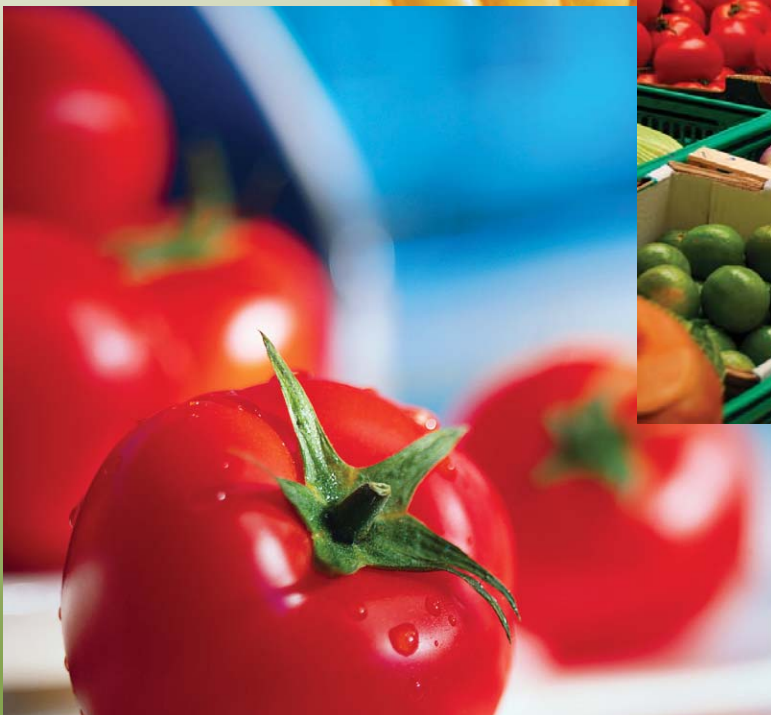
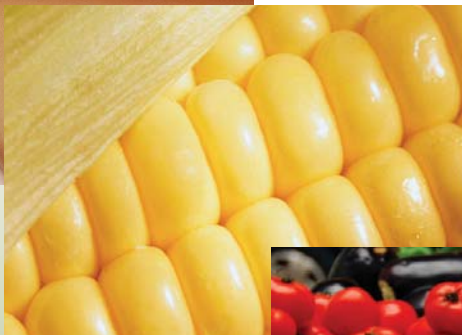




**MAZON: V'AKHALTA,  
V'SAVAATA,  
U'VERACHTA**

**EAT AND BE SATISFIED**



Created by Rabbi Margie Jacobs for the Institute for Jewish Spirituality

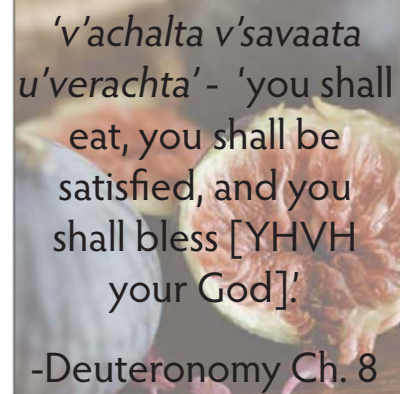
This curriculum is a joint project of *Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger* and the *Institute for Jewish Spirituality*. Special thanks to Jeremy Deutchman, Heather Wolfson, Dr. Eric Schockman, Sadie Rosenthal and Rabbis Jonathan Slater, Sheila Weinberg, and Rachel Cowan for their contributions to this project.

## INTRODUCTION

This curriculum is designed to build a sense of connection between current and potential supporters of Mazon and those in need whom Mazon serves. Through the study of traditional Jewish texts, experiential exercises, and discussion, congregations will increase members' engagement in Jewish study and practice, identification with the issue of hunger, and perception that ancient Jewish wisdom is valuable and relevant to important contemporary issues.

Through an exploration of the nature of hunger, satisfaction, and blessing, participants will:

- increase their identification with the issue of hunger;
- explore how their perception of abundance and lack in their own lives impacts both their material consumption and ability to give to others;
- maximize their capacity to give to those in need by cultivating a sense of satisfaction, abundance, and a resulting attitude of generosity.



Throughout the course, participants will explore their own experience of hunger, yearning and satisfaction, and hear the voices of those who do not have enough food to eat on a daily basis. The spiritual emptiness that leads to overconsumption is qualitatively different from the suffering of people who do not have enough food to feed themselves and their families. However, we would suggest that exploring these issues in their own lives will heighten the capacity of participants to empathize with, and act to assist, those who are in need.

In the *Birkat Hamazon*, the traditional blessing following a meal, we recite the following passage from the Torah (Deut ch 8): 'v'achalta v'savaata u'verachta' - 'you shall eat, you shall be satisfied, and you shall bless [YHVH your God].'

In this course, we will explore in depth each imperative in this verse.

The course will be held in six sessions of 1.5-2 hours each. The topics are:



### SESSION 1: V'ACHALTA - AND YOU SHALL EAT:

When do we eat? To what physical, emotional, or spiritual state is eating a response? In our own lived experience, what is hunger?



**SESSION 2: V'SAVAATA {1} - AND YOU SHALL BE SATISFIED**

What does it feel like to be satisfied? Is there an emotional aspect to our experience of a full belly?



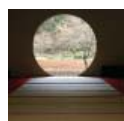
**SESSION 3: V'SAVAATA {2} - PRACTICES THAT SUPPORT SOVA (SATISFACTION)**

What are the spiritual practices that can help us to feel satisfied with what we have?



**SESSION 4: U'VERACHTA - AND YOU SHALL BLESS**

What does it mean to bless? Does an expression of gratitude naturally follow from eating and being satisfied, or is it something that we need to intentionally practice?



**SESSION 5: HEVE BRACHA! - BE A BLESSING!**

What about being a blessing, bringing blessing into the world through our efforts to end hunger for others? What is our obligation to those in need, and what are the challenges to doing so?



**SESSION 6: GETTING TACHLIS: PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR TIKKUN OLAM**

What specific steps can each of us take to end hunger? [Please note - if needed, sessions 5 and 6 can be taught in one session].

**EACH SESSION INCLUDES:**

**Check in:** At the beginning of each session, there will be time for participants to check in about their reflections over the previous week.

**Text Study:** Most texts will be studied in hevruta pairs, giving participants an opportunity to read texts aloud to each other and share their thoughts and comments.

**Group Discussion:** Participants will be encouraged to bring their own wisdom, experiences, and questions to the learning process. Please see note on "Group and Hevruta Pair Discussion" for more on creating safety in discussions.

**Homework:** For any study to have a lasting transformative effect, it is very useful for students to integrate their learnings into their daily lives. Journal assignments, mealtime exercises, tikkun olam suggestions, and other activities are intended to support students in bringing the course material into their hearts and homes well beyond the time frame of the course.

In the Torah, the imperative to "eat, be satisfied, and bless" is immediately followed by a warning to be careful not to forget God's commandments. The intention of this course is to cultivate our awareness of hunger, satisfaction, and blessing for the sake of remembering - remembering our great fortune for the gifts that we have been given, and remembering our obligation to work to eradicate hunger, and bring sova (satiety) and blessing to those in need.

## NOTES FOR FACILITATOR

The goal of Jewish study is not only to educate the mind - it is about transforming the heart, and in doing so, inspiring the work of the hands to bring about a better world. This is the goal of the texts, questions, and exercises in this course.

### TEXT STUDY:

As a facilitator, you will have your own style of teaching Jewish texts, and your own experiences and questions on which to draw. The questions that we have suggested here are not “mi Sinai,” and after spending time with the texts and your own reflections on them, you should feel free to depart from the curriculum and ask questions that seem most important and fruitful to you. The questions that we have included encourage participants to inquire what the ancient stories and words of our tradition have to say about our own contemporary, personal concerns and struggles. How do the issues in the text relate to our own experiences? How do these texts help us to live our lives well in each moment, to find what is sacred, true, and inspiring in each aspect of our lives?

This last question is particularly central to Hasidic texts, which attempt to answer a question that was key the Hasidic masters: Ayeh mkom kvodo (Where is the place of God's glory)? Their answer was that it was possible to find God, or the sacred, in each moment, in each place, if only we let God in. As we read their words, they are very practical instructions for us in cultivating a moment to moment awareness of the sacred no matter what our theology, and in doing so creating a life worth living through our words and our deeds.

### GROUP AND HEVRUTA PAIR DISCUSSION:

In order for real learning and transformation to occur, participants will be asked not only to passively take in material, but also to honestly share of themselves in ways that may require courage. It is of utmost importance that the facilitator work to provide a sense of safety and trust within the group, so that people can speak their truths without fear of judgment or criticism, and without risking the revelation of their confidences. Being on the journey often means being in a place of “not-knowing,” of having far more questions than answers, of trying out different answers, of hearing one's self articulate thoughts or opinions that may not be fully formed.

It is important that we listen to one another from this perspective: witnessing a holy creature, B'tzelem Elohim, seeking his or her path. This perspective suggests a stance of openness, compassion, support and patience rather than judgment, advice-giving or admonition. It is also important that we acknowledge that not everything need be shared. Our goal is to create the kind of safe space in which we can all feel comfortable sharing at the deepest levels that we ourselves can access. But it is important to acknowledge that each of us has different feelings about and experiences with self-disclosure. The most important thing is that we can all trust that whatever we choose to say in the group will remain absolutely confidential. (Be very clear about what “confidentiality” means in the context of this group; use examples.)



## FACES OF HUNGER

Today, 36 million Americans are at risk of hunger. Below are the messages from those that have faced hunger that you can include in your studies.

[Note to facilitator: You may choose to read a particular quote in the context of a class conversation, or use a participant handout during the course.]

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"My situation became so desperate that I had no money to buy milk for my baby. To give her nourishment, I boiled rice and filled her bottle with the rice water."

"My husband and I are in our late 70's. We stretch our money by eating only two meals a day and, when we feel well enough to go out, having lunch at the senior center."

"I am 65 years old and the caregiver for my 86 year-old mother who has Alzheimer's and is diabetic. When I lost my job, there wasn't enough income to support both of us. I thank God for the help we get from the food pantry."

"When you're hungry, you can't think of anything else."

"My teenaged daughters and I lived in our car after my husband's abuse got so bad we couldn't stay at home. They were embarrassed to go into the food pantry, but we had no choice. Without it, I don't know how we would have eaten."

"When I was diagnosed with AIDS I was still able to work. I'm on disability now, and I depend on Jewish Family Service to deliver my meals twice a week."

"With the increase in the number of people asking for help, our small food pantry would not survive without the grant we receive from MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger. The funding helps us cover some operating costs and supports our pantry's Passover food distribution."



## SESSION 1: V'ACHALTA - AND YOU SHALL EAT

### INTRODUCTION AND GOALS

Food and eating are central concerns in our general cultural experience and in Jewish culture as well. Could you imagine a Jewish function or a Jewish holiday without food? Even not eating is part of our culture, as we see on Yom Kippur.

We begin our course with the topic of eating and hunger - it is both a very accessible, familiar topic for students with a wide range of Jewish backgrounds, and yet potentially a "juicy" one as well. We receive so many mixed message about eating – what we eat, how we eat, how much we eat, and the product or result of our eating, which is the state of our bodies. We are told both to "finish what's on your plate" and "don't eat too much." In one commercial break, the media will both stoke our desire for the perfect piece of chocolate cake and also convince us that real success lies in controlling our cravings and mastering our weight loss program. With so many conflicting messages, it is difficult to discern when we are really hungry, and what it is that we truly crave.

In this session, participants will have an opportunity to identify cultural messages about eating and to put these external influences aside and explore what is true in their direct experience - their own bodies, senses, and minds - when they eat.



**CHECK IN:**

[*Facilitator note:* Discuss types of hunger/yearning - physical, social, emotional, intellectual.]

Participant introductions: what are you wanting/yearning/hungry for from this course?

**HEVRUTA DISCUSSION IN PAIRS OR SMALL GROUPS:**

[*Facilitator note:* Each pair should begin by deciding who will speak first. In contrast with our usual form of conversation, during each person's turn, there will be only one person speaking. The role of the listener is not to give advice or ask questions, but simply to listen attentively.]

Turn to someone near you and describe one positive and one negative experience of eating.

**TEXT STUDY:**

Garden of Eden

Genesis 2:25-3:12

The two of them were naked, the man and his wife, yet they felt no shame. Now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say: You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?" The woman replied to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the other trees in the middle of the garden. It is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said 'You shall not eat of it or touch it, lest you die.'"

And the serpent said to the woman, "You are not going to die, but God knows that as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like divine beings who know good and bad." When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they perceived that they were naked; and they sewed together fig leaves and made themselves loincloths.

They heard the sound of the Lord God moving about in the garden at the breezy time of day; and the man and his wife hid from the Lord God among the trees of



the garden. The Lord God called out to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" He replied, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid." Then [God] asked, "Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat of the tree from which I had forbidden you to eat?" The man said, "The woman You put at my side - she gave me of tree, and I ate."

### GROUP DISCUSSION:

According to the story, how does eating impact our sense of connection or disconnection to others? to ourselves? to God? What do we learn from the story about eating, hunger, and desire? What messages do we receive from our culture (Jewish and secular) about eating?

### MINDFUL EATING EXERCISE:

[*Facilitator note:* The following are instructions by Rabbi Sheila Weinberg for a mindful eating exercise. Read through these instructions before class. You may choose to read this verbatim to the group. You might also choose to take the key concepts and put the instructions in your own words.]

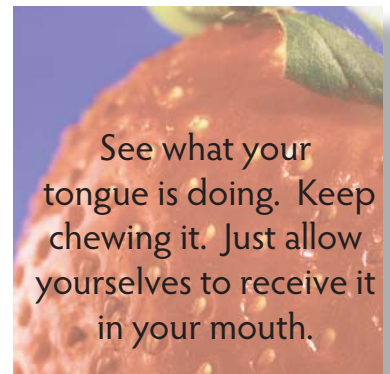
#### Eating Practice

I am going to pass out a bowl of raisins and invite you to take a few in your hand. Maybe you are thinking, "Okay, I've seen this before. Okay, yeah, this is the raisin thing." Or "what on earth is she doing with raisins?" Or "I really love raisins." Or "I am really hungry." You may actually feel the saliva forming in your mouth just at the thought of lunch and how long ago breakfast was. Anything could be coming up as thoughts in your mind. And meanwhile you may like raisins. You may love raisins. Or raisins may trigger other kinds of feelings. You know, being a kid with the lunch box and the raisins, or your kids and their lunch boxes and raisins, anything. This is an opportunity to continue to pay attention to our experience in this moment. Thoughts, sensations, stories, sounds, smells, tastes.

I don't know about you. In my life lots of meals are relatively unconscious.

A lot of times you're either having a conversation with somebody or it's a business meal, a dinner meal, or you're reading or, watching TV. Just to be by yourself with an extended period of time and have an opportunity to eat is an opportunity to practice mindfulness in a very big way, in a very big way. It is my experience in this country, in this time, that just about everybody, almost everybody, has some kind of food issue. Our whole culture has mega food issues – anorexia to obesity and everything else. Our world has severe food issues, hunger and excess, extremes. Jews have real food issues. What feels enough? What is enough? Women have tremendous food and body issues. I think men also have food and body issues.

So, actually, a lot arises when we eat. A lot is present when we eat. Go into any book store. Half of the books are about diets and menus. Either way - indulgence or denial. One way or the other. Jews have kashrut, a huge mitzvah practice, which some of us do or don't do or do well enough or not well enough for ourselves and others. It is so complicated. Religion, culture and society, family and survival, the environment and energy use – all point to food in some way.



We are going to do an eating meditation with these raisins. You can apply this practice to a silent meal meditation. Look at the raisins in your hand. Notice the shapes, colors, variations of each raisin. Now you can smell the raisins. Is it a pleasant smell? Feel the raisins. Are they sticky? What do they feel like in your hand? We will need to ingest the raisins before we can explore the sound they make or the taste. Meanwhile we can notice thoughts that arise stimulated by our contact with these raisins.

We can explore the raisin through the five senses and thought. Touch, smell, taste, sound and sight, plus thought. This is how we interact with our environment. This is how we exchange energy with life. This is how we so-called "separate" beings, exchange energy with the earth. This is how we live. We receive, we process and then we return the excess. We are constantly in relationship with each other, with memory, with other people, and with the earth. We are in relationship through the breath coming in and out and gravity that engages our body all the time. We are constantly being fed and returning the processed food to the earth. This is how our separate selves interact with the greater unity.

Before eating the raisin we say a blessing (see Session 4 on blessing practice for more blessing instructions). And now, once you've smelled and looked and touched, I'd like you to just take one raisin and put it in your mouth but don't chew it. By this time your mind is going, your heart is going, saliva is coming. Just move the raisin around there with your tongue and let it interact with your body fluids. You might notice that the outside of the raisin has a certain feel to it. It may be changing. You may be getting anxious. You may notice that it is softening, changing its texture. And then when you're ready, just bite into that raisin. Don't swallow it. Just keep chewing it. And receive; receive the taste of that raisin in your mouth.

See what your tongue is doing. Keep chewing it. Just allow yourselves to receive it in your mouth. Just keep chewing and notice if anything changes as you keep chewing it. And then when you're ready, swallow the raisin and allow it to make its way into your throat, moving down. Notice any residue in your mouth, your cheek, your tongue, teeth. Take in the experience of the raisin.

And now, your mind is thinking, "Oh, I'd like another raisin." A lot of times we just scoop a handful of raisins into our mouth. Have just one other raisin and just receive it. Do it on your own. Finish up the raisins. Just see where in your body the sensation is experienced. Notice the sound now. And the beautiful thing about our having these silent meals is, you can do them any way you want but you have more options than you usually have at a meal. So you can rest in between bites, put the fork down, you can rest in between bites and actually notice what's going on in your body.

You can also eat for a little while and then stop, just sit there, breathe, just pay attention to your breath for a little while and notice what your body feels like. Notice where the hunger is. Notice when the hunger passes. Notice what you're feeling. (No, this is not a diet workshop.) Enjoy, enjoy the food but eat with awareness. Notice when the desire for more arises. Or if it doesn't feel pleasant. Just notice that. Try not to judge your experience – just have your experience.

You have a very spacious time for the meal, both meals, breakfast and lunch. You have more than enough to do during a meal. You can notice the colors of the food or the smells. You can pay attention to how much food is enough and to when you feel full but are drawn to eat more anyway. Everything is in that one lunch or breakfast, the whole teaching. When you get distracted and all of a sudden you

realize "I'm just shoveling it in," okay. That's good. That's fine. You noticed that. Not with judgment.

We're not going to manifest new habits over night. We're going to just be very, very kind to ourselves. Remember, this paying attention is a radical act of love -- a radical act of love to ourselves. As we practice radical love for ourselves, so do we deepen our capacity to share love with others. Need I quote? *V'ahavta l'rayacha kamocha* usually translated "love your neighbor as yourself" can be translated: "to the extent that we can open our hearts to ourselves in love, so will we be able to open our hearts to each other." This is the ultimate purpose of all our practice.

## HOMework

1. Sometime during the week, eat one entire meal as mindfully as possible (based on the raisin exercise). Notice what helped you to eat mindfully? What was challenging about the experience. Are there aspects of this meal that you could bring into your daily eating? Journal about this or discuss in *hevruta* phone call.



2. Journal assignment: What do you notice about your relationship with food? When you are about to eat, notice why you are eating. Is it a response to physical sensation of hunger? Boredom? Meal time?

3. *Tikkun Olam* Idea: Understanding our own needs regarding food is important, but equally important is understanding that not everyone has the means to fulfill their food needs. If you live in a densely populated area, every time you eat in a restaurant in the next month, wrap up your leftovers and give them to a needy person on your way home. If this is not possible, consider donating the amount you would have spent, had one more person joined you for dinner, to a hunger relief agency such as MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger ([www.mazon.org](http://www.mazon.org)).



## SESSION 2: V'SAVAATA {1} - AND YOU SHALL BE SATISFIED

### INTRODUCTION AND GOALS

In this session, we will explore what it means to be satisfied. Jewish tradition offers a deep and perceptive view of contemporary consumer culture, in which we are often not satisfied by our material abundance; yet we don't know how else to address our lack of satisfaction except to acquire more.

The book of *Kohelet* (*Ecclesiastes*) teaches that: "A lover of money never has his fill of money, nor a lover of wealth his fill of income." The idiom "to have one's fill" in this verse is literally "to be satisfied." As we explore this passage, we will consider the following questions -

What is it about having "some" that generates the desire for "more"?

Why is it that having "some" in any given moment may not be a source of satisfaction? What is the source of drive for more wealth?

What does this passage suggest are the motivations – psychological, social, cultural – that may help us to answer these questions?



**CHECK IN:**

Ask participants to reflect on what they noticed during the week about hunger.

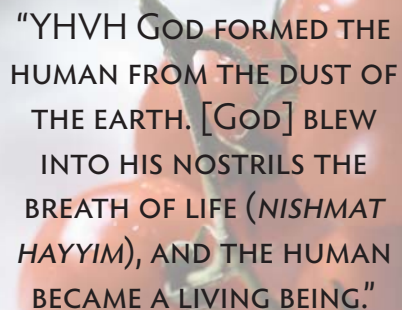
**EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISE:**

Short meditation, awareness of breath filling body [based on Genesis 2:7, "YHVH God formed the human from the dust of the earth. (God) blew into his nostrils the breath of life (*nishmat hayyim*), and the human became a living being."]

Stand with the four corners of your feet rooted firmly and weight evenly distributed. You may need to rock back and forth on their heels and toes to find a place of balance. Rest your arms at your sides. Now lift your arms to the side to raise them above their head with palms facing forward. Inhale as you lift and look up at your hands. Then lower your arms to the side as you exhale. Repeat this a few times, lifting as you inhale, lowering your arms as you exhale.

We are breathing in the breath of life, *nishmat hayyim*, as it says in Genesis 2:7, "YHVH God formed the human from the dust of the earth. (God) blew into his nostrils the breath of life (*nishmat hayyim*), and the human became a living being."

Ask the group to discuss what it felt like to consciously inhale - was it satisfying? Invigorating? Challenging?



"YHVH GOD FORMED THE HUMAN FROM THE DUST OF THE EARTH. [GOD] BLEW INTO HIS NOSTRILS THE BREATH OF LIFE (*NISHMAT HAYYIM*), AND THE HUMAN BECAME A LIVING BEING."

**TEXT STUDY:**

[*Background for facilitator:* The author of *Ecclesiastes* was a keen observer of the human condition. He wished to understand the root of happiness, to find a way to remain balanced, open and connected to life despite its seeming futility. He considers the capacity of work and wealth to bring satisfaction.

He suggests that sometimes effort, even if productive, may not be any more satisfying than indolence, even if the latter causes suffering. We should seek satisfaction – "gratification" – in the moment, happiness with what is regardless of how it is. The pursuit of the more, whether for oneself or even for others (partners, children), is rarely satisfying in itself; even less so when it impedes activities, associations and opportunities that are good in themselves.]



Ecclesiastes 4:5-8

Better is a handful of gratification  
Than two fistfuls of labor which is pursuit of wind.  
And I have noted this further futility under  
the sun: the case of the man who is alone,  
with no companion, who has neither son nor  
brother; yet he amasses wealth without limit,  
and his eye is never sated with riches. For whom,  
now, is he amassing it while denying himself  
enjoyment? That too is a futility and an unhappy  
business.

Eccl. 5:9-10; 12-16

A lover of money never has his fill of money, nor a lover of wealth his fill of income.  
That too is futile. As his substance increases, so do those who consume it; what, then,  
does the success of its owner amount to but feasting his eyes?

Here is a grave evil I have observed under the sun: riches hoarded by their owner to  
his misfortune, in that those riches are lost in some unlucky venture; and if he begets  
a son, he has nothing in hand.

Another grave evil is this: He must depart just as he came. As he came out of his  
mother's womb, so must he depart at last, naked as he came. He can take nothing of  
his wealth to carry with him. So what is the good of his toiling for the wind? Besides,  
all his days he eats in darkness, with much vexation and grief and anger.

### **HEVRUTA QUESTIONS (IN PAIRS OR SMALL GROUPS):**

When have you found your endeavors to be most satisfying? When have you  
found them to seem futile, empty of ultimate meaning? Which of these endeavors  
offers the greater "tangible" reward? Which demands shared effort; exertion and  
compromise; attention to interim stages, steps or goals?

**GROUP DISCUSSION:**

Reflect on *hevruta* study, then discuss the following questions:

What have you noticed helps you to feel satisfied when you eat?

What makes a meal feel “fulfilling” and what leaves you feeling empty, even if your stomach is full?

**HOMEWORK:**

1. Sometime during the week, plan a meal that is as satisfying as possible. How is this different from your “mindful meal” last week? Record your experience in your journal.
2. During meals this week notice how satisfied you feel. Can you identify the factors that influence your level of *sova*? Note these in your journal.
3. Tikkun Olam Idea: It is our job to ensure others are satisfied, not but not to deplete our own satisfaction in the process. As you do your shopping to meet your family's satisfaction needs over the next month, purchase at least 3 extra items of dried or canned food. At the end of the month, deliver them to a local food pantry. Better yet, encourage others to do so by organizing a canned food drive. Ask permission to place a labeled bin outside of a local super market for a given period of time for shoppers to purchase extra food and place it there at the end of their errand; or place a bin at your synagogue or place of business.





### SESSION 3: V'SAVAATA {2} - PRACTICES THAT SUPPORT SOVA (SATISFACTION)

#### INTRODUCTION AND GOALS:

Jewish spirituality offers a wide range of practices that can foster a feeling of sova. In doing so, it can help us to look more deeply at our decisions about consumption, and have a sense of abundance that leads to generosity to others.

In this session, participants will explore the practices that are currently useful to them in creating a feeling of sova, and will consider experimenting with additional practices, including Torah study, Shabbat, and mindfulness meditation.



**CHECK IN:**

Reflect on the week's assignment - what, in your own experience, supports a feeling of sova? Any surprises?

**DISCUSSION:**

When our bellies are full but we do not feel satisfied, what is it that we are yearning for? How do we fill that emptiness? [Responses may include: Yearning for connection, security, joy, ease. We fill with material consumption, overwork, talking with a friend, writing, taking a walk, singing...]

**TEXT STUDY - OPTION A:**

The Golden Calf

Exodus 20:15-18, 24:15-18, 32:1-6

All the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the blare of the horn and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they fell back and stood at a distance. "You speak to us," they said to Moses, "and we will obey; but let not God speak to us, lest we die..." So the people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God was.

When Moses had ascended the mountain, the cloud covered the mountain... Now the Presence of YHVH appeared in the sight of the Israelites as a consuming fire on the top of the mountain. Moses went inside the cloud and ascended the mountain; and Moses remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights....

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered against Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god who shall go before us, for that man Moses, who brought us from the land of Egypt - we do not know what has happened to him."

Aaron said to them, "Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." And all the people took of the gold rings that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. This he took from them and cast in a mold, and made it into a molten calf.

And they exclaimed, "This is your god, o Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt!"

### HEVRUTA QUESTIONS - FOR OPTION A:

[Facilitator note: When we are afraid or uncomfortable, we often want something concrete to comfort and fill us, even if it isn't exactly what we are yearning for - chocolate cake, big screen tv, new car...]

What are the Israelites afraid of in this story? How do they respond? How does this story relate to eating?

If you were Aaron, how might you help the Israelites respond in a different way?

Learning to be with discomfort, fear and uncertainty is one of the goals of spiritual practice. Jewish spirituality offers practices that can foster a feeling of sova. How so? (ask group to reflect on this) - Torah, Shabbat, awareness of present moment.

### TEXT STUDY - OPTION B:

Kedushat Levi, Parashat Vayera 39

Levi Yitzhak ben Meir of Berdechiv, 1740-1809



'And I will take a morsel of bread and sustain you your hearts; after that, you may pass, for therefore you have passed by your servant... and he stood by them under the tree, and the ate.' (Gen. 18:5-8)

"And this is the explanation for 'and they ate': That the angels—their very existence—comes from the *mitzvot* of Israel, when Israel does the will of the Holy Blessed One and performs God's *mitzvot*. In this case, the *mitzvah* [that Israel performs, which gives the angels their existence] is that of '*hachnasat orchim*,' hospitality to guests.

This is the secret of the words in the verse, 'and he set it before them.' (18:8) Avraham performed the *mitzvah* of '*hachnasat orchim*.' This is the explanation of "and they ate": From this *mitzvah* the angels received their existence.

And of the further words in the verse (18:8), 'and he stood by/over them under the tree, and they ate': This tree is the Torah, as it says in the verse, 'eytz hayyim hee' 'She is a Tree of Life (Prov. 3:18)."

### HEVRUTA QUESTIONS - FOR OPTION B:

What is it that "feeds" the angels in this text?

What aspects of Jewish tradition and practice "feed" you?

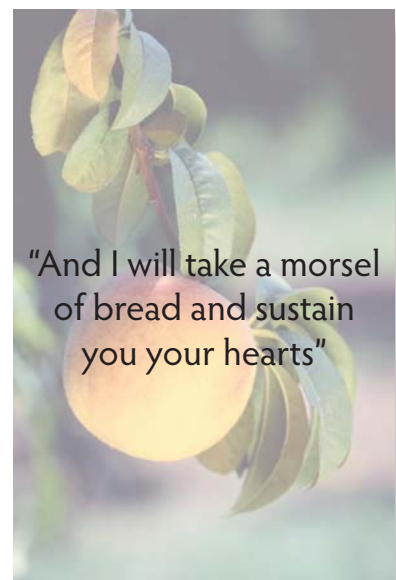
### EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISE - INTRODUCTION OF MINDFULNESS PRACTICE.

[*Facilitator note:* Like with the eating exercise, read through the instructions below carefully before class, and decide whether to read them verbatim or to put them in your own words.]

Mindfulness practice is an ongoing attempt to cultivate an awakened attention that is not tense. Many times in our lives, when we are awake and attentive, we are also tense or, when we are relaxed, we are spacey. In mindfulness meditation, we aim for an awakened attention that is simultaneously at ease and relaxed yet awake, bright, attentive and alive.

Take a few deep breaths and allow your shoulders to relax. Feel wherever your body is making contact with the ground or the chair. Take a breath or two into your belly and let it be soft. That same belly that holds so much.

Now in the next few minutes, just notice sounds. They are not coming bidden. They are unbidden. They are unasked for. They just arise. Outside sounds. Inner sounds. Just notice them beginning and ending. Not trying to grasp them. Not trying to find them or think about them. Not judging them in any way. Just receiving them with the instrument of listening. Really noticing hearing. You may notice some silence in between the sounds or other sounds in the silence. And you can stay with the sounds as your primary object of attention.



"And I will take a morsel  
of bread and sustain  
you your hearts"



You'll probably notice as you sit still, you'll begin to notice the breath. You may feel the in- breath entering your body and exhalation leaving your body. Notice breath arising just as sound arises, without any effort on your part. Your only effort is bringing your awareness, bringing your attention, to the sensations of breath. In-breath, out-breath. Wherever the breath is, just let it be. It may be long or short. It may be rough or heavy, or smooth. The breath is capable of breathing you without your effort. Most of your life you are just breathed by the spontaneous action of your breath.

You might notice where it is that you feel breath, where you feel the in-breath arising, where it's most obvious, easiest to notice. It could be at your nostrils, cool air coming in. It could be in the back of your throat as sensations, or vibrations. It could be in your chest rising and falling. It could be in your belly, expanding, releasing.

You are invited to make your first home in the breath. You may allow the breath to be your refuge, your entryway in to this present moment, your anchor. You do not need the breath to be anything other than what it is in this moment. You can lightly note, making a tiny note in your mind, "in-breath" "out-breath" or "breathing-in, breathing-out". Or you could just say, "in, out", "rising, falling". Know the in-breath. Know the out-breath.

We are going to sit quietly and do this practice for some minutes. You will notice that things will take you away from the breath. As diligent and devoted as you may be setting the intention to stay with the sensations of breath, invariably you will be distracted. You could fall asleep. You could become engaged in a story in your mind.

Sooner or later you'll awaken from sleeping or daydreaming, and think: "Oh my goodness! Yeah the breath, right, where is it? What happened?" That is totally fine. Even if you get confused in a long dream about something that happened before you came here or something you have to do when you get back, you'll wake up. Or you may be distracted by a very strong sensation in your body. Anything might happen. And when you notice that your attention has alighted on something else, in that moment, "oh, I was sleeping and now I'm awake. " Or, "I was lost in the thought about what's for lunch. Or I was thinking about my kids' application to

college." Whatever. You notice that the mind is in this loop of thinking. When you notice that, that's a moment of attention. That is good. That is a mindful moment. It is moment of remembering "my original intention was to be with the breath." You are awake! And then with gentleness and kindness towards the mind, bring your attention back to the initial intention of being with one inhale, one exhale. We'll sit in silence for about 10 minutes (end with the bell).

### HOMEWORK:

1. Consider experimenting with one practice this week that can foster a sense of sova (Torah study, meditation, prayer, walk, appreciation, time with a friend) and engage in this practice each day this week. Notice, and note in your journal, how doing so affects your feeling of sova at mealtimes and throughout the day.
2. *Tikkun Olam* Idea: We must note that it is not just short-term solutions that will bring long-term satisfaction for others. For this week's activity, consider a long term solution to satisfaction; try to end hunger through advocacy. Organize a letter-writing campaign. If there is currently a relevant piece of local hunger legislation, address these letters to your state or other local officials urging they respond timely to this piece of legislation. If no such piece of legislation is currently on the docket, write the letters to President Obama urging him not to neglect his campaign pledge to end childhood hunger by 2015.





## SESSION 4: U'VERECHTA - AND YOU SHALL BLESS

### INTRODUCTION AND GOALS:

In this session, the group will focus on one of the practices that both fosters and results from a sense of sova: blessings. We will explore what it means to bless a person or thing, and the impact of doing so on one's own heart and mind. We will explore blessing as a cultivation of:

- Gratitude
- Awareness
- Remembering previous state of hunger
- Wishing well to others

Then, discuss what it means to be a blessing, to bring blessing to others through our actions.

Rabbi Sheila Weinberg writes the following about how reciting a blessing is an awareness practice. "Blessing is Jewish awareness practice. If we look at the raisins [from the mindful eating exercise], or anything else that we eat, or the breath for that matter, we are actually looking back to creation. We are looking back to the Big Bang. Everything originates in creation. All matter expands out of creation."



"Over billions of years conditions emerge out of creation. These in turn cause the formation of the solar system, including the earth and the sun. On this particular earth, water and earth and air could interact so that, at some point, vegetation begins to grow. At another point, some conscious beings start cultivating the vegetation and find out that they can grow grapes. So when we say 'Blessed are you sovereign of the universe,' we acknowledge a truth that spans all time from the beginning to this moment."

"Furthermore, these specific raisins were planted somewhere. Maybe they are California raisins. There are a lot of people involved in this; the growers and the pickers and the sorters; the owners and the people who made the packaging; the people who put it on the shelves and then the people who bought it. So when we sit down to a meal we have a chance, because we're not in a rush, to actually make the *bracha* that you want to make."

We become aware through reciting a blessing of the wonder of creation and our gratitude for the gifts in our lives. When we then express our gratitude in words or deeds, this too is a blessing. When we wish for others that they, too experience these gifts - of nourishment and well being - and when we act to make that possible, this too is a blessing, arising from our awareness, our gratitude, and the opening of our hearts.

### CHECK IN QUESTIONS FOR GROUP PARTICIPANTS:

Invite participants to reflect on any practices that they did over the week to foster a sense of *sova* - what was useful? What was challenging?

### GROUP DISCUSSION:

[*Facilitator note:* Use the material from the introduction and goals section of this session to inform your discussion. Remind the group that there are no right and wrong answers to these questions, and encourage them to draw from their own experiences in their answers, rather than speaking only theoretically.]

What is a blessing?

What does it mean to give a blessing?

To receive a blessing?

To be a blessing?

When I am hungry (or when I feel a need for something, when I feel empty) how generous can I be? Where do I tend to place “blame” for my hunger? When I then fill my need, when I am satisfied, to whom do I give credit? Is my hunger or satisfaction solely an inner experience, dependent on me, or is it cultural, contextual? Can I be satisfied and remember to be grateful? What supports me in remembering to give thanks for my changed circumstances?

### TEXT STUDY :

[Facilitator note: For this session, choose between the two following texts, or study both if time permits.]

### OPTION A:

Deut. 8:6-18



Therefore keep the commandments of YHVH your God: walk in His ways and revere Him. For YHVH your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams and springs and fountains issuing from plain and hill; a land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey; a land where you may eat food without stint, where you will lack nothing; a land whose rocks are iron and from whose hills you can mine copper. When you have eaten your fill, give thanks to YHVH your God for the good land which He has given you. Take care lest you forget YHVH your God and fail to keep [God's] commandments, rules, and laws, which I enjoin upon you today.

When you have eaten your fill, and have built fine houses to live in, and your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold have increased, and everything you own has prospered, beware lest your heart grow haughty and you forget YHVH your God—who freed you from the land of Egypt, the house of bondage; who led you through the great and terrible wilderness with its serpents and scorpions, a parched land with no water in it, who brought forth water for you from the flinty rock; who fed you in the wilderness with *manna*, which your fathers had never known, in order to test you by hardships only to benefit you in the end—and you say to yourselves, “My own power and the might of my own hand have won this wealth for me.”

Remember that it is YHVH your God who gives you the power to get wealth, in fulfillment of the covenant that [God] made on oath with your [ancestors], as is still the case.

### OPTION B:

*Meor Eynayim, Parashat Matot*

Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl, 1730-1797

(translated by Dr. Joel Hecker)

...For there is nothing in this world that does not have a spark of holiness [in it], emanated from the speech of the Blessed Holy One. This is the taste that is within the thing that is sweet to the palate, as it is written, "Taste and see that YHVH is good." (Psalms 34:9) That is to say, that which you taste and see that it is good, it is YHVH who is the holy spark that is in the thing, garbed in it. That is as can be seen that after a person has eaten a certain food, the life-force remains within him and the waste is cast out, without any life-force [in it], and it (the waste) is useless and foul. For the essence of food from which a person is nourished and that gives him added energy is the holy spark that is in that particular food item, and it is the good taste that a person tastes in food and drink.

Therefore, when a person eats a certain food that spark is united to resident life force of the one who eats it and he receives added energy. When a person believes with a full and total belief that this spiritual food, which is the Divine... who is garbed there, and the person pays full attention and directs his heart to the internal [nature of the food] and causes himself to cleave with all of his life-force and his mind together with the energy and additional life-force that has been supplemented through this holy spark that has come into his body [and all of this united to] the root from which all of the life-force has emanated, then he brings that holy spark which until now had been fragmented and exiled, back towards [God].

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

In these texts, what do we learn about satisfaction?

How does satisfaction lead to blessing?

What do we learn from these texts about the nature of blessing?



[Facilitator note - possible responses]:

- Gratitude
- Awareness
- Remembering previous state of hunger
- Wishing well to others
- Connection to divine, humility, feeling part of greater whole

## PRACTICE:

Invite participants to write their own blessing based on the previous discussion about the nature of blessing. For example, the blessing may express gratitude, reflect an awareness of the sacred, or express a wish for the self or other.

## HOMEWORK:

1) Consider taking on the following text, or the blessing that you have written as a personal intention, a private meditation, to take with you each day. How might holding this prayer in your heart and mind help you to recognize what it is that provides you with true satisfaction, and when you are inclined to complain about your situation?

Proverbs 30:79

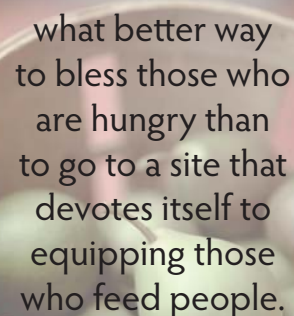
Two things I ask of You; do not deny them to me before I die:

Keep lies and false words far from me;

Give me neither poverty nor riches,

But provide me with my daily bread,

Lest, being sated, I renounce, saying, "Who is YHVH?"



what better way  
to bless those who  
are hungry than  
to go to a site that  
devotes itself to  
equipping those  
who feed people.

2) How might this prayer help you to identify when you should turn your heart and mind toward gratitude? How might this prayer help you to avoid forgetfulness of the goodness that you do enjoy, even as you witness moments of "hunger," of dissatisfaction with your circumstances, of wishing for "more"?

3) Tikkun Olam Idea: If blessing is a "Jewish Awareness Practice," what better way to bless those who are hungry than to go to a site that devotes itself to equipping those who feed people. This is a perfect week to volunteer at a food bank or food pantry sorting food that will feed those in need. This will bring the issue of hunger into your consciousness and allow you to do something directly to mitigate the problem.





## **SESSION 5: HISHAMER LECHA PEN TISHKACH/ HEVEH BRACHA - BE A BLESSING!**

### **INTRODUCTION AND GOALS:**

In this session, we will directly explore our obligation to feed those who are hungry and in need, and wrestle with the challenges to doing so.

Begin this session with a short text study on Genesis 12:1-2 -

YHVH said to Abram, "Go forth from your native land and from 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 you shall be a blessing."

This session is an exploration of what it means to "be a blessing."

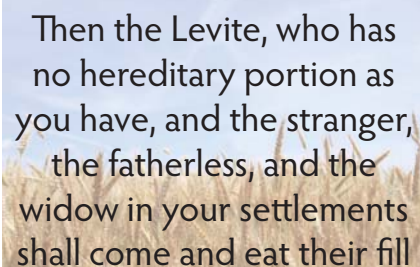


**CHECK IN:**

Ask participants to share any thoughts or experiences over the past week around blessings.

**EXERCISE:**

Invite participants to reflect on the many blessings in their lives. You may want to have people first journal a list of all that they appreciate in their lives, then share the list in *hevruta*.



Then the Levite, who has no hereditary portion as you have, and the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your settlements shall come and eat their fill

**GROUP DISCUSSION:**

[*Facilitator note:* The group may find that by reflecting on the blessings on their lives, they feel more joy or appreciation. They may also be more inspired or feel more able to give to others. If this does not come up in the group discussion, you may suggest it as a common response to this exercise, and ask whether participants have found this to be true in their own experience.]

Ask the group whether they noticed anything about making or sharing this list. Was it easy to do or difficult? What was their response to making the list?

**HEVRUTA TEXT STUDY:**

[*Facilitator note:* The two passages in this section refer to the practice of tithing for the sake of the poor. Every third year a tithe was taken explicitly for the sake of the poor, those who have no landholding from which to provide for themselves, who are dependent on others for both sustenance and protection. The food was offered to the poor en mass, by farmers as a group. There was no direct one to one connection between food provided by a farmer and the satisfaction of one or another individual.]

Deuteronomy 14:27-29

But do not neglect the Levite in your community, for he has no hereditary portion

as you have every third year you shall bring out the full tithe of your yield of that year, but leave it within your settlements. Then the Levite, who has no hereditary portion as you have, and the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your settlements shall come and eat their fill, so that YHVH your God may bless you in all the enterprises you undertake.

Deut. 26:12-15

When you have set aside in full the tenth part of your yield—in the third year, the year of the tithe—and have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat their fill in your settlements, you shall declare before YHVH your God: “I have cleared out the consecrated portion from the house; and I have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, just as You commanded me; I have neither transgressed nor neglected any of Your commandments: I have not eaten of it while in mourning, I have not cleared out any of it while I was unclean, and I have not deposited any of it with the dead. I have obeyed YHVH my God; I have done just as You commanded me. Look down from Your holy abode, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel and the soil You have given us, a land flowing with milk and honey, as You swore to our fathers.”

### HEVRUTA QUESTIONS:

What are the implications of these passages for your own experience of having, giving and receiving? How do you feel when aware of others who are hungry, who are unable to satisfy their basic wants? What turns you toward them, and what turns you away? What do you expect from your efforts to provide food for people who are hungry, to care for those in need? How will you know that the ones you serve are “satisfied”? How will you be satisfied, and what does that have to do with your expectations of what will come next (the “blessings” you may receive)?

### GROUP DISCUSSION:

Discuss hevruta questions in a group and the challenges to fulfilling our obligation to provide food for people who are hungry.

**HOMEWORK:**

*Tikkun Olam* Idea: Try doing something this week a little bit more related to serving the hungry, by volunteering at a local soup kitchen. Interacting with hungry people and physically putting food on their plates drives home the importance of our actions, our thoughts, our education, and our support. At any moment, any of us could be plagued by hunger, and sometimes we need to see the needy and desperate face of hunger to realize that. While you are there, have a conversation with the executive director of the organization, to learn more about the issues and obstacles plaguing those who are trying to help the dire problem of hunger.







## SESSION 6: GETTING *TACHLIS* - PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR *TIKKUN OLAM*

### INTRODUCTION AND GOALS:

This curriculum has shown us that there is tremendous value in mindfulness. On both a personal and communal level, our ability to recognize the blessings in our lives, and to derive a sense of satisfaction from them, can empower us to live a richer, more fulfilling existence.

In this last session, we will talk about the next step: how feelings of blessing and satisfaction can lead to transformative action. In particular, we will explore opportunities and challenges to effect positive change on behalf of the millions of Americans suffering from, or living on the brink of, hunger. We will discuss the implications of pursuing meaningful hunger relief through:

- Volunteering
- Public policy
- Private charity

Finally, we will discuss concrete steps each of us can take to fight hunger.



**CHECK IN:**

Invite participants to reflect on how they might extend the blessings in their own lives. How do their individual blessings offer an opportunity to improve the world around them?

**HEVRUTA DISCUSSION IN PAIRS OR SMALL GROUPS:**

Get together with a partner and talk about the link between experiencing personal blessings and achieving communal change. How does the abundance in our lives enable us to turn our energies outward, focusing on improving the circumstances of those around us? List specific examples.

Also, brainstorm about what you think some of the barriers to long-term change might be. Why is achieving change so hard? Are the obstacles we face spiritual? Physical? Social?

**GROUP DISCUSSION:**

[*Facilitator note:* Take a few minutes to distribute and review national resources in Appendix.]

Reflect on what we just learned. What is the value of each of the anti-hunger strategies (public support, private charity, volunteerism, advocacy) listed above? What are their limitations?

Experts in the field of hunger relief tell us that the resources exist to end hunger; all we lack is the collective will. What role does each of us have in building that will? How does being attuned to our own blessings put us in a space to share our abundance with those in need?

Give an example of how, in your own life, you have been a successful advocate (either on your own behalf or someone else's). What barriers were you forced to overcome? Did you find your success satisfying? How did that feeling of satisfaction benefit you? Did your advocacy have additional benefits that you did not at first expect?

How do we achieve a balance between meeting our own needs and working on behalf of those around us?

### MOVING AHEAD:

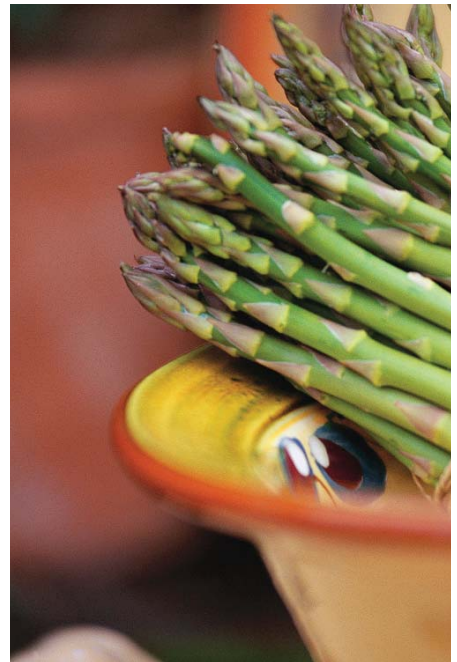
- 1) Make a list of steps you can take to end hunger. [*Facilitator's note:* These might range from volunteering at a local soup kitchen to writing a letter to a local, state or national legislator about the need for stronger anti-poverty policies.] Establish a realistic timetable for achieving these goals.
- 2) Keep a life journal, allowing yourself some time each day/week/month for personal reflection on the topics we've explored as part of this curriculum. By heightening your own awareness about the link between spiritual and physical need, you become a more effective change agent in your own community and beyond.
- 3) Stay conscious of the barriers you face in your efforts to make change in your own life and in your community. When you encounter an obstacle, write an action plan for overcoming it. Start with small, achievable steps. No step is insignificant, and every last one takes you further along the path to fulfillment.





**MAZON: V'AKHALTA, V'SAVAATA,  
U'VERACHTA**

**EAT AND BE SATISFIED**



**APPENDICES:  
STUDENT HANDOUTS**







## SESSION 1: V'ACHALTA - AND YOU SHALL EAT

### HEVRUTA DISCUSSION IN PAIRS OR SMALL GROUPS:

Turn to someone near you and describe one positive and one negative experience of eating.

### TEXT STUDY:

Garden of Eden  
Genesis 2:25-3:12

The two of them were naked, the man and his wife, yet they felt no shame. Now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say: You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?" The woman replied to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the other trees in the middle of the garden. It is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said 'You shall not eat of it or touch it, lest you die.'"

And the serpent said to the woman, "You are not going to die, but God knows that as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like divine beings who know good and bad."

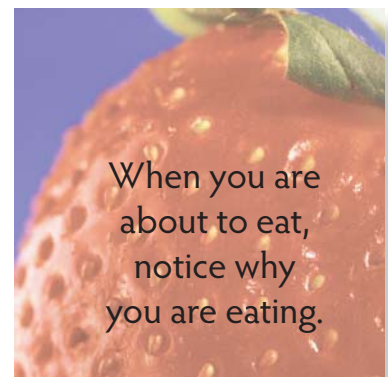


When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they perceived that they were naked; and they sewed together fig leaves and made themselves loincloths.

They heard the sound of the Lord God moving about in the garden at the breezy time of day; and the man and his wife hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. The Lord God called out to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" He replied, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid." Then [God] asked, "Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat of the tree from which I had forbidden you to eat?" The man said, "The woman You put at my side - she gave me of tree, and I ate."

## HOMework

1. Sometime during the week, eat one entire meal as mindfully as possible (based on raisin exercise). Notice what helped you to eat mindfully? What was challenging about the experience. Are there aspects of this meal that you could bring into your daily eating? Journal about this or discuss in *hevruta* phone call.



2. Journal assignment: What do you notice about your relationship with food? When you are about to eat, notice why you are eating. Is it a response to physical sensation of hunger? Boredom? Meal time?

3. *Tikkun Olam* Idea: Understanding our own needs regarding food is important, but equally important is understanding that not everyone has the means to fulfill their food needs. If you live in a densely populated area, every time you eat in a restaurant in the next month, wrap up your leftovers and give them to a needy person on your way home. If this is not possible, consider donating the amount you would have spent, had one more person joined you for dinner, to a hunger relief agency such as MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger ([www.mazon.org](http://www.mazon.org)).



## SESSION 2: V'SAVAATA {1} - AND YOU SHALL BE SATISFIED

### TEXT STUDY:

Ecclesiastes 4:5-8

Better is a handful of gratification  
Than two fistfuls of labor which is pursuit of wind.  
And I have noted this further futility under  
the sun: the case of the man who is alone,  
with no companion, who has neither son nor  
brother; yet he amasses wealth without limit,  
and his eye is never sated with riches. For whom,  
now, is he amassing it while denying himself  
enjoyment? That too is a futility and an unhappy  
business.

Eccl. 5:9-10, 12-16

A lover of money never has his fill of money, nor a lover of wealth his fill of income.  
That too is futile. As his substance increases, so do those who consume it; what, then,  
does the success of its owner amount to but feasting his eyes?



Here is a grave evil I have observed under the sun: riches hoarded by their owner to his misfortune, in that those riches are lost in some unlucky venture; and if he begets a son, he has nothing in hand.

Another grave evil is this: He must depart just as he came. As he came out of his mother's womb, so must he depart at last, naked as he came. He can take nothing of his wealth to carry with him. So what is the good of his toiling for the wind? Besides, all his days he eats in darkness, with much vexation and grief and anger.

### HEVRUTA QUESTIONS (IN PAIRS OR SMALL GROUPS):

When have you found your endeavors to be most satisfying? When have you found them to seem futile, empty of ultimate meaning? Which of these endeavors offers the greater "tangible" reward? Which demands shared effort; exertion and compromise; attention to interim stages, steps or goals?

### GROUP DISCUSSION:

Reflect on *hevruta* study, then discuss the following questions:

What have you noticed helps you to feel satisfied when you eat?

What makes a meal feel "fulfilling" and what leaves you feeling empty, even if your stomach is full?



What have you noticed helps you feel satisfied when you eat?

### HOMEWORK:

1. Sometime during the week, plan a meal that is as satisfying as possible. How is this different from your "mindful meal" last week? Record your experience in your journal.

2. During meals this week notice how satisfied you feel. Can you identify the factors that influence your level of sova? Note these in your journal.

3. *Tikkun Olam* Idea: It is our job to ensure others are satisfied, but not to deplete our own satisfaction in the process. As you do your shopping to meet your family's satisfaction needs over the next month, purchase at least 3 extra items of dried or canned food. At the end of the month, deliver them to a local food pantry. Better yet, encourage others to do so by organizing a canned food drive. Ask permission to place a labeled bin outside of a local super market for a given period of time for shoppers to purchase extra food and place it there at the end of their errand; or place a bin at your synagogue or place of business.









## SESSION 3: V'SAVAATA {2} - PRACTICES THAT SUPPORT SOVA (SATISFACTION)

### TEXT STUDY:

The Golden Calf

Exodus 20:15-18, 24:15-18, 32:1-6

All the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the blare of the horn and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they fell back and stood at a distance. "You speak to us," they said to Moses, "and we will obey; but let not God speak to us, lest we die..." So the people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God was.

When Moses had ascended the mountain, the cloud covered the mountain... Now the Presence of YHVH appeared in the sight of the Israelites as a consuming fire on the top of the mountain. Moses went inside the cloud and ascended the mountain; and Moses remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights....



When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered against Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god who shall go before us, for that man Moses, who brought us from the land of Egypt - we do not know what has happened to him."

Aaron said to them, "Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." And all the people took of the gold rings that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. This he took from them and cast in a mold, and made it into a molten calf.

And they exclaimed, "This is your god, o Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt!"

### HEVRUTA QUESTIONS:

What are the Israelites afraid of in this story? How do they respond? How does this story relate to eating? If you were Aaron, how might you help the Israelites respond in a different way? Learning to be with discomfort, fear and uncertainty is one of the goals of spiritual practice. Jewish spirituality offers practices that can foster a feeling of sova. How so? - Torah, Shabbat, awareness of present moment.



Jewish spirituality offers practices that can foster a feeling of sova.

### HOMEWORK:

1. Consider experimenting with one practice this week that can foster a sense of sova (Torah study, meditation, prayer, walk, appreciation, time with a friend) and engage in this practice each day this week. Notice, and note in your journal, how doing so affects your feeling of sova at mealtimes and throughout the day.
2. Tikkun Olam Idea: We must note that it is not just short-term solutions that will bring long-term satisfaction for others. For this week's activity, consider a long term solution to satisfaction; try to end hunger through advocacy. Organize a letter-writing campaign. If there is currently a relevant piece of local hunger legislation, address these letters to your state or other local officials urging they respond timely to this piece of legislation. If no such piece of legislation is currently on the docket, write the letters to President Obama urging him not to neglect his campaign pledge to end childhood hunger by 2015.



## SESSION 3: V'SAVAATA {2} - PRACTICES THAT SUPPORT SOVA (SATISFACTION)

### TEXT STUDY:

Kedushat Levi, Parashat Vayera 39

Levi Yitzhak ben Meir of Berdechiv, 1740-1809

'And I will take a morsel of bread and sustain you your hearts; after that, you may pass, for therefore you have passed by your servant... and he stood by them under the tree, and they ate.' (Gen. 18:5-8)

"And this is the explanation for "and they ate": That the angels—their very existence—comes from the *mitzvot* of Israel, when Israel does the will of the Holy Blessed One and performs God's *mitzvot*. In this case, the *mitzvah* [that Israel performs, which gives the angels their existence] is that of "*hachnasat orchim*", hospitality to guests.

This is the secret of the words in the verse, "and he set it before them." (18:8) Avraham performed the *mitzvah* of "*hachnasat orchim*." This is the explanation of "and they ate": From this *mitzvah* the angels received their existence.



And of the further words in the verse (18:8), "and he stood by/over them under the tree, and they ate": This tree is the Torah, as it says in the verse, "*eytz hayyim hee*." "She is a Tree of Life (Prov. 3:18)."

**HEVRUTA QUESTIONS:**

What is it that "feeds" the angels in this text?

What aspects of Jewish tradition and practice "feed" you?

**HOMEWORK:**

1. Consider experimenting with one practice this week that can foster a sense of *sova* (Torah study, meditation, prayer, walk, appreciation, time with a friend) and engage in this practice each day this week. Notice (and note in your journal) how doing so affects your feeling of *sova* at mealtimes and throughout the day.

2. *Tikkun Olam* Idea: We must note that it is not just short-term solutions that will bring long-term satisfaction for others. For this week's activity, consider a long term solution to satisfaction; try to end hunger through advocacy. Organize a letter-writing campaign. If there is currently a relevant piece of local hunger legislation, address these letters to your state or other local officials urging they respond timely to this piece of legislation. If no such piece of legislation is currently on the docket, write the letters to President Obama urging him not to neglect his campaign pledge to end childhood hunger by 2015.



What aspects of Jewish tradition and practice "feed" you?



## SESSION 4: U'VERECHTA - AND YOU SHALL BLESS

### TEXT STUDY:

Deut. 8:6-18

Therefore keep the commandments of YHVH your God: walk in His ways and revere Him. For YHVH your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams and springs and fountains issuing from plain and hill; a land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey; a land where you may eat food without stint, where you will lack nothing; a land whose rocks are iron and from whose hills you can mine copper. When you have eaten your fill, give thanks to YHVH your God for the good land which He has given you. Take care lest you forget YHVH your God and fail to keep [God's] commandments, rules, and laws, which I enjoin upon you today.

When you have eaten your fill, and have built fine houses to live in, and your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold have increased, and everything you own has prospered, beware lest your heart grow haughty and you forget YHVH your God—who freed you from the land of Egypt, the house of bondage; who led you through the great and terrible wilderness with its serpents and scorpions, a parched land with no water in it, who brought forth water for you from the flinty rock; who fed you in the wilderness with *manna*, which your fathers had never

known, in order to test you by hardships only to benefit you in the end—and you say to yourselves, “My own power and the might of my own hand have won this wealth for me.”

Remember that it is YHVH your God who gives you the power to get wealth, in fulfillment of the covenant that [God] made on oath with your [ancestors], as is still the case.



## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

In these texts, what do we learn about satisfaction? How does satisfaction lead to blessing? What do we learn from these texts about the nature of blessing?

## HOMEWORK:

Consider taking on the following text, or the blessing that you have written as a personal intention, a private meditation, to take with you each day. How might holding this prayer in your heart and mind help you to recognize what it is that provides you with true satisfaction, and when you are inclined to complain about your situation?

Proverbs 30:79

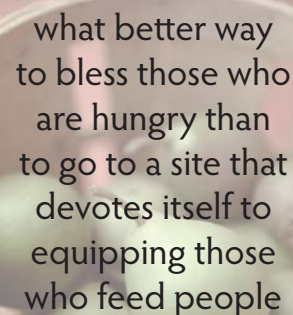
Two things I ask of You; do not deny them to me before I die:

Keep lies and false words far from me;

Give me neither poverty nor riches,

But provide me with my daily bread,

Lest, being sated, I renounce, saying, "Who is YHVH?"



what better way  
to bless those who  
are hungry than  
to go to a site that  
devotes itself to  
equipping those  
who feed people

How might this prayer help you to identify when you should turn your heart and mind toward gratitude? How might this prayer help you to avoid forgetfulness of the goodness that you do enjoy, even as you witness moments of "hunger," of dissatisfaction with your circumstances, of wishing for "more"?

Tikkun Olam Idea: If blessing is a "Jewish Awareness Practice," what better way to bless those who are hungry than to go to a site that devotes itself to equipping those who feed people. This is a perfect week to volunteer at a food bank or food pantry sorting food that will feed those in need. This will bring the issue of hunger into your consciousness and allow you to do something directly to mitigate the problem.





## SESSION 4: U'VERECHTA - AND YOU SHALL BLESS

### TEXT STUDY:

*Meor Eynayim, Parashat Matot*

Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl, 1730-1797

...For there is nothing in this world that does not have a spark of holiness [in it], emanated from the speech of the Blessed Holy One. This is the taste that is within the thing that is sweet to the palate, as it is written, "Taste and see that YHVH is good." (Psalms 34:9) That is to say, that which you taste and see that it is good, it is YHVH who is the holy spark that is in the thing, garbed in it. That is as can be seen that after a person has eaten a certain food, the life-force remains within him and the waste is cast out, without any life-force [in it], and it (the waste) is useless and foul. For the essence of food from which a person is nourished and that gives him added energy is the holy spark that is in that particular food item, and it is the good taste that a person tastes in food and drink.

Therefore, when a person eats a certain food that spark is united to resident life force of the one who eats it and he receives added energy. When a person believes with a full and total belief that this spiritual food, which is the Divine... who is garbed there, and the person pays full attention and directs his heart to the internal [nature of the food] and causes himself to cleave with all of his life-force and his mind together with the energy and additional life-force that has been supplemented through this holy spark that has come into his body [and all of this united to] the root from which all of the life-force has emanated, then he brings that holy spark which until now had been fragmented and exiled, back towards [God].



## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

In these texts, what do we learn about satisfaction?

How does satisfaction lead to blessing?

What do we learn from these texts about the nature of blessing?

## HOMEWORK:

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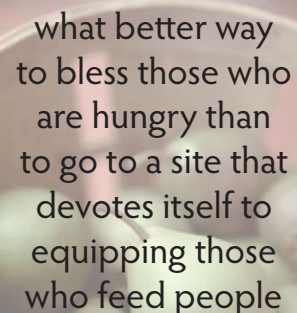
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Give me neither poverty nor riches,

But provide me with my daily bread,

Lest, being sated, I renounce, saying, "Who is YHVH?"

A photograph of a bowl filled with various fruits, including apples and oranges. Overlaid on the image is the text: "what better way to bless those who are hungry than to go to a site that devotes itself to equipping those who feed people".
 

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## SESSION 5: HISHAMER LECHA PEN TISHKACH/ HEVEH BRACHA - BE A BLESSING!

### HEVRUTA TEXT STUDY:

[Facilitator note: The two passages in this section refer to the practice of tithing for the sake of the poor. Every third year a tithe was taken explicitly for the sake of the poor, those who have no landholding from which to provide for themselves, who are dependent on others for both sustenance and protection. The food was offered to the poor en mass, by farmers as a group. There was no direct one to one connection between food provided by a farmer and the satisfaction of one or another individual.]

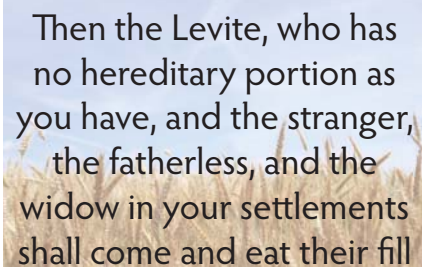
Deuteronomy 14:27-29

But do not neglect the Levite in your community, for he has no hereditary portion as you have every third year you shall bring out the full tithe of your yield of that year, but leave it within your settlements. Then the Levite, who has no hereditary portion as you have, and the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your settlements shall come and eat their fill, so that YHVH your God may bless you in all the enterprises you undertake.



Deut. 26:12-15

When you have set aside in full the tenth part of your yield—in the third year, the year of the tithe—and have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat their fill in your settlements, you shall declare before YHVH your God: “I have cleared out the consecrated portion from the house; and I have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, just as You commanded me; I have neither transgressed nor neglected any of Your commandments: I have not eaten of it while in mourning, I have not cleared out any of it while I was unclean, and I have not deposited any of it with the dead. I have obeyed YHVH my God; I have done just as You commanded me. Look down from Your holy abode, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel and the soil You have given us, a land flowing with milk and honey, as You swore to our fathers.”



Then the Levite, who has no hereditary portion as you have, and the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your settlements shall come and eat their fill

### HEVRUTA QUESTIONS:

What are the implications of these passages for your own experience of having, giving and receiving? How do you feel when aware of others who are hungry, who are unable to satisfy their basic wants? What turns you toward them, and what turns you away? What do you expect from your efforts to provide food for people who are hungry, to care for those in need? How will you know that the ones you serve are “satisfied”? How will you be satisfied, and what does that have to do with your expectations of what will come next (the “blessings” you may receive)?

### GROUP DISCUSSION:

Discuss hevruta questions in a group and the challenges to fulfilling our obligation to provide food for people who are hungry.

### HOMEWORK:

Tikkun Olam Idea: Try doing something this week a little bit more related to serving the hungry, by volunteering at a local soup kitchen. Interacting with hungry people and physically putting food on their plates drives home the importance of our actions, our thoughts, our education, and our support. At any moment, any of us could be plagued by hunger, and sometimes we need to see the needy and desperate face of hunger to realize that. While you are there, have a conversation with the executive director of the organization, to learn more about the issues and obstacles plaguing those who are trying to help the dire problem of hunger.



## SESSION 6: GETTING *TACHLIS* - PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR *TIKKUN OLAM*

### **HEVRUTA DISCUSSION IN PAIRS OR SMALL GROUPS:**

Get together with a partner and talk about the link between experiencing personal blessings and achieving communal change. How does the abundance in our lives enable us to turn our energies outward, focusing on improving the circumstances of those around us? List specific examples.

Also, brainstorm about what you think some of the barriers to long-term change might be. Why is achieving change so hard? Are the obstacles we face spiritual? Physical? Social?

### **MOVING AHEAD:**

- 1) Make a list of steps you can take to end hunger. Establish a realistic timetable for achieving these goals.



- 2) Keep a life journal, allowing yourself some time each day/week/month for personal reflection on the topics we've explored as part of this curriculum. By heightening your own awareness about the link between spiritual and physical need, you become a more effective change agent in your own community and beyond.
- 3) Stay conscious of the barriers you face in your efforts to make change in your own life and in your community. When you encounter an obstacle, write an action plan for overcoming it. Start with small, achievable steps. No step is insignificant, and every last one takes you further along the path to fulfillment.





## FACES OF HUNGER

*Today, 36 million Americans are at risk of hunger. Below are messages from those that have faced hunger that you can include in your studies:*

"My situation became so desperate that I had no money to buy milk for my baby. To give her nourishment, I boiled rice and filled her bottle with the rice water."

"My husband and I are in our late 70's. We stretch our money by eating only two meals a day and, when we feel well enough to go out, having lunch at the senior center."

"I am 65 years old and the caregiver for my 86 year-old mother who has Alzheimer's and is diabetic. When I lost my job, there wasn't enough income to support both of us. I thank God for the help we get from the food pantry."

"When you're hungry, you can't think of anything else."

"My teenaged daughters and I lived in our car after my husband's abuse got so bad we couldn't stay at home. They were embarrassed to go into the food pantry, but we had no choice. Without it, I don't know how we would have eaten."

"When I was diagnosed with AIDS I was still able to work. I'm on disability now, and I depend on Jewish Family Service to deliver my meals twice a week."

"With the increase in the number of people asking for help, our small food pantry would not survive without the grant we receive from MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger. The funding helps us cover some operating costs and supports our pantry's Passover food distribution."



## NATIONAL RESOURCES

### Alliance to End Hunger

[www.alliancetoendhunger.org](http://www.alliancetoendhunger.org)

The Alliance to End Hunger develops innovative partnerships among our members; political commitment among our leaders; and global connections among groups working to end hunger worldwide. The Alliance has more than 65 members -- corporations, non-profit groups, universities, individuals, and Christian, Jewish and Muslim religious bodies.

### Alliance for Justice

[www.afj.org](http://www.afj.org)

The Alliance for Justice is a national association of environmental, civil rights, mental health, women's, children's and consumer advocacy organizations. Their Nonprofit Advocacy Project provides legal guides, workshops, and technical assistance for charities involved in advocacy.

### Bread for the World

[www.bread.org](http://www.bread.org)

Bread for the World is a nationwide Christian citizens movement seeking justice for the world's hungry people by lobbying our nation's decision makers.

### Center for Budget and Policy Priorities

[www.cbpp.org](http://www.cbpp.org)

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities is a nonpartisan research organizations and policy institute that conducts research and analysis on a range of government policies and programs, with an emphasis on those affecting low-and moderate-income people.

### Center for Community Change

[www.communitychange.org](http://www.communitychange.org)

The Center for Community Change is committed to reducing poverty and rebuilding low-income communities. To do this, they help people to develop the skills and resources they need to improve their communities as well as change policies and institutions that adversely affect their lives.

**Center for Law and Social Policy**[www.clasp.org](http://www.clasp.org)

The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), a national, nonprofit organization founded in 1968, conducts research, policy analysis, technical assistance, and advocacy on issues related to economic security for low-income families with children.

**Community Food Security Coalition**[www.foodsecurity.org](http://www.foodsecurity.org)

Dedicated to building strong, sustainable, local and regional food systems that ensure access to affordable, nutritious and culturally appropriate food for all people at all times.

**Feeding America**[www.feedingamerica.org](http://www.feedingamerica.org)

Feeding America is the nation's largest domestic hunger relief organization. Through a network of over 200 food banks and food-rescue programs, they provide emergency food assistance to hungry American's.

**Food Research and Action Center**[www.frac.org](http://www.frac.org)

The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) is a leading national organization working to improve public policies to eradicate hunger and under-nutrition in the United States.

**MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger**[www.mazon.org](http://www.mazon.org)

Founded in 1985, MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger is a national, nonprofit agency that allocates donations from the Jewish community to prevent and alleviate hunger among people of all faiths and backgrounds.

**United States Department of Agriculture**[www.fns.usda.gov/fncs](http://www.fns.usda.gov/fncs)

Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services: The FNCS mission area works to harness the nations agricultural abundance to end hunger and improve nutrition and health in the United States.

[www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov)