Leo Baeck

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*As you look at each model, we encourage you to keep the following questions in mind:*

* *What aspects of this model align with your visionary description?*
* *What does not?*
* *What intrigues you about this model?*
* *What questions do you have about this model?*

# Background

Leo Baeck Temple (LBT) is a Reform congregation located in Los Angeles between the city and the San Fernando Valley. In its 50+ year history, it has had a stable leadership with only three senior rabbis. Leo Baeck has historically been a congregation focused on social action. Its religious school is led by a graduate of the Rhea Hirsch School of Education at Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles. There are 212 total students enrolled in the children’s education programs including 34 in their Family Shabbat Experience program, 178 in their Sunday school, and 90 in midweek Hebrew. Approximately 16 students are confirmed in 10th grade each year. The congregation has recently rebuilt its sanctuary, social hall, and offices, adding several adult classrooms, conference rooms, and multipurpose space.

# Experimentation Begins

In 2005 LBT began experimenting with new forms of education for children. A Task Force explored different models of Shabbat based family education, and created a new model for LBT called Family Shabbat Experience (FSE) which was launched in September 2007. In FSE, LBT aims to enhance families’ engagement in the Jewish values of learning, community and involvement. Parents and children join each Saturday afternoon for Shabbat worship, age-appropriate Torah and text study, and community, experiencing Judaism through the beauty of the Sabbath and the strength of our sacred observances.

**See Appendix I for a description of the Family Shabbat Experience.**

# Creating a Vision

While LBT was excited about the prospects of FSE, they believed that longer term and deeper change could happen if their innovations were built around a vision and aligned to that vision. LBT participated in The RE-IMAGINE Project of Los Angeles from July 2007 to December 2009, a project of The Experiment in Congregational Education in partnership with the Bureau of Jewish Education Los Angeles. In this project a Task Force convened to create a vision for k-7 children’s education and design an alternative model that will help them reach their vision. LBT’s new vision centers around the creation of a sacred community. The use of the word sacred in their vision statement was a major shift for the congregation which has, in the past, been focused on social justice without a strong connection to its roots in Jewish belief. While the vision was originally written for k-7 education, it has become a vision for all education in the congregation and will likely influence other activities as well.

# *Leo Baeck Temple Vision Statement*

***Mission****The rabbis of the Mishnah taught,*'V'talmud Torah k'neged kulam:*' the study of Torah is intimately connected to living a life of mitzvot and Jewish virtues. At Leo Baeck Temple, the purpose of youth education is to inspire our children and teens to develop a compelling, lifelong commitment to Judaism so that they will be able to make informed Jewish choices and live up to the highest ideals of our tradition. Everyone is welcome.****Vision Statement****In partnership with families, we use sacred Jewish time, space and texts –set apart from the everyday--to become an involved and closely linked spiritual community committed to*tikkun olam*.*

*Jewish learning is imbued with the pursuit of:*

* ***Connection****– As a house of gathering, a*beit knesset*, we create Jewish memories, which connect learners through time and space. Jewish values are integrated into contemporary life. Families are strengthened by engaging in Jewish life together, and communal, intergenerational learning has the ability to build the broader synagogue community. We recognize that Hebrew study connects us to*Klal Yisrael*, the Jewish people.*
* ***Knowledge****– As a house of learning, a*beit midrash*, we are mindful that learning and teaching are intricately joined. Everyone has something to learn and everyone has something to teach. We are an inclusive community where all learning styles and abilities are embraced. Jewish learning is experiential and inspires action.*
* ***Prayerfulness****– As a house of prayer, a*beit tefillah*, we embrace the capacity of learners to question their relationship with tradition, and to search for God. Through shared worship and a personal sense of prayerfulness, we encourage inward reflection and outward awareness.*

*We are a community, a*kehillat tzedek*, committed to the pursuit of justice. We provide opportunities to turn our learning into sacred deeds in our learning community, our congregational community, and the world. As Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel taught, in the spirit of*tikkun olam*, “We pray with our feet.” Jewish values are integrated into the actions of our lives and we see them as Jewish acts.

In order to reach our vision, we commit to the following:*

* *Making youth education at LBT joyful, communal and relevant to our contemporary world. Therefore, in partnership with our families, we commit to creating exciting, meaningful and engaging experiences.*
* *Recruiting, nurturing, and retaining teachers and staff best suited to realize our vision.*
* *Continually reimagining our vision of lifelong learning.*

*We, therefore, dedicate ourselves to ongoing discussion and evaluation.*

# New Models of Education

LBT created a long term plan to incorporate four new programs into a new model of congregational education with the belief that implementation of this model would help them achieve their vision. The four programs are:

* Havurah based education for young families – opportunities to live and learn Judaism in a small community and practice Jewish communal acts including life cycle, hanukat ha-bayit, and bikur cholim as a community
* Yom Limmudim – community wide Shabbat learning days designed to engage the entire community in intergenerational learning on Shabbat about 5-6 times per year
* “University” style elective education for families with older pre-b’nai mitzvah children to self direct their learning and practice with guidance
* Jewish Life Coaches – congregants trained to work with other congregants and havurot to help them take the next step in their own Jewish observance

The model was introduced at an annual teacher appreciation Shabbat service where the educator and members of the Task Force spoke. Congregants reacted very favorably and were excited for programming to begin.

**See Appendix II for a description of the LBT Whole Family Education Model.**

# Implementing the Vision

The LBT team is realistic in understanding how quickly they can move to implement the entire plan. An Education Steering Committee has been formed which includes the educator, a rabbi, and lay leaders. This committee is responsible for assessing progress against and advancing the vision. An Implementation Team has subteams for each of the major programmatic elements and is responsible for the nuts and bolts of each element. They have laid out a five year plan with targets.
While the current economic situation has been difficult for all congregations, Leo Baeck is facing additional challenges. A neighbor pulled out of a contract to rent space in their parking lot, a major source of revenue. They are finishing a new building for which they are still raising funds, and financing the increased maintenance expense of this building. The initiatives that they have launched in FY 2010 were required to have zero budget impact on the congregation, an almost impossible task. Implementation team members came up with creative ideas to do very low cost programming, using volunteers instead of professionals, and have largely kept on plan without having an impact on the budget.

## Yom Limmud

The first programming element of the model is a Yom Limmud. Eventually they expect to have several of these each year. Yamei Limmud will always be on Shabbat because it fits with their vision of learning in sacred time. The Implementation Team worked through many logistical details were considered in light of not wanting to take money on Shabbat. While many of the congregants do carry money on Shabbat, they were aware that the congregation has never had a gift shop because they didn’t want the concern about being open on Shabbat. They also wanted to model the sacred nature of Shabbat and figure out a way to run the day without taking money. People registered in advance and paid for lunch, but congregants who came without having registered were asked to give their name and were billed later for lunch. Similarly an author gave a talk about her book and she kept a list of people who took copies and they sent checks at a later date.
The pilot was on December 5, 2009. Organizers were pleased with how smoothly and professionally the day was run and with overall attendance. They are working on several areas of improvement for the next Yom Limmud which is scheduled for March 2011. There are 22 volunteers working on the implementation team for the next Yom Limmud.

## Jewish Life Coaches

The next programming element is Jewish Life Coaches. This element is still in the planning stages but a draft job description has been written for the Jewish Life Coaches. The expectation is that Jewish Life Coaches will meet with interested families to help them deepen their engagement with Jewish living and learning.

**See Appendix III for a draft job description for Jewish Life Coaches.**

## Havurah Model and University Model

These elements were still in the planning stages at the time this description was written.

# Appendix I

# Family Shabbat Experience at Leo Baeck Temple

**What is the Family Shabbat Experience?**

Family Shabbat Experience (FSE) is a program designed to approach Jewish Education in a new way. This is an alternative to the Sunday component of the LBT Religious School program for families with students in grades K- 6. The goal of FSE is to enhance LBT families’ engagement in the Jewish values of learning, community, and involvement in Jewish life. Participation in FSE means making a year-long commitment to a new way of learning; parents and children participate in FSE together each Saturday afternoon that FSE occurs. Though there is a classroom component to the program, the learning at FSE extends far beyond the academic aspects associated with school learning. It is an experience of learning through living Torah and Jewish life. Those who enjoy and value spending time together with their family, partaking in lifelong Jewish learning, and building strong friendships with other LBT families will be well suited to our Family Shabbat Experience. Both long-time members and new families are welcome.

**Why Jewish learning on Saturday?**

Saturday is Shabbat, the day of rest for the Jewish People. This is a day for being with one’s family, taking a break from the busy work week, and living on “Jewish time.” One of the goals of FSE is to help our families reclaim both the Sabbath and “family time.” During FSE, families will come together to sing, pray, study, discuss, play, create and laugh. Within this supportive community, new traditions will be created, and new and stronger friendships will be made.

**FSE fits your family and your family’s lifestyle.**

This program begins at 3:30pm and ends by 5:50pm. It is designed specifically to avoid the majority of sporting and youth activities held on Saturdays, while still getting you home in time for dinner. While children in grades K-2 will come only to FSE on Saturday afternoons, children in grades 3-6 will participate in our weekday Hebrew program in addition to FSE. Siblings in grades 7-12 are encouraged to participate in FSE as madrichim (teenage aides). For them, normative post-B’nai Mitzvah programming will continue on Sundays. In addition, babysitting service will be provided for younger siblings of FSE students. Regular attendance, punctuality and full participation by all parents and children at each session are essential for the success of the program.

**Adult Learning**

You, our parents, will have the opportunity to pray and learn with your children every Shabbat. You will also have the chance to be spiritually and intellectually nourished independent of your children. The separate adult limud (study time) will give you the opportunity to explore Judaism while making connections with other adults who are living similar experiences as a Jewish adult and parent. Much of the adult limud will address topics similar to those being raised with the children, but at an adult level of instruction and conversation.

**Curriculum**

The FSE curriculum for grades K-2 mirrors the current K-2 curriculum in the Sunday Religious School program. The Judaic content of the FSE curriculum for grades 3-6 is similar to the current Sunday program. FSE families will attend temple-wide events, such as the Chanukah family dinner, and students in grades 3-6 will still participate in the 3-6th grade retreat and other school community programs. In this way, relationships between students in FSE and those who choose not to participate will be built and maintained.

# Appendix II

# Whole Family Education

# ****Whole Family Education. . . Big Picture Jewish Education****

**Imagine this:**
…families with young children connecting with one another, learning how to create Jewish memories together in a mutually supportive, comfortable and safe environment. …families being encouraged to find their own Jewish path that works for them… families learning skills that will help them continue their Jewish journey beyond the synagogue. Imagine lively Shabbat dinners, group social action projects, fun, age-appropriate Torah learning, basic prayer literacy, and the creation of memorable moments and new traditions for each family.

**Details**: Families at Leo Baeck Temple synagogue community will be connected and linked to a chavurah with several other families. Each chavurah will have a professional facilitator and a teacher for the children of the chavurah. The facilitator will help to establish the chavurah’s goals for the year. Each chavurah will have a guidebook for the year with suggested, lessons, ways to celebrate, social and social action opportunities. Each chavurah will have expected outcomes recommended by the synagogue.

There will be parent training sessions throughout the year for all adults involved with the chavurot (plural of chavurah) to come together to learn how to facilitate discussions, Shabbat dinners and to share the successes and challenges of their chavurah experience. There will also be a synagogue hosted website for congregants to share online their Jewish journeys with the rest of the synagogue community.

**Imagine this:**

. . . Shabbat morning at Leo Baeck temple where the halls and classrooms are filled with members of the synagogue from the ages of 1 to 99 years old. …synagogue members engaged in a plethora of learning opportunities - choosing between going to a musical Shabbat morning minyan or yoga, Jewish cooking or Israeli dancing, learning the Torah portion with your family through drama or participating in the intergenerational choir. All of these activities are happening throughout the campus of Leo Baeck on Shabbat. …an 80 year old man debating the existence of God with a 4th grade girl.

**Details**: There will be several community learning days which will transform Shabbat at Leo Baeck Temple. The entire community is invited to spend an energizing, intellectually stimulating and community building Shabbat at the synagogue on Saturday.

**Imagine this:**

. . . a program with different paths to Jewish living and learning with exciting opportunities to engage and explore your Jewish identity as an individual, as a family, as a Leo Baeck community. …the synagogue provides guidance to you in your exploration of these many avenues of entry and suggests opportunities to connect as a whole Leo Baeck community. ….sitting with a list of courses among which you can choose the ones that best suit you and your family’s interests. …choose a semester long course designed for families which teaches about topics such as Judaism connection with the environment. …coming together as a community at the end of the year for a “museum exhibit” of every family’s portfolio which will visually demonstrate their Jewish journey for that year.

**Details**: Semester course catalogues will be created each year for families. Each opportunity will be categorized by Torah, tikkun olam, worship or celebration. Each family will be asked to take part in a certain number of each activity throughout the year. Each student will also be asked to take part in a certain number of activities independent of his or her family. Each year will have a theme such as “Judaism and Nature” or “Judaism and Justice”; and all families and students will be learning about this theme throughout the year through the vehicles of Torah, Talmud, Field Trips and other engaging opportunities.

**Imagine this:**

. . . a professional Jewish Life Coach provided for each and every family of Leo Baeck Temple regardless of the ages of the children (a Jewish Life Coach is a Judaically knowledgeable person who helps synagogue families navigate the wealth of our tradition to engage in Jewish life). …the coach helps families to figure out new family traditions, rituals and celebrations while incorporating those with which they are already familiar. …the Jewish Life Coach also serves as a cheerleader for these families both with regard for the steps they have already taken and those they might take in the future.

# Appendix III

# Leo Baeck - Jewish Life Coaches

**Jewish Life Coach Job Description**

A Jewish Living Coach or Chai Coach is a Judaically knowledgeable person who helps synagogue families navigate the wealth of our tradition to engage in Jewish life. The coach will help families to figure out new family traditions, rituals and celebrations while incorporating those with which they may have grown up. The Jewish Living Coach will guide families in their on-going Jewish exploration and journey. The Jewish Living Coach will not only assist families in helping to create Jewish family rituals and memories but the coach will also be a cheerleader for these family in the steps they have already taken in addition to the steps they might take in the future.

While some families may want to incorporate more learning such as weekly family Torah study or learning Hebrew together, others may want to explore their personal or extended ancestry. The Jewish Living Coach may help families connect Jewish values to the secular part of our lives, or perhaps even working to work through spiritual doubts.

The job of the Jewish Living Coach is to listen, question, suggest, support, guide, encourage and reassure these families in a nonjudgmental way to allow them to create a Jewish action plan tailored to the individual family’s needs and desires.

**Ways in which a Jewish Living Coach may assist FSE families, but not limited to:**

1. Assisting families in creating comfortable and accomplishable home family Shabbat customs and rituals
2. Giving creative or traditional Jewish ways to prepare for a joyful occasion (simcha).
3. Providing information and resources regarding a Jewish practice or principle.
4. Brainstorming creative or meaningful ways to think through a life cycle event or milestone.
5. Help families to explore where they want to be socially and emotionally as a family, especially within the Jewish context.
6. Be a liaison to the synagogue or the greater Jewish community.
7. Provide creative ways to engage the children or non-interested partner in Jewish rituals or celebrations.
8. Suggesting ways for the home to be a sacred and safe “Jewish home.”
9. Decorating the home Jewishly with mezzuzot, art, Ketubah, Judaica, etc. . .
10. Teach how to host a Shabbat dinner
11. Connect families to one another who might get along (matchmaker)
12. Encourage family social action projects
13. Help the families think about every aspect of their life from Modeh Ani in the morning to Shema at night and enrich yet not overwhelm their lives with Judaism
14. Debrief the Jewish experiences that they have to help them attach personal meaning and explore how to extend or deepen the experience

**Necessary background of a Jewish Living Coach:**

1. Strong knowledge of Jewish holidays.
2. Well versed in the stories of the Torah.
3. Familiarity with the hustle and bustle of busy Los Angeles families.
4. Nonjudgmental affect and approach to various Jewish lifestyles and backgrounds.
5. Ability to decipher Hebrew.
6. Know the difference between ushperin and ushpizin.
7. Personal commitment to a Jewish life.
8. Ability to relate well to both children and adults.

**Responsibilities in this position include, but are not limited to:**

1. Meeting with the entire FSE group and teaching a lesson on what a Jewish Living Coach is and might be able to do for them.
2. Creating and preparing a nonjudgmental intake format for the families with the assistance of the Director of Education.
3. Assisting families in creating comfortable and accomplishable home family Shabbat customs and rituals
4. Meeting with each family in person at least once per semester in their home for a tour of their home and for a nonjudgmental conversation to discuss the predetermined intake questions.
5. Prepare an individualized oral and written Jewish Action Plan for the FSE families.
6. Create a quarterly (4 times a year) newsletter ala Real Simple Magazine” for the families with suggests on social action activities, recipes, and making Shabbat fun and engaging for children and holiday celebrations.
7. Communicating with the Director of Education on a weekly basis via phone or email updating the DOE about the progress of the Jewish Living Coach.
8. Create a “family journal” format for families to record their process and progress through pictures, articles and other entries.
9. Submit a written report of the Jewish Living Coach’s activities.
10. Follow up with the families via phone or email once a semester approximately six weeks after the face to face meeting encouraging and supporting them and their Jewish Action Plan.
11. Attending all Jewish Living Coach training meetings, approximately four per year.
12. Communicating thoughtfully and regularly with parents and with the Director of Education about what is happening in your classroom.
13. Observing all school and Temple policies.
14. Remaining mindful that your families will learn just as much from the person that you are as they will from the information you impart.