

What we're doing: instigated questions and provoked answers.

A newsletter.

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## Dear Friends:

Chanukah will soon be upon us. Although what happened historically and how the holiday has evolved over time, including in our own era, are far more complicated than we often acknowledge, **at its heart, Chanukah is a celebration of the persistence of Jewish identity.** As the old adage has it: they tried to destroy us, we won, let's eat (in this case latkes or sufganiyot, depending on your tradition).

Chanukah and "*chinuch*" – education – come from the same Hebrew root. For many years, educators and the funders who support their work have set "strengthening Jewish identity" as their key goal. There's a great deal to unpack in this simple sounding phrase: What do we mean by "identity"? What do we mean by "Jewish identity"? What does it mean to "strengthen" Jewish identity?

At our foundation, we believe there's another important question to ask: why do we want to strengthen Jewish identity? For us, perhaps the central answer is that embedded in Jewish teaching and practice are insights, historical examples, role models, stories, and guidelines that can help us live better lives and shape a better world. "Strengthening Jewish identity" means encouraging and enabling Jews (and we invite others to participate as well) to more deeply and richly engage with Jewish wisdom and to apply it thoughtfully and joyfully in their lives. The Maccabees fought not just to have the right to be Jewish, but for the right to teach and observe Torah – the content of their Jewish identity.

We see signs around us that many others are also focusing attention on the content of Jewish tradition both as a powerful resource for living better lives and as the framework for organizing and eventually assessing our educational efforts. Several different ways of naming this content are now in active use.

“Jewish values” has long been a formulation that educators and others have used to try to describe what is essential and meaningful in Jewish teaching that aims to influence learners’ attitudes and behaviors. Today, we can see curricula built around core Jewish values (e.g., that of [Shalom Learning](#), a multi-dimensional supplementary education programs) and educational tools like the [Jewish values cards](#), developed by Robyn Faintich and distributed by Behrman House. An alternative formulation that appears to be growing in popularity is the framework drawn from the Jewish Mussar tradition of middot – character traits to be cultivated. Creative educators like Avi Orlow at the Foundation for Jewish Camp with his [“periodic table” of Jewish character traits](#), and filmmaker Tiffany Shlain and her film, [The Making of a Mensch](#), and institutions like [Gann Academy](#), a pluralistic day high school in Massachusetts, and the [Mussar Institute](#), are all refocusing attention on the elements of character that Jewish teaching and practice can help to instill and cultivate.

We at Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah speak often about [“Jewish Sensibilities”](#) - distinctive ways in which Jews perceive and respond to life situations, captured in a word or brief phrase, but elaborated on in Jewish texts, narratives, and historical experience. We see a disagreement and recognize that both sides may have an element of the truth and can learn from one another ([\*elu v’elu\*](#)). We experience the frenetic pace and pressures of life today and come to appreciate the extraordinary value of setting a regular time to step back, take time off, reflect, and celebrate ([\*Shabbat\*](#)). We recognize that there are times when it is necessary to act, even without full understanding of what may occur or full appreciation of why we feel compelled to do so ([\*na’aseh v’nishma\*](#)).

We don't see the vocabularies of values, *middot*/character traits, and sensibilities as antagonists or competitors. From different angles and with slightly different emphases, they all point back to the same fundamental reality: Jewish teaching is meant to be a framework for living – not just for doing “Jewish” things in particular Jewish times and places, important as these are, but for the entirety of our lives.

We're happy as a foundation to be able to support so many educators and organizations that are "strengthening Jewish identity" by helping Jews and others to discover the profound wisdom in Jewish teaching and practice and to apply this wisdom to be better parents, partners and community members, better environmental stewards and social activists, and more fulfilled and flourishing human beings. Jewish values, *middot*, sensibilities – these are building blocks of better lives and a better world. Maccabees we're not. But, we too celebrate not only the persistence of Jewish identity, but of the content from our tradition that can make that identity meaningful and generative for so many in the contemporary world.

Yours,  
Jon Woocher,  
President

## GIVING

Executive Director Dara Steinberg recently attended the Grantmakers for Effective Organizations Collaboration Conference in Houston in November. You can find her [full reflection \(and part of the conference soundtrack\) here.](#)

The biggest conference takeaway was deceptively simple - ***collaboration takes constant work and stewardship***. There are four ingredients needed for successful collaborations, which make up a basic recipe with endless variations:

- **Trust** - you need to build trust in the group and that takes...
- **Patience** – it takes time to build trust, time to get everyone on the same page and to do that you need...
- **Communication** – to make sure you're truly aligned and you then need...
- **Flexibility** – because what you may learn your partners need is not what you went into the process thinking it would look like, so many people sharing case studies said "this looks nothing like I thought it would" or "this looks nothing like it did when we started" but where it went (and continued to evolve to) was key to getting the partners to a shared goal.

Sounds just like your average grant, yes? Many of these things are countercultural in our desire for a move-fast, drive-for-results nonprofit culture. Both funders and nonprofits must support each other with an awareness of how much depends on all these traits.

For more insights, visit Dara's [full report](#) on our [blog](#).

## LEARNING

Tooting our own horn, we loved [this account](#) in the [Jewish Week](#) of our foundation's [Sensibility Cards](#) in action.

If it piques your interest, it goes without saying that we'd love to hear from you and think together about ways this tool might be used in your organization, in your work.

## SHARING

There are many Jewish Wisdoms that touch on (and/or wrestle with) community and the search for connection. [Rebecca Sirbu](#) recently added her thoughts to the ongoing conversation with [this essay](#) at [My Jewish Learning](#).

Pausing is an important self-care reminder with deeply Jewish roots. We enjoyed [these wise thoughts](#) (beautifully short, no less meaty) from [The Wisdom Daily](#) on slowing down when you need to.

And, to share a smile - a Hanukkah Classic for you, from Woody Guthrie:

*What else should we be sharing? [Click here to send us your recommendations!](#)*



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