaplan's prescription for Jewish education appears to have been timeless. Kaplan explained the human partnership in the ongoing renewal of creation, through the confrontation of chaos and attempts to create order and meaning. The countless demonstrations of Jewish communal creativity in the aftermath of October 7th—organizing, comforting, healing, advocating—capture recent human efforts to order the chaos. I do not think it is an overstatement to say that Jews today are positioned to be actors in a major inflection point in Jewish history, and in the creation of our world. Kaplan understood that Jewish education needs to be designed as a tool to create the society, with Jewish life within it, that we want to see.

There is in fact historical and modern precedent for the times we live in. As we reencounter historical forces we have seen before and attempt to forge new realities, we can look back to Kaplan's bold thinking as a spiritual underpinning for a contemporary definition of Jewish creativity. Kaplan's ideology of a Jewish education designed to build a civilization dovetails with current proponents of creativity in education who imagine an education system aimed at the betterment of humanity and society. The current discourse on creative education is the next building block of the definition of Jewish creativity for today's world.

Creativity as a Tool in Today's Educational Landscape

Building on the spiritual and historical foundation offered by Kaplan, a definition of Jewish creativity for 21st century Jewish education can be constructed by consulting the contemporary discourse of creative education. Advocates for creativity in education tend to define creativity as a process of generating original thinking that has value.[11] Creative thinking solves puzzles, expresses ideas in new ways, produces novel concepts or explanations, finds patterns, and produces what does not already exist. A sense of optimism guides the possibility that new ways of thinking are even possible, and imagination ensues. Creative thinking manifests in many spheres of knowledge and human behavior, including science, technology, the arts, culture, civic life, politics, families, and religious and spiritual life.

Teaching and learning creativity require manifesting creative thinking across disciplines. Sir Ken Robinson, whose widely acclaimed Ted Talks and books challenged the public square to prioritize creativity in schools, called creativity "the ability to bring to mind things that aren't present to our senses" (p. 119). But imagination is only one step; ideas then translate into practice. "Creativity is putting your imagination to work," Robinson wrote. Proponents of creativity take creative thought and process seriously, rejecting the notion that all free thought is creative and that creativity is simply the product of "light bulb" moments. "Being creative is not just about having off-the-wall ideas and letting your imagination run free. It may involve all of that, but it also involves refining, testing, and focusing what you're doing," Robinson argued. In order to have value, creative ideas must be tested, edited and curated:

> *Creativity also involves making critical judgments about whether what you're working on is any good, be it a theorem, a design, or a poem. Creative work often passes through typical phases. Sometimes what you end up with is not what you had in mind when you started. It's a dynamic process that often involves making new connections, crossing disciplines, and using metaphors and analogies. (p. 119)*[12]

Of course, no idea is born finished. Creativity does not begin and end with imagination. Robinson explained that creative thought travels through a process of

11 Beghetto, *Beautiful Risks*; Boaler, *Limitless Mind*; Robinson and Aronica, *Creative Schools*; Clapp, *Participatory Creativity*.
12 Robinson and Aronica, *Creative Schools*.

refinement as the value of the process or product emerges. This definition of creativity manifests not just in the *having* of ideas but in the *value* of novel ideas. As we construct a definition of creativity in Jewish education, a few cautionary notes on the meaning of the word value. First, the value of an idea could be in its role in a process of inspiring another valuable idea; the product is not the only measurement of value. Second, the word value is not meant to be narrowly defined as economic value in the marketplace. For our purposes, value can be measured in a wide range of contexts: providing life, meaning, beauty, healing, and utility to particular individuals, or providing value even more broadly to populations, communities, or society.

Creative thinking solves puzzles, expresses ideas in new ways, produces novel concepts or explanations, finds patterns, and produces what does not already exist.

Creativity has a critical role to play in shaping today's society. MIT Media Lab researcher Mitchel Resnick argues in his book, *Lifelong Kindergarten*, that we are living through a seismic shift in how industry, information, and ideas influence culture and social norms which demands a new approach to thinking about education. The whole landscape of society is evolving from the aging industrial model that shaped our education system. The internet and the evolution of digital and social media radically changed human consumption of information, transforming an industrial society into a "knowledge society" in "the information age." Education can be redesigned to bring about a new kind of society, a "creative society," as Resnick writes, "Success in the future—for individuals, for communities, for companies, for nations as a whole—will be based on the ability to think and act creatively." He continues:

> *There is a pressing need to help young people develop as* ***creative thinkers*** *so that they're prepared for life in a fast-changing world. At the same time, we can use this transition as an opportunity to promote a more humane set of values in society. (p. 158)*[13]

While we don't know what the future holds, we can teach with the aspiration of nurturing a society where people are prepared to come together to generate original and useful responses to the challenges of the day. Education can

13 Resnick, *Lifelong Kindergarten*.

be a tool for preparing learners to be ready to confront contemporary problems, equipped not only with knowledge, but with the ability to apply imagination, empathy, courage, and resilience.

Society itself depends on cultivating the human capacity for creative thinking. Mary Helen Immordino-Yang and Antonio D'Amasio, educational researchers who derive their data from studies in affective neuroscience, posit that "the chief purpose of education is to cultivate children's building repertoires of cognitive and behavioral strategies and options, helping them to recognize the complexity of situations, and to respond in increasingly flexible, sophisticated, and creative ways" (p. 36). Creativity, they assert, is "a means to survive and flourish in a cultural context."[14] The neurobiological research on creative thinking points to numerous benefits for learning, including the potential to harness education as a tool for training the brain to think creatively in the face of uncertainty. We need a strategy for Jewish education in a world that will be in flux and transition for the foreseeable future.

Education can be a tool for preparing learners to be ready to confront contemporary problems, equipped not only with knowledge, but with he ability to apply imagination, empathy, courage, and resilience.

Creativity is a mindset that is valuable not only for industry, but in seeking new and nuanced solutions to moral, political, social, communal, and personal challenges. By embracing a broad call to teach Jewish creativity, we can elevate the kinds of creativity that are often unheralded or taken for granted but are essential for human flourishing: the creative practices of organization and improvised ingenuity that strengthen homes and families, provide shelter and sustenance, and bring joy, comfort, wellness, and safety to others. I will explore the possibilities and practical applications of this viewpoint more deeply in the "how" section of this essay, below. The Jewish educational enterprise is endowed with a rich cultural and intellectual heritage, a moral and spiritual compass, and a commitment to community that together position Jewish educators to embrace the call to a creative society. With this general educational call to action in mind, it is worth taking a moment to highlight the history of Jewish creativity as another element of the working definition guiding this vision.

14 Immordino-Yang, *Emotions, Learning, and the Brain.*

Jews and Jewish History: A Story of Creativity and Adaptation

The idea that creativity is about generating new ideas of value has a touchpoint in classical Jewish wisdom. An oft-cited story in the Talmud about students and teachers provides a pedagogical insight: Rabbi Yehoshua greets two students and asks what novel idea they learned in the *beit midrash* (study hall) that day. They respond, "We are your students, and we drink from your water" [a metaphorical way of saying, all of our learning comes from you; how could we tell you something you have not already learned?]. Their reply suggests an educational philosophy that understands learners as passive recipients of knowledge. But Rabbi Yehoshua asserts they can go one step further, from receiving ideas to conceiving ideas: "Even so," he replies, "there cannot be a study hall without a *chidush* (novel idea)."[15] *Chidushim* are novel ideas, original interpretations, new twists on old customs, "yes ... and" responses large and small. These ideas have sparked Jewish adaptation and survival throughout Jewish history.

Chidushim are novel ideas, original interpretations, new twists on old customs, "yes ... and" responses large and small. These ideas have sparked Jewish adaptation and survival throughout Jewish history.

Creativity has been a strategy for Jewish vitality for centuries. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks described the Jewish people as a "creative minority," adept at navigating the intersection of host societies, other civilizations, and their own cultural heritage as "history's great problem solvers." Sacks encouraged Jewish readers to embrace facing inward and outward, "maintaining .strong links with the outside world while staying true to your faith, seeking not merely to keep the sacred flame burning but also to transform the larger society of which you are a part."[16] Classical examples of Jewish creativity can be found in the philosophical and religious encounters with the rise of Christianity and Islam, and in the development of rabbinic Judaism. In the wake of one of the most significant historic losses of the Jewish people, the burning of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE, Jewish learning and Jewish worship were preserved, adapted, and proliferated. The story of exile is one of tragic loss but also of reinvention, as new Jewish communities became centers of Jewish civilization.

15 Tractate *Chagiga* 3a.
16 Sacks, "On Creative Minorities," para. 21.

As Jews migrated by force or by choice to different parts of the globe, Jewish creativity has been expressed in every public and private realm from the introduction of *minhagim* (Jewish customs), musical traditions, Jewish hybrid languages, cuisines and recipes, visual art, liturgy and *piyyut* (liturgical poetry), and commentaries on the Torah and rabbinic literature. The private sphere was no less creative than the more often-cited examples of the public sphere. Consider the Jewish women who created new cooking practices and recipes to guarantee survival, nourishment, and observance of *kashrut* when ingredients were in short supply or they moved to new regions. Women have born primary responsibility for holding families together during migration, observing customs and preserving lived traditions.[17]

Crisis also necessitates creativity. For decades, the discourse of North American Jewish education has for the most part assumed the ascending success and acceptance of Jews in society, treating antisemitism as a chapter of the past, assuming a viable and invincible State of Israel, and viewing assimilation as a threat from within that could be neutralized by a more positive, personally meaningful, liberal approach.[18] As the Jewish community grapples with a post-October 7th world, creative thinking follows the cycle of history; it once again becomes a tool for confronting adversity, processing trauma, reclaiming Jewish identity in the face of antisemitism, strengthening community, expressing nuance and emotion, seeking new allies, and communicating through new media. Undoubtedly, fighting antisemitism and defending Israel have commanded a renewed sense of urgency in Jewish education, with prescribed tactics and advocacy; and yet, a steady course of proactive investment in wise and creative thinking must continue as a sustaining principle of Jewish learning and flourishing.

The current moment in Jewish history is the ultimate test of the intersection of the Jewish past with the creation of a viable and vibrant Jewish future. The "uncertain future" that futurists, researchers, and educators arguing for change have been forecasting for decades is already unfolding in the present.[19] While October 7th and its aftermath have been a wake-up call, it does not require a reactive measure of reverting to fear, guilt, and defensiveness as the primary focus of Jewish education. For a modern compass, we can look to the Jewish historical

17 It is important to note that inequities may have prevented women and people with marginalized identities from pursuing and expressing their full creativity with limited access to the education and resources available in society, possibly diminishing the varieties of creative contributions. Looking to the future, an intentional program of creativity in Jewish education could foster even more varied cultural products as more diverse Jewish learners participate in the enterprise of creative Jewish learning.

18 The recently released "MAP: My Aspirations Playbook," part of the report "From Census to Possibilities: Designing Pathways for Jewish Learners" published by the Jewish Education Project, provides a roadmap for educators who wish to implement an approach steeped in positive psychology with the outcome of "thriving."

19 Johansen, *The New Leadership Literacies*; Resnick, *Lifelong Kindergarten*; Robinson and Aronica, *Creative Schools*.

experience that has weathered cycles of loss and opportunity through the ages. That "oscillating narrative" of facing challenges can be a warning and inspire resilience.[20] Jewish creative thinking brings Jewish wisdom to bear through the inevitable repetitive drumbeats of Jewish history, the highs and the lows; we need to be better prepared, as Kaplan charged when similar needs were burning a century ago, to be "functioning creatively in all of life's situations" (p. 486).

PART II: FROM WHY TO WHAT AND HOW

What are the distinctly Jewish habits of "functioning creatively?"[21] We now turn our attention from the philosophical to the practical. How does one become practiced in generating *chidushim* and learning to "function creatively in all of life's situations?" How might we embark upon a Jewish educational project of teaching these habits intentionally? How does being deeply engaged in creative environments—as creators, consumers, and connoisseurs—enable us to sustain a vital Judaism that adapts and withstands the test of time?

These are questions which have captured my curiosity as a researcher and a teacher over the last decade. Since 2014, I have launched two incubators for Jewish teaching artists to explore creative pedagogical practice as guest faculty in the graduate schools of education that I directed: first the Dream Lab at American Jewish University, and then *Beit HaYotzer*/the Creativity Braintrust at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, both with generous grants from the Covenant Foundation. While I refer to these Jewish teaching artists collectively as artists and creatives, they specialized in a range of disciplines, including theater, visual, literary, and musical arts, and utilized their creative disciplines in workshops for educational leaders and teachers. Over the years, I

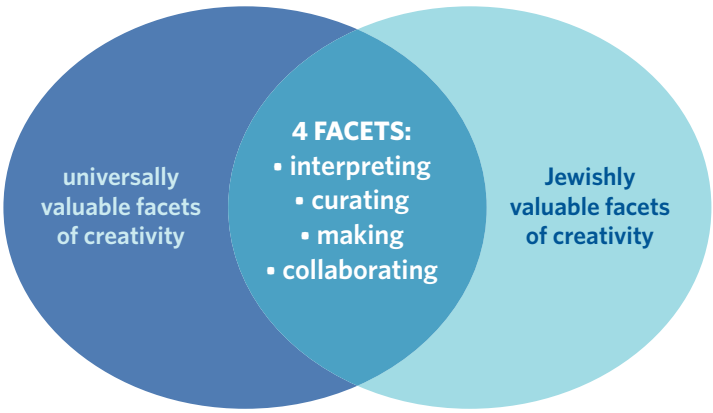
20 Marshall Duke and Robyn Fivush have studied the positive influence on the "psychological well-being and potential for positive change" in youth when they are knowledgeable about their roots and when their families share an "oscillating narrative" of weathering real struggles, modeling resilience. This study, and the intergenerational storytelling methodology that grew out of it, has become a formula for resilience among parenting experts. Marshall Duke et al, "Knowledge of Family History as a Clinically Useful Index of Psychological Well-being and Prognosis;" Bruce Feiler, "The Family Stories that Bind Us."

21 In my 2019 essay, "Jewish Creative Sensibilities: Framing a New Aspiration for Jewish Education," I proposed a menu of content for creative thinking. In that essay I recommended seven sensibilities, or ways of thinking and seeing, that are informed by bodies of Jewish wisdom and experience and that inspire facets of Jewish creativity: *Lech Lecha*/Be Bold; Shabbat/Sacred Pause; *Teshuva*/Iteration and Improvement; *Elu V'Elu*/The Divinity of Difference; *Kehillah*/Community and Collaboration; Be a *Mensch*/Be a Good, Kind Person; and *Yesh Tikvah*/Optimism. This essay focuses on Jewishly-infused habits (e.g. practices, ways that we behave creatively) that are essential for Jewish creativity in the contemporary and future world. My proposal for Jewish creative sensibilities builds on the conception of "Ten Jewish Sensibilities" articulated by Vanessa Ochs in *Sh'ma* in 2003, where she offered a compelling framework of "particularly Jewish ways of thinking about what it means to be human, ways that guide and orient a person's actions and choices." Looking back on efforts to "curricularize" the sensibilities, Ochs cautioned the field in 2019 in her essay, "Prescribing Sensibilities Off-Label," that she understood the sensibilities as a framework that is learned through living, not through flash cards or magnets, pointing to the potential for lists of sensibilities to be reduced to checklists, as opposed to categories of deep and expansive thinking and application. I hope that by offering an additional framework here, I can further reinforce that these habits are learned through living, practice, and a culture that fosters them.

regularly studied and documented them operating each in their own crafts. I noticed how they brought their creative worldviews to learning spaces. I facilitated reflective practice with the artists, co-planned workshops, observed them teach, and sometimes co-facilitated the workshops and seminars with them. We had regular opportunities to reflect on the teaching and learning that they designed and led. In those conversations, we began to identify the habits of creativity that we noticed the learners demonstrating. While the content they were teaching often stemmed from Jewish sources and wisdom, they engaged their learners in considering universal themes such as moral courage, empathy, understanding the other, and navigating values in tension. As I will illustrate below, their creative teaching and learning spaces effectively elicited ideation, curiosity, and expression, as well as confronting challenge, discomfort, and paradox. The four facets of creativity that I offer in the framework below cluster together in a digestible form the habits, perspectives, skills, and dispositions that emerged in these creative workshops.

Four Facets of Jewish Creativity: Becoming Interpreters, Curators, Makers, and Collaborators

The four facets of creativity that I offer here are universally valuable to thrive in today's world and particularly valuable to those who are living and weaving *Jewish* culture, religion, spiritual engagement, and learning in the contemporary and secular world. At the intersection of the universal and the particular, these facets are manifestations of the definition of creativity I have offered here: the process of generating *chidushim* that are beneficial or valuable.



As a framework for educational design, I want to clarify that these habits are not a checklist or a curriculum. They are practiced and developed over time through a variety of activities and experiences, woven through formal education and less

formal programs with more emergent design and goals. They include habits of mind and practices that are regularly developed in art studios and music rooms, in galleries and film production, in laboratories, maker spaces and garages. And yet, they are not specific to any single setting: They are transferable to classrooms, living rooms, kitchens, outdoor spaces, and workplaces. The thinking that percolates in these spaces has applications to behaviors that are essential for living a life of purpose in community in the contemporary world.

Readers are invited to keep in mind several principles that inform the possibilities of Jewish creative thinking in educational practice, which will be demonstrated in the discussion below:

1) Everyone has the capacity to create, and creativity takes many forms.

2) There are different roles we can play as creative contributors to culture, community, and society, for ourselves and for others, as we grow in the various facets of creativity.

3) While each facet is unique, they do not operate completely independently; for any person, one facet may shine brighter. The facets reflect one another, as do facets of a gemstone.

4) These facets of creativity are practiced and finessed over a lifetime, but as Jerome Bruner's classic principle of learning suggests, they can be exhibited in an intellectually honest way—and I would add, in an emotionally honest way—at any age.[22]

In the examples below, I offer not a formula, but a portrait of possibilities: These are the pedagogies, conditions, and environments through which habits of creativity can be developed and nurtured, where learners can grapple, feel joy, and express themselves in the present, and where they can co-create the future. Many of my examples draw from the teaching and learning I have facilitated and observed in creative arts and culture; there are certainly illustrations beyond the spaces I have encountered that would provide further examples of what a creative learning landscape might look like. A robust literature suggests a long list of capacities, dispositions, and habits of mind that are developed through immersion in the arts and creative environments. I will provide examples of what it looks and feels like when we establish Jewish creative environments where the habits of creativity are intentionally modeled, encouraged, and enacted. [23]

22 Bruner, The Process of Education, 1960.

23 Boaler, *Limitless Mind*; Clapp, *Participatory Creativity*; Dewey, *Art as Experience;* Diaz and McKenna, *Preparing Educators for Arts Integration*; Eisner, *The Arts and the Creation of Mind;* Halverson, *How the Arts Can Save Education*; Hetland et al., *Studio Thinking 2*; Lerman, *Hiking the Horizontal*; Siedel et al., *The Qualities of Quality*. The observations I share in this section about creative pedagogy are from seminars taught through *Beit HaYotzer/*the Creativity Braintrust, a project generously funded by the Covenant Foundation at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion School of Education. I am grateful to teaching artists Adina Allen, Isaac and Shawna Brynjegard-Bialik, Ariel Burger, Aaron Henne, Alicia Jo Rabins, and Jon Adam Ross for experimenting with us at HUC-JIR.

It is my hope that this framework can help prioritize habits of creativity that are often underrated in formal education, viewed as competing with core knowledge for curricular real estate and then relegated to the extra-curricular margins of institutional learning. Creativity tends to be viewed as "nice to have" but not "required." Moreover, creativity is often assumed to be the purview of natural born creatives, and thus lives primarily in electives and activities that only the self-selected even try. In reality, facets of creativity can be woven into the fabric of good teaching and learning. The habits and practices described here could become accessible to all if they are prioritized as learning outcomes, and more Jewish learners could be empowered in their creativity. As learners practice the habits of interpreting, curating, making, and collaborating, they will deepen their capacities to engage with classic subject matter, produce their own *chidushim*, and live engaged Jewish lives. Within each facet and as they interact, we will discover a world of possibilities.

FACET 1: Creativity as Interpreting

Animated by curiosity and a quest for understanding, interpreters can ask "What could this mean? What does this mean to me? How does this impact others?" They can pose and answer questions about meaning and impact in a variety of life's situations, using a range of lenses, tools, hermeneutics, symbols, and forms of expression.

Interpretation is the key to finding and conveying meaning. Classical Jewish tradition relies heavily on the written word for interpretation, codified in Talmudic and rabbinic discourse. Stories, legal texts, poetry, and wisdom literature have articulated Jewish origin stories and ethics for centuries. The texts themselves are more accessible than ever through a proliferation of technologies like Sefaria (a free online searchable repository of texts in the original and translation)[24] and many Jewish learning opportunities. We live in a world where people increasingly consume ideas visually and aurally, in reels, podcasts, and memes. Content is transmitted and translated through so many channels. Technology allows us to simply click on definitions, multiple translations, commentaries, and related articles. Technology enables us to record, code, and disseminate our own perspectives. Knowledge and information can be created and manipulated by anyone—including artificially. There is a greater need than ever for humans to develop the capacity to discern meaning and authenticity when they encounter ideas.

24 www.sefaria.org/texts

What do the words mean, and what do they mean to us, today? A traditional approach begins with what is known as the *p'shat*, the basic, literal meaning, and then moves to various dimensions of interpretation. What other modes of interpretation are available to us, in a highly sensory, multi-media infused information society? The arts and technology provide multiple entry points and languages for consuming and expressing ideas: Through movement, visual representations, music, and various apps, we convey and connect to dimensions of the human experience. Creativity opens our imaginations to visualize and sense interpretations that might otherwise be invisible or inaccessible to us when language and canon have narrowed the traditional interpretations.

Consider the following example of interpretation through the arts. Singer-song-writer, poet, and *midrashist* (Bible commentator) Alicia Jo Rabins created "Girls in Trouble Music," a multi-media compendium of songs about Biblical women that invites learners to consider the experiences of women in the Torah through song and visual art, as well as the Biblical text and classical midrash.[25] In one lesson on the Biblical figure Miriam, the song "Scorpions/Snow" takes learners inside the emotional journey of Miriam, banished from the Israelite camp for speaking ill of her sister-in-law. As Rabins imagines her, Miriam has her own "time on the mountain" quite different from her brother Moses, among the scorpions, with her skin turned snow-white with disease as punishment. She invites readers of the text to interpret different artistic depictions of Miriam, ranging from a late 19th century European expressionist depiction of Miriam as a white, aging person huddled alone on a doorstep in the desert sun, to a contemporary image of Miriam as an Indian woman in a sari, wearing *tefillin* and dancing. [26] Learners are invited to imagine Miriam beyond the text. What does the artist seek to see in Miriam? What might it be like to be a Miriam? What paradoxes confronted Miriam? How would I respond when faced with similar dilemmas? How should I relate to Miriam? What does Miriam's experience illustrate to me about my own life, relationships, and leadership? The juxtaposition of modern feminist poetry, rabbinic narrative, musical genre, and multiple artists' gazes allow for the possibilities to unfold, for Miriam to be relatable, provocative, and inspiring.

25 While the project began as a master's thesis turned "indie-folk/art-pop song cycle," Rabins expanded her *midrash* into a curriculum with source sheets, lyrics, learning activities, and art. She has produced music videos and a new series of webTV shorts about female Biblical figures, and a rock opera for stage is in development. www.girlsintroublemusic.com

26 Tefillin are phylacteries, a ritual object made of leather straps and two small boxes containing parchment, which are worn during weekday and Sunday morning prayers. In Orthodox tradition, only men wore them. The art depicts a woman wearing them, signaling a contemporary egalitarian revision.

Engaging with Biblical characters through different artistic lenses does not simply add more to know about them for the test. Through the multi-modal approach of Rabins' curriculum, learners encounter different methods of interpretation that they can apply to countless other subjects and contexts as they make sense of the world. The poetry, musical composition, and art are interpretations of the original text and reference the rabbinic texts. The creative elements model how to ask contemporary existential questions of a text. Human emotions—loneliness, stoicism, joy, regret, yearning—are projected through images and musical instruments that "speak" to the audience in a language that mere words cannot convey. Biblical characters are not models of perfection; they are examples of human effort and fallibility, case studies of how people negotiate family, community, nationhood. The experiences of women in the Torah are often underdeveloped by the Biblical narrative, but even some male protagonists leave readers only mysterious clues as to why they made decisions. Becoming an interpreter is learning to read the clues and express the possibilities between the lines.

Creativity opens our imaginations to visualize and sense interpretations that might otherwise be invisible or inaccessible to us when language and canon have narrowed the traditional interpretations.

This example points to an additional benefit to learning and growth through artistic interpretation: We become multilingual, accessing experiences and ideas that cannot be expressed in our daily vernacular and might be confined to the world of scholars. Thus, the arts can become an essential tool for access and inclusion in learning, allowing those who thrive in other avenues of expression to participate and offer interpretations that might otherwise be invisible or unheard. When we privilege only the knowledge that can be conveyed in conventional language (and all the more so, academic language), we obscure the wisdom of experience that is embodied, demonstrated, sensed, or tasted. As Dewey articulated in *Art and Experience*,

> *If all meanings could be adequately expressed by words, the arts of painting and music would not exist. There are values and meaning that can be expressed only by immediately visible and audible qualities, and to ask what they mean in the sense of something that can be put into words is to deny their distinctive existence.* [27]

27 Dewey, *Art and Experience*, p 77.

Ariel Burger quotes his teacher Elie Wiesel as saying, "when you reach the end of language, you can sing a *nigun*."[28]

This approach to teaching and learning—establishing creative portals to interpretation and expression—utilizes a strategy known as culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy, as well as culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy.[29] Teaching through the music, literature, and stories of learners from different backgrounds can center the cultures that may implicitly be non-dominant, including immigrant, ethnic, and racial identities in Jewish spaces. If we insist that only people of a certain class, status, gender, or background have the right to interpret, and must only do so in the primary language of discourse, the tradition will never be able to hold us all. Moreover, we will fail as a community to preserve the valuable creativity of global Jewish traditions which proliferated during various periods of migration. Efforts to sustain multiple traditions within Jewish spaces through cultural production, such as those of Persian, Mizrachi, or Latin Jews, can only enhance the vibrancy of Jewish communities. At the same time, as we venture to become multilingual in our communal discourse, it will be critical to consistently ask, "What is the basis for this understanding?" and "Why is that the received interpretation?" and "What other interpretations are plausible?" Asking why and how, with multiple avenues of expression, will ensure that interpretations are thoughtful, sourced in evidence and prooftexts, or lived out in experience.

Seeking multiple interpretations may uncover opposing views. Ariel Burger uses stories as a tool to explore multiple perspectives; after all, stories hold essential truths and confront us with the possibility that two seemingly opposing truths may have validity. There are so many ways to engage with stories that lead us down different, heart-opening, and mind-expanding interpretive paths: As readers, stories invite us to empathize with different points of view; glean different lessons; imagine alternative endings. As an exercise in perspective-taking, Burger invites students to view an illustration and asks them to assign it a title and imagine the story it depicts. Diverse interpretations emerge as learners imagine what the picture might portray. The process helps us consider the potential—both coherence and conflict—that the image might suggest. When we do this exercise in the realm of fiction, it prepares us to confront the realities of

28 *Nigun*, Hebrew for a wordless melody that repeats. Shared by Ariel Burger while teaching a class to educators at HUC-JIR, February 2022.
29 Hetland et al, *Studio Thinking 2*.

dueling narratives in real life. This pedagogy of learning through immersing in, interpreting, and imagining stories is particularly suited to holding nuance and complexity. [30]

I do not mean to suggest that "novel" is always better, or that the old should categorically be replaced by the new. As human creativity multiplies, there is a value to preserving original and classic interpretations while adding these new layers of meaning, so we continue to understand origins and trace evolution over time. To value creativity does not mean to only value what is novel and throw away what exists. Often creativity adds a novel perspective to what already exists, and those foundations are not meant to be erased. We learn to continually discern through a Jewish interpretive process of "turning and turning again," reconsidering what is classic through new lenses and new teaching tools. [31]

The capacity for discernment will become ever more important as generative AI technology makes it easier to gather and copy interpretations; consumers will still need to discern the value and appropriateness of the interpretations they encounter. A healthy discourse of empathetic sharing of interpretations and appropriate challenge is necessary, to avoid permanently alienating ourselves from those with even slightly different views from our own; lest we be cast us into algorithmically controlled echo chambers where only the most common, dominant, or angriest versions of reality are shared. Creative interpretation is a pathway to uncovering contradictions and multiple takes on an idea. A learning environment that encourages interpretation offers the possibility of new insights, stories, and ideas to emerge. That multiplicity of perspectives provides a gallery of possibilities from which we can curate. The capacity for curating is the next facet we will explore.

30 Burger demonstrated this pedagogy over several seminars for education students at HUC-JIR from 2019-2023.
31 Levisohn and Fendrick, *Turn it and Turn it Again*.

FACET 2: Creativity as Curating

Curators have a developed sense of aesthetics, values, and criteria that guide their choices. They are learning to prioritize and make values-based choices in a free society where autonomy reins, authority is questioned, and influencers attract followers. They reflect, "How do I want to thoughtfully curate my identities, my lifestyle, my relationships, my communication, and my activities?" They make selections for themselves and for others with considered intention and purpose.

Curating is an essential Jewish activity in a world where consumers get to choose their own adventures. Contemporary consumers like to customize their lives, and Jews are no exception. Several decades ago, Cohen and Eisen coined the term "the sovereign self" to describe the trend of Jews favoring their autonomy in choosing how to live Jewishly, building on the now classic example in Robert Bellah et al.'s *Habits of the Heart* of a woman named Sheila practicing her own self-directed "religion" of "Sheilaism." Now it is taken for granted that contemporary liberal Jews pick and choose what is meaningful to them.[32] Social scientist and scholar of Jewish life Sarah Benor compares this phenomenon of picking and choosing to making an iTunes playlist as opposed to purchasing music albums.[33] With the further unbundling of media into countless on-demand platforms and apps, learning how to choose what to consume, when, and why is an essential habit of mind for anyone; developing a sense of aesthetics and values by which to curate one's life is critical for maximizing the meaning and opportunity of one's Jewish experience.

Learning to curate takes the pressure off individuals to always feel like they have to create for themselves from scratch. While "DIY (do-it-yourself) Judaism" has offered endless pathways to create a ritual life for oneself, not everyone feels empowered to launch their own independent *minyan* (prayer group) or write their own *Haggadah* (Passover ritual and narrative guide) or *siddur* (prayer book).[34] Curating allows us to borrow, sample, and remix. Some examples of curating Jewish life include: choosing the menu for a Shabbat meal; selecting readings and music for a memorial service; creating a playlist for an event; designing a creative bar/bat/b-mitzvah experience or project; sourcing books for a book club; planning the calendar of activities for a teen/youth group. As I write this, my ten year-old daughter has been on Facetime with friends curating fashion items for a Purim costume, negotiating aesthetic, budgetary,

32 Bellah, *Habits of the Heart*; Cohen and Eisen, *The Jew Within*.
33 Lecture given in EDU 578 "Charting the Future of Jewish Education," Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 2017.
34 Connelly, "Before Google, Before Wikipedia, this DIY Almanac Shaped a Generation."

and religious considerations. Though they are not conscious of it, these girls are applying values learned at school, at their synagogues, and at home and integrating them with their views on popular culture, pre-teen girl culture, and their own desire for self-expression.

We engage in curating daily, sometimes unconsciously, as we plan our own calendars and lives, prioritizing and deprioritizing relationships, events, and activities. Curating involves making value judgments as we recognize beauty, wisdom, and worthiness. Developing self-awareness about one's choices is critical, so that the values, priorities, and rationales that define those choices become a clear and calibrated compass. Who will I follow in my social media feed? Which podcasts will fill my playlist? When the communication channels that currently inform our lives become obsolete and are replaced by new ones, how will my compass guide me to make new choices among new media? The more we consciously practice and develop the skill of choosing and designing intentionally, the more prepared we will be to curate our own lives and contribute to bringing beauty and meaning to the lives of others.

Young learners who post on social media are amateur curators, constantly consuming and then deciding how to represent themselves by sharing the creations of others in the form of opinions, news, music, memes, and reels. What guides them when they follow influencers? What values, pressures, and cultures will determine what they think is smart, funny, just, or beautiful? How will they learn to weed out what is insipid, offensive, damaging, and hateful? How will they navigate the pressure to post their values quickly as news cycles flash before them? How will they learn to decide what they care about enough to post in their stories—the story of themselves and their values that they curate for others? Our learners need intentional spaces to practice making curatorial choices, so that they can deepen the skills of intentional disclosure, self-regulation, advocacy, and voice in their social and political universes online. All these choices add up to expressions of who they are and what they value.

Curating involves making value judgments as we recognize beauty, wisdom, and worthiness.

One of the ways we learn to curate is by reflecting on curation as we experience it and teasing out how the experience that has been curated for us makes us feel and think. Slowing down to self-reflect is counter-cultural and demands inten-

tional time and space. We might invite learners to ask: What human experience is this gallery collection trying to communicate to me? What emotional journey does this film soundtrack take me on? As I watch a performance of theatre dybbuk, what moral questions are they inviting me to consider? When I attend a meal prepared by the Sephardic Spice Girls (a Los Angeles-based Iraqi Jewish cooking duo), what stories of Iraqi Jewish history do they want me to taste and smell? When we become curators, we learn to identify a big idea, question, moral, or through line that holds the different elements together in a coherent experience that is memorable, that invites learning. A curator asks, "What story or message do I want to share? What do I want my audience to consider and come to value? What do I want them to experience? How do I imagine others will absorb and respond to what I have curated for them?"

Stitching together the pieces of ourselves and learning to shape our narratives is the process of learning to own our identities, which is a primary objective of Jewish education.[35] At a time in history when purveyors of Jew hatred are trafficking beliefs about Jews that are steeped in age-old canards, it is critical that Jews also learn to curate their own narratives that are proud, informed, self-reflective, nuanced and authentic. Practice in intentional curation can help us feel empowered to share those narratives through a variety of media, gatherings, and rituals.

Curating is not only a practice for the self; it is also the skill of creating experiences for others, which requires not only knowledge of one's own preferences but the ability to recognize what will be meaningful to others. Curating requires a sensitivity to avoid what might be offensive or alienating to others and empathy to avoid "othering" and excluding in a communal space. At the same time, a keen curator can create an experience of productive discomfort, finding a way to be provocative such that the experience can lead to growth. When done well, curating demands and deepens emotional intelligence. Curators facilitate journeys through creative spaces and experiences, sparking the possibility of new thinking for their audiences.

For the Jew living in the modern world, weaving together an identity, values, and priorities from multiple influences and cultures, curating is an essential skill. We curate our own lives. One might ask, why not simply call this planning, managing, organizing, choosing—why *curating*? Why adopt an artistic and aesthetic orientation to designing our identities? We can make our own lives and communities into

35 Numerous scholars and practitioners have commented on the relative uses and weaknesses of "strengthening Jewish identity" as a learning outcome of Jewish education, along with suggesting alternatives, as in Kelman and Levisohn, *Beyond Jewish Identity*. I can imagine a process of curating the story of one's identity as a worthwhile approach to the Jewish identity project, authentically engaging learners in thinking about how they decide who they are and how they want to present themselves in the world.

works of art. Such an orientation helps us think intentionally about who we are, how we select our activities, how we prioritize relationships and commitments, choose friends/partners/communities, and hold values. A creative perspective on designing ourselves enables us to discover beauty in our lives.

Curating also gives us some license to be playful in sampling and remixing as we learn and ideate. A creative orientation invites us to use the wide range of raw materials we have at our disposal, including the substance of Judaism: wisdom, ideas, and vocabulary. Engagement with Jewish wisdom or development of a broad Jewish vocabulary need not be confined to an intellectual or academic pursuit. On the contrary, perhaps the pressure to intellectualize makes wisdom less accessible and attractive. We can mold and shape Jewish time, space, and practice when we feel empowered to do so, using the varied materials of our real lives. It is precisely this kind of empowerment that gives people the confidence to create. Creating, or making, is the third facet of creativity.

FACET 3: Creativity as Making

Creators make *chidushim*, which we might think of expansively beyond ideas as "new offerings," in many forms: original ideas, inventions, suggestions, solutions, art, poetry, literature, machines, tools, systems, experiences, celebrations, expressions, rituals, and more. They learn to use the resources and materials available to become creators. They draw upon their skills, knowledge, language, and relationships to infuse their creations with meaning and value. They can examine their world and themselves with wonder and ask, "What's missing? What is needed? What might be beneficial or valuable?" and begin to imagine possible responses. They may also "trust the process" and guide something new into being without a plan.

There are many kinds of valuable creations, using a wide range of materials and elements. Creators make poetry out of language, observation, imagination, and emotion. They create meals out of edible ingredients. They create gardens out of seeds, plants, soil, water, and sun. They create schedules out of time, space, events, and priorities. They create communities out of people, using communication tools, shared activities and values, and relationships. Creations like these are both the roots and fruits of Jewish flourishing.

There are many ways to build, develop, invent, plant, and produce. And yet, making is often considered the most inaccessible facet because people assume that a high level of technical skill or uniquely inspired genius are needed for

the creative process to have value. Sometimes we don't even begin the process because we doubt the *product* will have value. The voice of the inner critic or skeptic paralyzes the would-be creator:

"I'm not creative enough."
"I don't have enough time."
"People will think it's stupid."
"It won't be good."
"I can't [fill in: draw, paint, sing, act]."
"I was never good at _____/I always hated crafting."
"It's not serious."

I often begin presentations to educators and leaders about creativity by asking participants to share something creative they did in the past week. The range of responses usually helps debunk the "I'm not creative" myth. Some share stories of pottery classes, cooking, and gardening, others talk about a lesson, program, or prayer service they created (I mostly do this work with educators and clergy) while occasionally people express pride in a way they have organized or managed their personal lives or navigated their way out of a bind. We quickly see there are a range of ways in which people express and utilize creativity. Alicia Jo Rabins, the aforementioned singer-songwriter who is also an accomplished author, filmmaker, and self-described "culture bearer," opens her poetry writing workshop with a prompt designed not to scare off the self-described "not creatives." "Tell us your name and something you like to make," she invites everyone to share. We hear voices from around the room. "I make challah." "I make greeting cards." "I make schedules." People discover that we all make *something* that brings us and others benefit or joy. We may underestimate the value of what we make and that making is an act of creativity. When viewed collectively, individual creations can have a cumulative effect of cultivating a healthy culture.

In my years of teaching about creativity in education, I have encountered students and professionals who identify wholeheartedly as creatives and others for whom the whole category of creativity makes them bristle with discomfort, declaring, "I'm not creative." At a recent workshop for female-identified Jewish educators and community leaders, I invited participants to create personalized representations of diagrams of kabbalistic *sefirot* to communicate the values that guide their leadership, using the medium of collage.[36] Some were visibly

36 Alicia Jo Rabins developed the idea for the *sefirot* workshop with me, which we beta-tested with a group of HUC students before I adapted and gave the workshop for the leadership group. *Sefirot* are the elements of a metaphysical "tree of life" in the Kabbalistic tradition, representing different attributes of the Divine.

delighted to work in a medium other than speech and prose, while two participants exuded discomfort, folding their hands across their chests and avoiding even glancing at the buffet of colorful and glittering multi-textured materials. I have observed that the resistance stems from multiple perceived barriers: a lack of technical skill to create a rendering of an idea or image that is in their heads; discomfort with the invitation to express themselves through a new medium; an assumption that this is a craft project, possibly even infantile, and will not be worthwhile as a learning exercise; or barriers to risk-taking such as fear of being judged.

Ultimately, participants who were able to trust the process discovered meaning that emerged in their creations. Colors and textures reflected unnamed emotions and paradoxes; symbols signaled identity markers, challenges, and achievements; personal narratives that were too vulnerable in words but could be boldly stated in metaphors could be shared. While some approached the project with the goal of making a piece of art, the process of collaging together materials into a metaphor to access their personal reflections was really the essence of the exercise. That kind of creativity nourishes meta-cognition and the ordering and meaning-making that is so essential for self-renewal.

Creativity nourishes meta-cognition and the ordering and meaning-making that is so essential for self-renewal.

If the aim is to teach and learn creativity, the first step is to get over the belief that we can't all be creative and embrace the potential. Frequent immersion in creative process gets people comfortable with becoming creators, trusting one's inner creative voice and learning to understand others. Theater artist, educator and founder of the Inheritance Project Jon Adam Ross uses play in educational workshops to ease participants into the possibility of being creative.[37] He begins from the very moment people enter the room: inviting them in, chatting, smiling, attending to making them feel comfortable. Participants assemble in a circle. He asks them to take turns communicating, but only with their eyes. Once everyone has warmed up, he gives each participant a slip of paper with a word on it, such as peace, rebuilding, healing, holiness, knowledge. He invites them to invent a gesture that communicates the word without saying it aloud. Each person then has a chance to perform their gesture, and the group learns to repeat each

37 Jon Adam Ross is the founder of the Inheritance Theater Project and was a member of the *Beit HaYotzer* artist-scholars circle that I facilitated at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion between 2020-2023.

other's gestures, in succession around the circle. Before long, participants are communicating in a new language, new expressions emerge, and they are creating choreography together without speaking. There is awkwardness and confusion to be sure—after all, one does not become fluent in a new language or practice in a matter of minutes. Accepting the awkwardness of practice and learning is part of the process. One by one, the gestures transform into a choreography, which the group practices to different music and at different tempos. New human connections are made through the process of seeing one another and feeling seen through facial expressions and gestures, which is a new method of communication for most.

What is the exercise about? There is mystery throughout, as the participants suspend skepticism and follow along, trying to guess what their slips of paper have to do with this performance. In the final reflection, Ross reveals that they have been inventing a choreography of prayer. Participants share that the exercise helped them see and understand more deeply something they thought they knew; they took another perspective outside of their own; and they bonded with others in a way they hadn't before. The process of communicating, thinking, and moving in new ways helped them strengthen their creative muscles, in addition to appreciating the words on their slips of paper in new ways. *Chidushim* emerged from the embodied experience and from one another—from the learning company that formed around trying something new.[38]

Making can be about the value of the product, but it can also be about the value of the process: allowing oneself to benefit from the process of making, of feeling like a creator. The product might turn out the way we envisioned it, or we might discover something unexpected and take a new direction. When we infuse the process with a spirit of experimentation and exploration, what we actually wind up making is a newer version of ourselves: helping soothe or clear the mind to prepare for new ideas, opening the possibility of imagination, revelation, or clarity of perspective. When current events make us feel depressed, worried, or defeated, engaging in making something new can open new apertures in the brain, allowing for possibility when we thought we might be at a dead end. Making anew is a manifestation of resilience.

38 Inspired by the process we observed in our study of Aaron Henne's leadership of theatre dybbuk, Tobin Belzer and I used the term "learning company" to distinguish a collective learning experience where participants produce a work of performance art, as opposed to a learning community that exists for learning's sake. Stern and Belzer, "The Past as Portal to the Future."

When the barriers to creativity are managed, and an environment conducive to creativity is established, the human brain can thrive on creativity. With small acts of creativity accumulating into a collective, we can aim to build a creative society. We don't have to create alone, and most people do not have the breadth of skills or the range of resources to create everything they need. Moreover, well-framed feedback and critique can help us refine our creations and make them more valuable. We often rely on others to enhance and amplify our creativity. The combination of individual and collective creativity, the interplay of the personal and the social that I have described so far, becomes a mechanism for developing the creative society that Resnick and Robinson depicted in their studies of creativity in schools. That is why the final facet of creativity is collaborating.

FACET 4: Creativity in Collaboration

Collaborators are open to cooperating with others to interpret, curate, and create together. Collaboration is not only a meeting of the minds, but it draws together complementary talents, perspectives, and skills. Sometimes the role of the collaborator is to midwife creative products for their partners who might need a muse or feel stuck. Collaborating involves a set of subskills: They are strategic and generous in collaborating in ways that add value to their own lives and to the people in their orbit. With self-awareness, they can recognize the different talents, skills, ideas, and expressions they bring to generate something greater than what could be achieved alone. They can listen. They ask, "How can I contribute?" They can provide constructive critique that elicits rather than inhibiting the creator's creativity. They can create and refine genius ideas in relationship with others.[39]

Jewish education has become focused on individual meaning-making as a Jewish aim, and achievement as an educational aim. In a society that prizes autonomy and choice, Judaism has to both compete in the marketplace of ideas and activities, and be accessible and relevant to learners. Add to that a culture of American education that prizes competition and individual achievement coupled with differentiation and individual education plans. With customization being paramount, the result is a recipe for the decline of collective culture. Private Jewish learning may enrich the Jewish journeys of individuals and emphasize personal relevance, and finding individual creative flow is valuable for thinking and processing. When learning and thinking leads to creating together, a vibrant culture can be produced. Collaborating is a key facet of creativity for restoring a Jewish collective.

39 On constructive critique as an essential element of creative process, see Belzer and Stern, "The Past as Portal to the Future"; Catmull, *Creativity, Inc.*; Hetland et al, *Studio Thinking 2*; Lerman, *Hiking the Horizontal*.

Jews are famous for disagreeing, which can actually be fodder for creative collaboration. Creative collaboration does not necessitate uniformity or a shared view. In fact, collaboration can also be a means to engage in "productive conflict," where disagreement and even discomfort yields new ways of thinking and new creative products. A constructive clash of two views can yield a third way forward.[40]

Creative collaboration happens when there is an explicit culture with norms in place to support productive conflict. One element of such a culture is critique and feedback in a group creative process. There are many ways to structure and foster a culture of critique when creative process and product is the goal. This is the culture that Resnick describes in the STEM-maker world of *Lifelong Kindergarten*. Whether it is creating films, games, and music using Scratch coding online, building with Lego Mindstorms at the MIT Media Lab, or coding at an afterschool Computer Clubhouse, Resnick describes kids who give each other feedback respectfully, while they sample and remix using each other's work, producing tens of millions of projects in clubs and individually around the globe. They are learning to participate in a "knowledge-building community" that shares and cultivates new ideas, designs, and creative works. Similarly, it is common practice in studio art classes to avoid general judgment and compliments of works in progress; the norm is to appreciate the elements of the art, but not to say, "Ooh, yours is so pretty." Choreographer Liz Lerman developed a critical response protocol to structure feedback to refine the quality of a creative performance work. It begins with affirmation and observation, graduating to neutral questioning and then finally critique, all aimed to hold the creator accountable while honoring their work in progress and its potential. Jewish Studio Project, an arts-based organization that engages adults in visual arts-based reflection and study, developed a creative process rooted in open art therapy that involves collaboration as well as witnessing. They frame their activities with norms that protect individual creative process and invite creating in community: Follow pleasure and refrain from judgment

When learning and thinking leads to creating together, a vibrant culture can be produced. Collaborating is a key facet of creativity for restoring a Jewish collective.

40 Catmull, *Creativity, Inc.*; Halverson, *How the Arts Can Save Education*; Shenk, *Powers of Two*.

are norms that balance each other and make it possible to take risks in front of others. Theatre dybbuk builds critique into its collaborative process of script development, which is essential for determining how to present complexity on stage. All these examples are methods for teaching, modeling, and ensuring constructive habits of collaboration.[41]

The best collaborations intentionally invite and value people with different skillsets to contribute. Positive collaboration also depends on participants being brought together with different clearly defined roles. Group projects often go awry in schools, where the wrong combination of talents is placed together and expectations about roles are not communicated or even determined. We can invite more talent into a creative process by explicitly identifying the skills, expertise, perspectives, and roles that are needed for the task. In his study *Participatory Creativity*, Edward Clapp argues that creativity is an inherently collaborative process: "Creativity is a distributed process of idea development that takes place over time and incorporates the contributions of a diverse network of actors, each of whom uniquely participate in the development of ideas in various ways." Clapp proposes that forming groups that best utilize the different strengths of participants toward a shared creative objective is the key to successful collaboration in creative process.[42]

This version of creativity is a social process. Sometimes an intense culture of individualism and competition can get in the way of collaboration. Clapp suggests centering the ideas, as opposed to putting the participants in the hot seat, to create buy-in to the process and bolster psychological safety for risk-taking. This is all part of intentional learning design.

Everyone has a part to play in a collaborative creative culture. A common myth about creativity is that it is the innate trait of lone geniuses, like Chagall or Einstein. While this may be true for a select few (with the credit disproportionately assigned to white men), creativity can flourish in concert with others. Societal barriers to creativity, including the disempowerment of certain races, classes, and genders, inhibit and limit the possibilities of creative collaboration through diversity. Collaboration depends on the creation of environments where the barriers to creativity are removed by those with the power to do so. Composer Brian Eno is credited

41 Belzer and Stern, 2022; Lerman, *Hiking the Horizontal*; Resnick, 2017. I have observed the Jewish Studio Process as well as theatre dybbuk's process on multiple occasions between 2013 and 2023; Aaron Henne of theatre dybbuk uses an adaptation of Lerman's critical response in his teaching.
42 Clapp, *Participatory Creativity.*

with coining the term "scenius," meaning creative genius that emerges from a "cultural scene" or "an ecology of talent"—in other words, from a creative community.[43] One of the ways we access our creativity is by spending time with others engaged in creative practice, with the freedom or motivation to be creative. When we set the scene for generating ideas, taking on puzzles, and refining works, creativity flows. A club, classroom, or extra-curricular program that has a learning culture like the one described here can become a laboratory for evolving a creative society—the kind of learning laboratory John Dewey hoped classrooms could become to strengthen democracy over a century ago.[44] This is the kind of education that has the power to transform individuals, communities, and society.

Imagine Jewish communities where these habits of creative collaboration are intentionally practiced and valued, talents are harnessed for shared purpose, and participants feel valued for what they contribute. The creative in this case might be the person stewarding the group, and the creative is also the individual fulfilling a particular task involving a specific technical skillset. What if the communication required for creative collaboration became the norm for communicating in our classrooms, congregations, and communities? What if our schools and learning spaces were truly environments designed to elicit and provoke creativity? What if all Jewish learners were invited authentically into the interpretive discourse of Jewish history and as co-creators of the Jewish future? What if we were truly prepared to curate deep and rich Jewish lives? Imagine the new kinds of Jewish creativity that could emerge if Jewish educational settings were laboratories for such a vision of Jewish life.

43 Kleon, *Steal like an Artist*.
44 Dewey, *The School and Society and the Child and the Curriculum; Democracy and Education.*

FOUR FACETS, ONE GEMSTONE:
Teaching and Learning to Ensure a Creative Jewish Future

Interpreting, curating, making, and collaborating are four facets of creativity that have universal value for a flourishing society while they also fuel particularly important functions of living life as a Jew in the 21st century. Like other ways of knowing, feeling, and doing, these habits and practices interact and overlap, informing and influencing each other, reflecting new meaning and potential into the world. As I have sampled in the examples above, there are a wide range of pedagogical strategies for developing creative mindsets in learners.

There are many ways to think and act creatively. One might practice one or two of these habits more than the others. Each facet complements the others. Regardless of talent or technical skill, whether we can't draw or we are tone deaf, we *can* sense, understand, and exist with deeper purpose and self-awareness when we cultivate creative habits. An individual may be more comfortable in one facet or another, either by nature or nurture; how we are socialized and the degree of exposure to creative practice can impact where we feel confident in any realm. Social hierarchies and power dynamics may prevent people from enacting these habits, but if those barriers are removed, we might discover a much more multifaceted and innovative range of possible creative processes and outcomes.

The artists described above demonstrate how to encourage creativity by creating a learning culture where experimentation, listening, seeking perspectives, and imagining are the norm. Ideally, such learning cultures would be supported by a broader surrounding ecology of learning that nourishes all facets of creativity. The map and structure of the Jewish educational enterprise today does not yet operate as an ecology; settings are separated into distinct sectors, such as schools, camps, afterschool programs, congregations, museums, educational travel, youth engagement, early childhood centers, family education, and adult learning. These settings compete with one another for resources: funding, enrollment, professionals, and the attention of participants. No single setting can hold the responsibility for Jewish education alone. The settings can be better linked together into an ecology of education, explicitly designed to foster Jewish creativity. How to reorganize the Jewish educational landscape into a better functioning ecology of learning is a subject worthy of another paper.[45]

45 The concept of an ecology of learning draws from Urie Bronfenbrenner's theories of human development, which links and maps the various influences in a learner's life. For another paper, it is worth exploring more deeply how the enterprise of Jewish learning at all stages of the life cycle can be organized into an ecology with explicit aspirations, so that the intended and emergent learning outcomes of each setting can be reinforced across the system. See Shelton, *The Bronfenbrenner Primer.*

As we re-examine the structure of Jewish education and the place of creativity within it, we have a moral imperative to be attuned to the systems, rules, and social conventions that inhibit or prohibit creativity, particularly as those barriers prevent diverse Jewish voices and aesthetics to enter the communal culture. It is inevitable that there will be debates about what expressions of Jewish creativity are legitimate and authentic; if we engage with healthy curiosity, empathy, and kindness, we increase the possibility of producing more *chidushim* and discovering new ways to thrive in a changing and diverse world. We cannot grow and enrich culture without promoting empowered creativity for all. A culture of creativity has the capacity to draw upon the uniqueness of individuals, while empowering a dynamic collective, connected by history.

Creativity is an invitation to imagine, ideate, and interpret in new ways. Jewish creativity is an invitation to apply creative habits to all spiritual, moral, political, and practical arenas of our lives.

The Jewish story through millennia is one of creative adaptation and transformation. Current generations are being called upon to write the next chapter of that history. Are we prepared to craft that chapter? I offer this rationale and the four facets of creativity as a framework for the field of Jewish education to participate intentionally in galvanizing Jewish creativity in all the places where Jewish learning occurs. To the extent that Jewish education is where we encounter wisdom and practice skills and develop habits of mind, the possibility that the four facets of Jewish creativity can be amplified exponentially through an intentional program of creative training is worthy of further experimentation, development, and resources.

In this essay, I have drawn from a wide spectrum of creativity theorists across centuries, bridging secular and religious perspectives, historical lenses and future-forward gazes. A classical ideal of *chidushim*—new ideas, perspectives, offerings—is animated anew by contemporary educational visionaries who want to design learning to generate new and valuable ideas while encouraging the rethinking and polishing of classic ones. Creativity is an invitation to imagine, ideate, and interpret in new ways. Jewish creativity is an invitation to apply creative habits to all spiritual, moral, political, and practical arenas of our lives. I want to offer a charge to readers, whom I assume to be consumers, purveyors, and supporters of Jewish education: We need more laboratories, studios, test kitchens,

outdoor spaces, sanctuaries, and classrooms where we can practice the habits of creativity, to adapt and cope in the moment, and to ready ourselves to invent in the face of the challenges and opportunities yet to come.

Most of today's Jewish learners live life navigating a variety of worlds, identities, languages, and cultures. They are flooded with choices about who to be, who to know, follow, and like, and how to communicate. Moreover, they are bombarded with claims about Jews, Jewish history, and Israel that seek to delegitimize and indict. Against that chaos, they need to feel confident to live their Jewish lives and write their own narratives, and to use Jewish navigation tools to chart their pathways to human flourishing. Immersion in high quality Jewish creative activity awakens aesthetic awareness, perspective-taking, and connection-making. Creative expression oxygenates Jewish life and community, animating and illuminating the place we write for ourselves in history. Creativity is a means to keep Jewish history alive, live fully in the present, and create a hopeful future.

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