

# 2021 Children's Sabbath

## "Where Does It Hurt?": Listening to Heal Our Children

### Jewish Resources for Children's Shabbat

This section provides Jewish resources for the 2021 celebration of Children's Shabbat on October 15 and 16. The theme for the 2021 National Observance of Children's Sabbaths is "*Where Does It Hurt?: Listening to Heal Our Children*". In addition to these resources for the services tied to the 2021 theme, please refer to the more extensive resources for Children's Shabbat, education materials, and action ideas on the [Children's Defense Fund website](#).

Below you will find the following to use or adapt as appropriate and incorporate into your services and other elements of the 2021 Children's Shabbat:

- Sermon sparks relating the Torah portion Lech L'cha (Gen. 12:1-17:27) to the Children's Shabbat theme
- "[Our Words Contain Worlds](#)," a reflection on listening to the children offered by Rabbi Lydia Medwin of Atlanta's The Temple
- Prayers and readings especially fitting for the themes of the 2021 Children's Shabbat
- Youth Group program, "Everyone Helps the Other, Saying 'Be Strong!'"

## Sermon Sparks for Children's Shabbat 2021

### Lech L'cha

The Torah portion for the 2021 Children's Shabbat, Lech L'cha, offers a number of rich connections to the 2021 National Observance of Children's Sabbath theme, "Where Does It Hurt?": Listening to Heal Our Children. The following two sermon sparks are just a few of the possible approaches to developing a Children's Shabbat sermon.

#### 1. Journey—Go Forth...

*"The Eternal One said to Abram, 'Go forth from your land, your birthplace, your father's house, to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and it shall be a blessing, I will bless those who bless you, and I will pronounce doom on those who curse you; through you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'" Gen. 12:1-3.*

#### **Haran/Crossroads**

In 2021 we find ourselves at a crossroads we never anticipated. This time has been distressing, disorienting, devastating to children, youths, and adults, with its loss of certainties, rituals, resources, and community. The pandemic across our land and globe has surfaced and exacerbated mental health needs and financial fragility. The foundation of racism in our nation present from its birth has become more exposed, newly bared by the moments of racial reckoning over the past few years. As the Capitol came under assault in January and voting rights are being curtailed our democracy has appeared more vulnerable than ever imagined.



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Poet Wendell Berry wrote:

### **The Real Work**

It may be that when we no longer know what to do  
we have come to our real work,  
and that when we no longer know which way to go  
we have come to our real journey.  
The mind that is not baffled is not employed.  
The impeded stream is the one that sings.

Haran means “crossroads.” At this crossroads, the Eternal calls us to go forth. We don’t want to go back to the old “normal.” We don’t want to stay in this state of crisis. What will it look like to venture forth toward a new normal, to move toward and become a great nation in which all families experience blessing, in which our greatness comes from the ways in which we nurture and protect and bless all children?

### **Birurim: Sparks of Holiness**

*Gd spoke to Abram: “Go you from your land . . .” (12:1)*

“From the time that Gd said to our father Abraham, ‘Go from your land,’ and ‘Abraham went on, journeying southward,’ there began the process of birurim—of extracting the sparks of holiness that are scattered throughout the universe and buried within the material existence.

By the decree of divine providence, a person wanders about in his travels to those places where the sparks that are to be extracted by him await their redemption. The Cause of All Causes brings about the many circumstances and pretexts that bring a person to those places where his personal mission in life is to be acted out.”  
(Rabbi Sholom DovBer of Lubavitch)

As we venture forth, work to move toward a nation where our greatness comes from blessing all children and families, from justice, from compassion, from nurture—what sparks of holiness will we see? What role might we play in helping those sparks emerge and shine? Is it the spark of young people speaking out for mental health awareness and care, removing old stigmas? Is it the spark of solidarity as we defend voting rights for all people? Is it the spark of advocacy for financial security for families, with a living wage and child tax credit as vital elements? Is it the spark of intergenerational movement building, where we listen to the voices of the young, learn from the experience of the elders, are guided by those who are most impacted and too often marginalized? What sparks do you imagine we might encounter on this journey to a promised land of justice and sufficiency for all? May our lives and the lives of all on earth be showered by these sparks of holiness.

### **L’chi Lach: The Inner Journey**

Wendell Berry, in *The Unforeseen Wilderness: Kentucky’s Red River Gorge*, observed, “And the world cannot be discovered by a journey of miles, no matter how long, but only by a spiritual journey, a journey of one inch, very arduous and humbling and joyful, by which we arrive at the ground at our own feet, and learn to be at home.”



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Debbie Friedman's lyrics "L'chi Lach" echo the reminder that for us, today, the Eternal calls us onto a spiritual journey inward rather than one that is merely outward and physical:

*L'chi lach*, to a land that I will show you  
*Leich l'cha*, to a place you do not know  
*L'chi lach*, on your journey I will bless you  
And (you shall be a blessing) *l'chi lach*

*L'chi lach*, and I shall make your name great  
*Leich l'cha*, and all shall praise your name  
*L'chi lach*, to the place that I will show you  
(*L'sim-chat cha-yim*) *l'chi lach*  
(Debbie Friedman)

We are all invited onto that inner journey. The toll of the past few years on our children and youth has put them on an unexpected, uncharted path. The mental, emotional, social toll of the pandemic has created and surfaced the need for support, care and health care, a community of understanding, nurture, and protection. Parents too have experienced a toll—encountering unforeseen loss of jobs and homes, dislocated work, distance from and loss of elderly parents, challenges of virtual schooling, and meeting new needs of children, themselves, their own parents—driving them onto a new and often rocky road. As we navigate this inner journey for ourselves, as we listen and look to be companions with our children and youths and other parents on their journey, we ask and listen for responses to many questions: where does it hurt? What will help heal? How do we prevent harm? What are we leaving behind that is helpful? What are we leaving behind that is a loss? What summons us forward and inward? What challenges do we encounter on that journey? What do we anticipate lies ahead?

### 2. What's in a Name?

*"And then the angel of the Eternal continued, 'Look—you are pregnant and shall bear a son; call him Ishmael [God Will Listen], for the Eternal has heard your affliction.' ... (16:11)*

*So she called the Eternal who had been speaking to her, 'You are El Ro'i' –meaning by this, 'Even here I have seen the back of the One who looks upon me!'" (16:13)*

In the *bris* and baby naming, we affirm the significance of names. Hebrew names connect us to our tradition, perhaps to family members who came before us, or to qualities we hope for in our children. The Torah portion for Children's Shabbat, *Lech L'cha*, introduces a number of names that may invite connection and reflection on divine responses to the suffering of children and parents and opportunities for us, made in the image of the divine, to mirror those divine responses of seeing, listening, and responding to injustice and pain.

The 2021 Children's Shabbat, *"Where Does It Hurt?": Listening to Heal Our Children*, recognizes the pain and struggle children, youths, and families have endured over the past year. The pandemic has brought not only illness and the death of loved ones to COVID, but also diminished family income, and the loss of anticipated school days filled with learning and socializing, routine and rituals, celebrations and community. The year has surfaced and exposed pervasive mental health challenges, the fragility of our democracy, and the persistence of racism.



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As parents and other adults contend with drastically changed work settings and circumstances, health concerns, financial changes, and more, it is easy to miss the voices of our children, to have their disruption and despair drowned out by the noise of everything else going on.

The Children's Shabbat and our parashat invite us to pause and listen to the children as well the parents who are struggling the most.

### **Ger/Stranger**

Hagar's name, related to *ger*, stranger, reminds us of the continuing, persistent oppression of those who are on the margins, those whose income, immigration status, cultural identity, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality lie outside those of traditional power, status, and protection. When we as individuals, communities, or as a nation continue "othering"—distancing ourselves from the common human hopes and needs, pain and plight of other parents and children—we drive today's Hagar into the wilderness in desperation and despair.

### **El Ro'i: The One Who Sees**

When Hagar is oppressed, afflicted, and driven to utter despair, the Eternal sees her, hears her, and responds to her cry. She calls the Eternal "*El Ro'i*"—the One who looks upon me. As Dvora Weisberg writes, "In naming God as the One who looks upon me (16:13) Hagar recognizes God as the One who sees the pain of the injured." (Dvora E. Weisberg, "Post-biblical Interpretations" in *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*, p. 79)

On the Children's Shabbat, we affirm that the Eternal sees the oppression and despair of parents who don't know how they can go on. Midrash suggests that the repeated naming of the angel suggests that there was not one but several angels in the encounter with Hagar. Perhaps that stands as invitation to us to see multiple opportunities for many of us to see and respond to the pain and plight of marginalized and oppressed parents and children. Will we let ourselves see and respond?

Note that Sarah and Hagar never address each other by name. "Sarah and Hagar neither speak to each other nor refer to each other by name, but their intertwined lives reflect both the systemic abuse women face and the combination of personal struggle and divine aid required to survive." (Amy-Jill Levine, "Another View" in *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*, 78.) The oppression of the system turns them on each other rather than on those who use and abuse them sexually or on the dehumanizing and oppressive system itself.

On this Children's Shabbat, we affirm the deep importance of seeing and listening to those who are most immediately impacted by injustice and oppression, by the pain of the pandemic and poverty, by despair and dislocation. Part of that seeing and listening means coming to see those who struggle as individuals with names and stories, insights and experience, hurts and hopes. It means we must work collectively against the temptation and instinct to distance ourselves, to treat those who struggle as statistics, as a faceless "problem" and not beloved, individual partners who have the most to share in leading us toward solutions for the injustice children and families bear. Part of the listening and seeing is refusing to blame those who are oppressed by unjust systems, and instead collaborating and focusing on dismantling the oppressive and inhumane systems.

One of three actions urged in response to the 2021 National Observance of Children's Sabbaths is planning and conducting a ["Child Watch Site Visitation Program"](#) which is designed to help



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community leaders see, hear, and put faces and individual stories to the broader systemic challenges and injustice so that they can learn from and be led by those who share their insights and experience and contribute to positive solutions. [Learn more here.](#)

### ***Ishmael: God Will Listen***

The parashat reminds Hagar and us, in the naming of Ishmael, that God Will Listen to those who cry out in distress and despair, out of the pain of injustice and affliction. The 2021 National Observance of Children's Sabbaths, "*Where Does It Hurt?: Listening to Heal Our Children*", is especially focused on the vital and urgent importance of listening to children and youths. Deep listening to children, youths, and those traditionally on the margins is especially difficult for those who are traditionally centered and in positions of power accorded by age, income, education, vocation, race/ethnicity. Even without malice or intention, the implicit power dynamics communicate who is heard, when they are heard, what is acceptable to express, and what response if any it will generate. For the 2021 Children's Shabbat, a second key action that congregations and communities are encouraged to take are "[Family Suppers Listening Sessions.](#)" guided by a resource that helps organizers reflect and plan in ways that will surface authentic sharing and genuine listening. [Learn more here.](#)

### **Ishmael; God Will Listen**

Our children are crying;  
Hear my pain,  
    my loneliness,  
        my depression,  
            my losses.  
Ishmael; God will listen. Will we?

Our children are calling;  
Hear my hope,  
    my dreams,  
        my ideas,  
            my strength.  
Ishmael; God will listen. Will we?

Our children are saying;  
Hear how you can help,  
    can partner,  
        can support,  
            can conspire.  
Ishmael; God will listen. Will we?

Our children are asking for us to listen and love—  
to see the hurts,  
    to heal the harm,  
        to prevent more pain.  
Ishmael; God will listen. Will we?

## Our Words Contain Worlds

By Rabbi Lydia Medwin, The Temple, Atlanta

*[Rabbi Lydia Medwin offered the following reflection](#) at the Children's Defense Fund's Proctor Institute, "Listening to the Children: A Radical Revolution in Values," in July, as part of a plenary session she led with Dr. Patrick Reyes. Dr. Reyes offered the following words of introduction: "It's my privilege to introduce and welcome Rabbi Lydia Medwin home from The Temple in Atlanta where she is the living embodiment of a listening spirit—from working in El Salvador to the Appalachians to Atlanta, from working with local legislators and religious leaders to end mass incarceration to leading programs around racial healing in the South and working to address racial disparities affecting women of color in maternal and childbirth and health. She is a profound advocate and worker for freedom of women and children.... So, welcome home Rabbi Lydia."*

Our words contain worlds. Our words contain worlds and there's a word in Hebrew that I'm thinking about tonight. It's in the Torah, in our sacred books in the Jewish tradition. It's in Hebrew and it means "listen." It's *Sh'ma*. It's actually found in Deuteronomy 6:6 in our sacred texts. It happens to be in this week's portion of the Torah [July 17, 2021] that we read and it is known as the watchword of our faith, the first prayer that many Jewish children learn. Six little words that begin with the word listen.

Sh'ma Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad!

Hear, O Israel, God is our God, and God is One!

This word contains worlds and the first world comes with a story. It's a story that comes about two thousand years ago in the Jewish tradition from a midrash that talks about the dying of Jacob, one of the patriarchs. And we read there that he's surrounded by all of his children—a dozen children and many more wives and others. And he says, "Listen, I'm scared. Here we are sitting in Egypt. I know we had to leave the land to be here, but I'm nervous that this relationship that we have with God will end with me."

And his children say miraculously in one voice, "Sh'ma Israel." Listen, Jacob—whose name is also Israel—listen, Adonai is our God. Adonai will always be our God and God is One. With listening we will carry on your tradition." They say, in essence, "The things that you value most will continue." And so this act of listening as someone or something is dying or passing away is important in order for continuity to exist, to pass on what is good and what is true. Another story comes from much more recently, in 1946 in post-war Europe. We read about a story in which rabbi Yitzhak HaLevi Herzog is touring around Europe's orphanages and monasteries where Jewish parents had hidden their children during the war. And he says it's time for all of these children to come home. And the Reverend Mother says, "Of course, let's do this, let's find the children. But," she says, "I have no idea how to find them; their parents dropped them off here sometime in secret—we don't know who they are. It's been years in some cases."

And the rabbi said, "I have an idea." So he assembled the children all into one room and he stood on the podium and he said these six simple words: "Sh'ma Yisrael...."



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Suddenly dozens of children were crying and weeping, saying “Mama,” “Papa.” They heard these words and it took them back to their own most intimate most important memories.

And so when we listen, we tap into this world as well—a calling that bypasses the mind, that goes straight into the heart. It’s a kind of listening that calls forth identity and tradition and memories in Jewish communities around the world.

We say this prayer, this line from the Torah that is lifted out of the Torah and stuck straight into our prayer books at least two times, three times a day—many communities saying it right before bed. And so this prayer becomes also a prayer about listening as protection, and listening as comfort and shelter, and safety and concern.

When we look at the prayer embedded in its liturgy, in fact we see that the prayer right before it is about God’s love for us and the ways in which God shows love for all people through passing on wisdom. And the prayer right after the Sh’ma is about love again; it’s about the way that we show our love to God by living into God’s hopes and dreams for us. And so the Sh’ma is really wrapped in love; it’s wrapped in care, it’s showing our wisdom and getting to live up to the expectations that are held for us that we can strive for the goodness that we know is inside that we need to express.

And lastly, this world that is Sh’ma, that is listening, is about a labor—my labor. When I was bringing my son into this world I, with every contraction, took in the deep breath and through each breath said one word of Sh’ma. And I never finished it to the end. Six words. And I found in the Sh’ma a sense of strength, a sense of power and resilience and endurance, a sense that with listening, with this listening something new could be possible, something new could be brought into this world that had never existed before but desperately needed to exist. This kind of listening is about hope, and it’s about hope for our future.

## Prayers and Readings for Children's Shabbat

### Candle Blessing

O Source of light and truth,  
Creator of the eternal law of goodness,  
Well-spring of justice and mercy,  
Help us to find knowledge by which to live.  
Lead us to take the words we shall speak  
Into our hearts and our lives.  
Bless all who enter this sanctuary in need,  
all who bring the offerings of their hearts.  
May our worship lead us to acts of kindness, peace, and  
love.

(From *Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur*, p. 121)

### Welcome

May the door of this synagogue be wide enough  
to receive all who hunger for love, all who are lonely for fellowship.  
May it welcome all who have cares to unburden,  
thanks to express, hopes to nurture.

May the door of this synagogue be narrow enough  
to shut out pettiness and pride, envy and enmity.

May its threshold be no stumbling block  
to young or straying feet.

May it be too high to admit complacency,  
selfishness and harshness.

May this synagogue be, for all who enter,  
the doorway to a richer and more meaningful life.

(*Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur*, p. 124)

### Sh'ma: A Re-Creation

Loving life  
and its mysterious source  
with all our heart  
and all our spirit,  
all our sense and strength,  
we take upon ourselves  
and into ourselves  
these promises:  
to care for the earth  
and those who live upon it,  
to pursue justice and peace,  
to love kindness and compassion.



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We will teach this to our children  
throughout the passage of the day—  
as we dwell in our homes  
and as we go on our journeys,  
from the time we rise until we fall asleep.  
And may our actions  
be faithful to our words  
that our children's children  
may live to know:  
Truth and kindness have embraced,  
peace and justice have kissed  
and are one.

(Marcia Falk, in *Siddur Lev Shalem*, The Rabbinical Assembly, p. 41)

### After the V'ahavta:

“When people come to you for help, do not turn them off with pious words, saying ‘Have faith and take your troubles to God!’ Act instead as if there were no God, as though there were only one person in all the world who could help—only yourself.” (Martin Buber)

### Emet Ve-Emunah

In a world torn by violence and pain,  
a world far from wholeness and peace,  
give us the courage to say, Adonai:  
there is one God in heaven and earth.  
*The high heavens declare Your glory;  
May earth reveal Your justice and love.*

From bondage in Egypt, we were delivered;  
At Sinai, we bound ourselves to Your way.  
*Inspired by prophets and instructed by sages,  
Time and again, we overcame oppressive forces.*

Though our failings are many and our faults are great,  
It has been our glory to bear witness to our God,  
Keeping alive in dark ages  
Your vision of a world redeemed.  
*Let us continue to work for the day  
When the nations will be one and at peace.  
Then shall we rejoice as Israel did,  
Singing on the shores of the Sea:*

(Adapted from *Chaim Stern in Mishkan T'filah*, p. 157)



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### Hashkiveinu

Spread your peace over us,

Like a baby's blanket knit with love and care, purled with hopes and dreams;  
Like a child's covers tucked in after the last story is told, safe and warm.

Spread your peace over us,

Like the chuppah over a new couple binding themselves in covenant love  
Like the grandparent's tallit wrapped around the B'nai Mitzvah's shoulders, carrying  
memories of generations past and prayers for those to come.

Spread your peace over us,

and help us spread your peace  
to the young and the old,  
over the healthy and the hurting,  
to those in despair and those who delight.

Baruch atah, Adonai, haporeis sukat shalom aleinu  
V'al kol amo Yisrael v'al Yerushalayim.

(S. Daley-Harris)

Prayer invites

God's Presence to suffuse our spirits,

God's will to prevail in our lives.

Prayer may not bring water to parched fields,

Nor mend a broken bridge,

Nor rebuild a ruined city.

But prayer can water an arid soul,

Mend a broken heart,

Rebuild a weakened will.

(*Mishkan T'filah*, p. 165)

O God, by faith, like Abraham, let us obey Your call to leave our comfortable homes and set out for strange places although we do not know for certain where we are going.

By faith, like Noah, let us heed Your signs and warnings and build sturdy arks to rescue our children from the coming floods.

By faith, like Isaac and Jacob, let us seek Your blessings on our children's futures.

By faith, like Moses, let us leave Pharaoh's house and head across the wilderness to lead our oppressed children to freedom.

By faith, like Joseph, let us turn evil into good and welcome our erring brothers and kin with a spirit of reconciliation and love.

By faith, like the child David, let us go out without fear to face the Goliaths of our day with slingshots of righteousness and justice confident of Your divine guidance and protection.

(Marian Wright Edelman in *Guide My Feet: Prayers and Meditations on Loving and Working for Children*, p. 56)

## K'dushah

Holiness occurs when power and goodness co-exist in perfect harmony (adapted from Mordecai Kaplan). How shall we sanctify God's name? By being holy ourselves. How do we accomplish this? Let our prayers bring us to sacred deed, to actions that promote justice, harmony, and peace.

*(Mishkan T'filah, p. 171)*

## K'dushat HaYom

May these hours of rest and renewal  
open our hearts to joy and our minds to truth.  
May all who struggle find rest on this day.  
May all who suffer find solace.  
May all who hurt find healing on this day.  
May all who despair find purpose.  
May all who hunger find fulfillment on this day.  
And may this day fulfill its promise,  
Baruch atah, Adonai, m'kadeish HaShabbat.

*(Mishkan T'filah, p. 173)*

What does the Eternal require of us?  
But to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with Adonai. (Micah 6:8)

## Hodaah

For the expanding grandeur of Creation,  
Worlds known and unknown, galaxies beyond galaxies,  
Filling us with awe and challenging our imaginations,  
*Modim anachnu lach.*

For this fragile planet earth, its time and tides,  
Its sunsets and seasons,  
*Modim anachnu lach.*

For the joy of human life, its wonders and surprises,  
Its hopes and achievements,  
*Modim anachnu lach.*

For human community, our common past and future hope,  
Our oneness transcending all separation,  
Our capacity to work for peace and justice in the midst of hostility and oppression  
*Modim anachnu lach.*

For high hopes and noble causes, for faith without fanaticism,  
For understanding of views not shared.  
*Modim anachnu lach.*

For all who have labored and suffered for a fairer world,  
Who have lived so that others might live in dignity and freedom,  
*Modim anachnu lach.*



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For human liberties and sacred rites:  
for opportunities to change and grow, to affirm and choose,  
*Modim anachnu lach.*

We pray that we may live not by our fears but by our hopes,  
Not by our words but by our deeds.  
*Modim anachnu lach.*

Blessed are you, Adonai, Your Name is Goodness and You are worthy of thanksgiving.

(Eugene Picket, adapted, in *Mishkan T'filah*, p. 257)

### Shalom

We oughtn't pray for what we've never known,  
and humanity has never known:

unbroken peace,  
unmixed blessing.

No.

Better to pray for pity,  
for indignation, discontent,  
the will to see and touch,  
the power to do good and make new.

(*Mishkan T'filah*, p. 259)

### Modeh/Modah

This day has dawned with new and limitless potential, as of one just born.  
This day beckons us forward, as a young child curious about what lies ahead.  
This day will grow into fullness, bringing learning and light as in the growth of our youth.  
We offer thanks to you, Eternal, for the promise of this day.

(S. Daley-Harris)

### Elohai N'shamah

My soul came to me pure,  
Drawn from the reservoir of the Holy.  
All the time it remains within me,  
I am thankful for its thirst  
For compassion and justice.  
Let my eyes beyond the beauty of all creatures;  
Let my hands know the privilege of righteous deeds.  
Baruch atah, Adonai, asher b'yado nefesh kol chai v'ruach kol b'sar ish.

(*Mishkan T'filah*, p. 423)

### Nisim Bchol Yom

Religion embraces both faith and action.  
The primary quality is action,  
for it lays the foundation for faith;  
the more we do good,  
the more readily do we grasp the meaning of duty and life,  
and the more readily do we believe in the Divine  
from which stems the good.

(*Mishkan T'filah*, p. 199)

## Responsive Reading after Ahavah Rabbah

Once or twice in a lifetime

A man or woman [or youth] may choose

A radical leaving, having heard

Lech l'cha—go forth.

God disturbs us toward our destiny

by hard events

and by freedom's now urgent voice

which explode and confirm who we are.

We don't like leaving

but God loves becoming.

*Baruch atah, Adonai, habocheir b'amo Yisrael bh'ahavah.*

*(Mishkan T'filah, p. 231)*

## Journey

"And the world cannot be discovered by a journey of miles, no matter how long, but only by a spiritual journey, a journey of one inch, very arduous and humbling and joyful, by which we arrive at the ground at our own feet, and learn to be at home."

*(Wendell Berry, The Unforeseen Wilderness: Kentucky's Red River Gorge)*

## Youth Group Program

### “Everyone Helps the Other, Saying ‘Be Strong!’” National Observance of Children’s Shabbat

October 2021  
S. Daley-Harris

**Touchstone Text:** Isaiah 40:27-41:16 (selected verses)

#### Goals

Participants will:

- Be aware of the National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths.
- Reflect on verses from the haftarah for Children’s Shabbat.
- Recognize the variety of ways the pandemic has taken a toll on teens and children.
- Consider how they can strengthen other teens and children, and how they would like to be helped.
- Remember the Eternal’s promise to help, strengthen, and uphold them during difficult times.

#### Objectives

At the end of the program, participants will be able to:

- Explain what the National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths is and why we participate in the Children’s Shabbat.
- Describe a range of ways the pandemic has affected not only them but also other teens in the group and children, teens, and families more broadly.
- Name at least one gift they have to support and encourage others.
- Identify one way that they prefer to be helped, supported, and encouraged.
- Have a concrete reminder of the Eternal’s promise to help and strengthen in the haftarah.

#### Materials:

- Mural paper with the heading “Even the young grown faint and weary”—at least 6 feet long; sticky notes (such as Post-Its)—five per person; markers/pens; and masking tape or other preferred means for hanging mural paper on the wall.
- River stones (available from craft stores) and paint pens.
- Table to display stones and pens or baskets in which to distribute them.
- Copies of the handout, one per participant (Touchstone text on one side, discussion questions on the reverse).
- Flipchart paper and markers.
- Songs selected by program leader (PL) and means of playing them during the reflection and writing for the mural and, if desired, during the closing segment while participants (PPs) are creating their river rock reminders.

#### People:

- Any number of participants
- One program leader
- One time-keeper
- One assistant to distribute materials and take notes during the last group discussion
- Permission from appropriate congregational leader to display the mural in a place where adults can see it.



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### Space Needed:

- Room large enough for discussion in a circle, with a wall on which a length of mural paper (at least six feet long) can be hung with masking tape or other preferred method.
- Table to spread out river rocks and paint pens (alternatively baskets may be used and passed around).
- Space to spread out into dyads for conversation.

### Time Table:

00:00-10:00	Introduction to Children's Shabbat
10:00-15:00	Overview of the Touchstone Text
15:00-30:00	"Even the Young Grow Faint and Weary" Mural
30:00-50:00	Dyads: Each Helps the Other, Saying "Be Strong!"
50:00-60:00	Riverstone Reminders

### Detailed Procedure:

#### **00:00-10:00 Introduction to Children's Shabbat**

Program leader (PL) welcomes participants (PPs). If numbers permit, PL invites PPs to introduce themselves, saying the name they want to be called. (If desired, for a light-hearted way to begin, PL may also invite PPs to share a nickname they were called by parent/s or others when they were a child.)

PL explains that this program is part of the nationwide National Observance of Children's Sabbaths coordinated by the nonprofit, nonpartisan Children's Defense Fund in partnership with movements, denominations, and religious organizations. The National Observance of Children's Sabbath joins congregations of every faith each October in religious services, education, outreach, and advocacy to learn about and respond to the needs of children in our nation, such as poverty, gun violence, and lack of health care.

This is the 30<sup>th</sup> year of the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths. From its very first year, the engagement of the Jewish community in the Children's Shabbat has underscored the central commitment to children and justice at the heart of Judaism and the long history of social action in our community.

This year's Children's Shabbat focuses on the theme "Tell Me Where It Hurts?: Listening to Heal Our Children" and is engaging people of all ages in listening to the voices of children and teens to better understand the struggles the past year-plus of pandemic, poverty, racial reckoning, assault on democracy, disruption, and distress has caused.

The theme, "Tell Me Where It Hurts?: Listening to Heal Our Children" encourages congregations to listen more carefully to what children and young people have to say about "where it hurts" and what problems they see and experience, and have that listening guide the responses they develop in partnership with young people to work for healing and systemic justice to prevent the painful circumstances going forward. The Children's Shabbat involves all ages. While we want to listen especially carefully to the experiences of children and youths, it is important that all ages are guided by those experiences and engaged in responses that support healing and prevent further harm. The Children's Shabbat includes challenges and responses at the individual, congregational, community, state, and national level.



## JEWISH RESOURCES FOR CHILDREN'S SHABBAT

Note that the Children's Shabbat is not to be confused with a tot shabbat service aimed at very young children and their parents. The Children's Shabbat is for the entire congregation because all ages are concerned about the challenges facing children and families and all ages have a role to play in responding to them.

PL asks if there are any questions, answers them as she/he is able, and lets PPs know there is more information on the Children's Defense Fund website ([www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org)).

### **10:00-15:00 Overview of the Touchstone Text**

PL distributes handout with touchstone text from Isaiah 40:27-41:13 (excerpted from the Haftarah for Lech L'cha.)

Invite three PPs to read the three sections of the touchstone text aloud.

Ask if anyone knows the context for this passage. If so, invite them to share with the group and supplement response if needed. If none know, explain that the unknown author of this text (now usually referred to as second Isaiah because he/she came after the first prophet known as Isaiah) was speaking to the Israelites in exile in Babylon. The exile had lasted far longer than any had imagined it would when it first began.

Does this sound familiar to any of us in this second year of the pandemic?

PL invites quick "popcorn" responses to the following questions (or ones like it that seem appropriate, depending on circumstances in October 2021):

- In December 2019, when the pandemic was first reported, did you think it would impact your life in any significant way?
- In March of 2020, when COVID-19 was officially termed a pandemic, how long did you think it would last?
- At the end of that spring, did you think that the following school year for you would be virtual or significantly changed?
- In one word, how did you feel when cases started to rise again across this nation this summer and into the fall?

In the time that our touchstone text was written, the people were increasingly in despair, not sure how much longer they could hold on. Isaiah wrote these words to the distressed, despairing people as they felt they were losing strength to go on. The words were offered to comfort and sustain those who despaired—although the question may also be raised whether this response was meant to quiet or stop the voicing of despair. Either way, it acknowledges the reality of distress and despair, the need for hope and comfort to keep going on.

### **15:00-30:00 "Even the Young Grow Faint and Weary" Mural**

Distribute five sticky notes and markers/pens to PPs. Invite them to reflect on the ways that they and other teens and children have, like those Israelites in exile, grown faint and weary, distressed, and even despairing over the course of the past year plus. Invite them to take the next three minutes to write different feelings or experiences that have contributed to their or other young people's struggles over the past year—one experience or feeling or impact per sticky note. What they write can reflect their own experience, feelings they know from peer sharing, or what they are aware of affecting children and teens more broadly (including what they've read or seen in the news).



## JEWISH RESOURCES FOR CHILDREN'S SHABBAT

When the reflection and writing time has concluded, invite them to post their sticky notes on the mural paper—have four or five go up at a time. Tell them that they can spread them out on the paper, and encourage them to cluster notes on similar themes together. For instance, if one wrote “didn’t get to visit colleges,” “feel more anxious,” and “worry about people who lost jobs,” she might stick the first near someone else’s note that said “don’t feel prepared for college applications” and the second and third near someone who wrote “hard to get out of bed” or “my family seems more stressed.”

Encourage them to post their notes silently, and to take time to read what else is posted, also in silence. You may choose to play music during the reflection, posting, and reading time.

After everyone has posted their notes and had time to read what others posted, invite conversation (no one should feel compelled to share). How was it to share (in writing) what they and other young people have been experiencing? What was it like to see what others are feeling? Were they surprised, reassured, worried about the results? What was it like to find that others had the same experience? What was it like to find that no one else shared an experience?

*Arrange to display this mural with sticky notes where the adults of the congregation can see it, to help others understand what the students are experiencing.*

### **30:00-50:00 Dyads: Each Helps the Other, Saying “Be strong!”**

Remind participants of the lines from Isaiah in which “each helps the other, saying ‘Be strong!’” and the details of how individuals collaborated and encouraged each other across lines of difference, recognizing different gifts and skills, different tasks and challenges. Tell them that they will be responding to two questions in two dyads (partner pairs), with each person having one minute to respond to each question. Point out that the questions are printed on the handout. After the second dyad, the group will come together to continue the discussion.

Have PPs pair up with the person next to them. Give them 4 minutes to respond to the following two questions. (To save time deciding who will go first, ask the person whose name comes first in the alphabet to respond first in this dyad.)

- What are your particular gifts that you can bring to the task of helping and encouraging other teens and children—on an individual level or on a collective activism/organizing level?
- What do you find helpful when you need encouragement? What kinds of words, actions, or other support helps you?

Time-keeper should announce “10 seconds until time to switch” and then “switch” for each minute of the four minute segment.

Invite them to turn to the person on their other side to form new pairs. Give them another 4 minutes (one minute per person, per question) to answer the next two questions that broaden the question out beyond the individual level. (To save time deciding who will go first, ask the person whose name comes last in the alphabet to respond first in this dyad.)

- What are formal and informal ways to encourage, help, and strengthen each other?
- What are ways that we can encourage, help, and strengthen children and youths at a broader, systemic, or political level in our state and nation?



## JEWISH RESOURCES FOR CHILDREN'S SHABBAT

Time-keeper should announce "10 seconds until time to switch" and then "switch" for each minute of the four minute segment.

For the final 10 minutes of this segment, invite sharing with the whole group. Assistant may record ideas on the flipchart paper.

Encourage PPs to jot down in the reflection/commitment space on their handouts any ideas that they are interested in following up on individually or collectively. Invite those who wish to name those commitments if they want others to work with them.

### ***50:00-60:00 "I will give you strength, I will help you, I will uphold you with My victorious hand": Riverstone Reminders***

Let each participant choose one of the smooth river stones and a paint pen from the table where they are displayed. Re-read Isaiah 41:10. Invite participants to write a word or phrase on the stone to remind them of the Eternal's promise in 41:10 and/or the encouragement of the others. They may take these stones with them to keep somewhere visible as a reminder, or even in a pocket to touch during an especially difficult time.

## Appendix:

### Handout: Touchstone Texts

“Do you not know?  
Have you not heard?  
The everlasting God, the Eternal,  
Creator of the earth from end to end,  
Measureless in understanding is the One  
Who gives strength to the faint,  
Adds power to those who have none.

**Even the young grow faint and weary;**

**The young may stumble and fall—**

But all who trust in the Eternal  
Renew their strength,  
They soar on wings like eagles,  
They run and never grow weary,  
They march and never grow faint.

(Isaiah 40:28-31)

They draw near, they approach;

**Each helps the other,**

**Saying, “Be strong!”**

The artisan encourages the goldsmith.  
The one who hammers the metal smooth  
Compliments the one who strikes the anvil,  
Saying ‘The soldering is good,’  
And they fasten it in place with nails:  
It cannot be moved.

(Isaiah 41:5b-7)

I have taken hold of you from the ends of the earth,  
And called you from its far corners,  
And said to you: You are My servant,  
I have chosen you, and not rejected you.

Have no fear, for I am with you;  
Do not be afraid, for I am your God.

I will give you strength,

I will help you,

I will uphold you with My victorious hand!

(Isaiah 41:9-10)

Discussion Questions for Dyads

#### **First Dyad:**

(one minute each per question)



## JEWISH RESOURCES FOR CHILDREN'S SHABBAT

As an individual:

- What are your particular gifts that you can bring to the task of helping and encouraging other teens and children—on an individual level or on a collective activism/organizing level?
- What do you find helpful when you need encouragement? What kinds of words, actions, or other support helps you?

### **Second Dyad:**

*(one minute each per question)*

Thinking about collective responses:

- What are formal and informal ways to encourage, help, and strengthen struggling children and teens in our community, schools, congregation?
- What are ways that we can encourage, help, and strengthen children and youths at a broader, systemic, or political level in our state and nation?

### **Personal Reflection and Commitment:**

**Ideas I Want to Follow Up On (individually or with others)**