



The Ziegler School
of Rabbinic Studies

בית המדרש ע"ש זיגלר

בשביל החיים
Walking with Life

Edited By
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דרכיה דרכי נעם



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DEAN AND VICE PRESIDENT

INTRODUCTION

Conservative Judaism, in *Emet Ve-Emunah: Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism*, affirms, “The Jewish home should reflect the rhythm of the Jewish calendar, of Shabbat and Yom Tov, as well as the Jewish life-cycle with its attendant ceremonies from birth to death.” In the brochure, *Conservative Judaism: Covenant and Commitment*, the Rabbinical Assembly affirms, “The many *mitzvot*, giving substance to God’s *b’rit*, reflect divine love in every aspect of the human endeavor. Through *mitzvot* we have the potential to transform each moment of our lives, even the most prosaic, into an encounter with the divine.”

It is to aid the contemporary Jew in the duty and privilege of deepening the moments of joy, transition, and sorrow in our lives, of enlisting the rich resources of Judaism’s great sages through the ages, that the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies at the American Jewish University, in partnership with the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, the Rabbinical Assembly, the Women’s League for Conservative Judaism and the Federation of Jewish Men’s Clubs has compiled and published this adult education course focused on Jewish apprehensions of life cycle. These essays and worksheets will open a wide range of insights and conceptualizations of the multiple stages and varieties of human living and Jewish values. Typical of Conservative Judaism, these essays integrate traditional and academic insights and approaches, celebrate the pluralism of Jewish diversity throughout history, and insist that open-minded and critical study can energize an agenda attained without partisan blinders.

It remains our happy duty to thank the Held Family Foundation, and especially Mr. Harold Held, z'l, dear friend to the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies and the American Jewish University, and a philanthropic visionary, for making the production and dissemination of this remarkable tool possible. I'd also like to thank Dr. Robert Wexler, President of the American Jewish University for his steady support and encouragement of this project from its inception. And it is also a personal pleasure to thank my student and colleague, Ms. Deborah Silver, whose professionalism, insight, patience and diligence have produced a work of real excellence.

With Ms. Silver, it is a joy to thank Professor Tzemah Yoreh for the vocalization of some of the Hebrew texts.

May the Holy Blessing One enliven your study, awaken your heart, and open your soul to the implementation of Torah values through every moment of life, and may the essays and worksheets which follow help you to walk the time honored path of Torah and mitzvot in a spirit of wonder, pluralism, openness, intellectual honesty, and strengthened faith.

B'virkat Shalom,

Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson

Dean, Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies

Vice President, American Jewish University

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

INTRODUCTION

This third book in the Ziegler Adult Learning series is designed, like its predecessors *Walking with God* and *Walking with Justice*, to provide high quality, stimulating and challenging materials for our adult learners. The audience we have in mind is the questioning congregant who might not be entirely familiar with Jewish sources.

The book comprises twelve self-contained units which deal with various stages of the human life cycle, from birth to death. With the exception of the first unit, which does not have havruta texts, all units comprise:

- an essay
- a set of four havruta texts, with questions
- a fifth text for group study

All materials can be downloaded from the AJU website (www.ajula.edu). Follow the link to Walking with Life.

RESOURCES

For each session you will need:

- the essays (for session 1, essays 1 and 2; for the rest, the essay for the session following to hand out at the end so participants can read it for the next time)
- copies of the texts, or any other materials you wish to use
- materials (paper, pens etc) for participants to record their thoughts (so they can keep the materials in mind between sessions)

SUGGESTED SESSION LENGTH

The suggested length of the session is 1½ hours – see the session suggestions for ideas as to how this breaks down. You can of course adjust this as you wish. Any session of two hours or longer will need a short break in the middle. Participants can look at texts/discuss them while they are having a warm drink, if time is short.

SESSION SUGGESTIONS AND TEXT WORK

We suggest you begin every session with a short recap of the main issues raised by the essay the participants have studied.

Then break into *havruta* groups. Four texts are provided per session, with questions to help guide the study. The idea is that you split your participants into four groups. Initially, give each group one of the texts. When the time comes to report back, give every group copies of all of the texts so that they can study them as their colleagues report on them, and take them home. This technique enables a lot of learning to be covered in a comparatively to work on the four texts. Or you can choose to focus on only one or two of the texts – it's up to you.

In the second part of the session all participants can work together on the Text for Group Study, or you may wish to choose another related activity or teaching of your own. Some ideas are provided in the 'Session Suggestions' at the end of the book.

The material has been designed for adult learners – if you are using it for other audiences, you might find that it needs adjusting. Please feel free to do whatever you need to do.



HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

RITUAL

While this is not a book that is specifically designed to help participants craft rituals, you may find that the sessions naturally drift in that direction. If so, we suggest that instead of studying the fifth text, you work together with your participants to design new rituals which can then be used within your community.

JOURNALING

Participants will retain their learning for longer if they keep a written record. The issues covered in this book will overlap with their personal lives in a very direct way. You may wish to suggest that they keep a private journal of their insights and ideas from each session, and to allow time for them to journal before the session ends.

CONCLUSION

Rabbi Meshullam Zusya of Hanipol used to teach: “In the world to come, they will not ask me, ‘Why were you not Moses?’ They will ask me, ‘Why were you not Zusya?’”

Part of the aim of this book is to remind participants of the relevance of our tradition to their own lives that they live now, today. We have tried to deal with aspects of the lifecycle – singlehood, health – which raise issues that you might not find explored in other sources. We hope the materials will stimulate, comfort and inspire.

It is our hope and our prayer that the study of the materials in this book will help people dive deeply into our tradition in their quest to be themselves, the only selves they can truly be, and in this way enrich not only their communities but also the world.





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United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism,
the Rabbinical Assembly,
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