

In Their Own Words: Jewish Teens on their Journey to Adulthood



Name: Marissa Brockman
Location: Temple Shir Tikva, Sudbury, MA
Grade: 11
Hobbies: Dance
Moving Traditions Experience: *Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing!*, sixth year

"*Rosh Hodesh* is so important to me because it gives girls like me an outlet and a Jewish space to express ourselves and be who we really are. If grownups want to understand why the group is so special they should reflect on their own teenage years and remember how hard it was. Being in *Rosh Hodesh* has helped me find my own voice and realize that I can impact those around me.

There is something amazing about being in a group with just girls. No matter what, we all know that we are all going through the same things. I have learned through my years in *Rosh Hodesh* that it is important not to judge other people but to allow your differences to bond you. My *Rosh Hodesh* friends and I each have very different personalities. I am a little outgoing, another girl is very quiet, one very dramatic. We learn from each other and connect because the group helps us live life in a better way."



Name: Ely Merenstein
Location: Denver Community Group
Grade: 9
Hobbies: Guitar, piano, singing
Moving Traditions Experience: *Shevet Achim: The Brotherhood*, second year

"There are no major problems at my school, but sometimes there are tensions between students and between students and faculty. It is an academic environment with high expectations.

The guys group got me thinking differently about the word 'wisdom.' For example, keeping in mind other people's feelings, making decisions for ourselves about what we value, the right things to say and act in situations, all are about wisdom. I don't have another group where I can discuss connecting secular topics such as what it means to be a man, and wisdom, to my Jewish life."

Once on the street I bumped into a boy from my *Shevet Achim* group. I could not help but smile when he introduced me to his mother as his "Jewish manhood mentor."
– *Shevet Achim* Group Leader

Moving Traditions Welcomes Boston Board Members



Moving Traditions' Boston Board members and leaders, from left to right: Carolyn Perlemuter, Deborah Meyer, Executive Director, Sally Gottesman, Board Chair, Hope Suttin, and Charles Cohen

How did *Rosh Hodesh* Touch Your Life? Evaluating the Long-Term Outcomes of *Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing!*

We've heard over the 10 years of the program that girls love *Rosh Hodesh*, recommend it to friends, and feel that it strengthens their connection to Jewish community.

It is now time to determine the program's long-term outcomes for *Rosh Hodesh* girls and the women who lead their groups.

Guided by two leading social scientists in the field of evaluation, Drs. Pearl Beck and Tobin Belzer, Moving Traditions is conducting a national research project to learn from past group leaders and from participants

who are now at least 16 years old how the program has affected their attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors as women and as Jews.

"The findings will be framed as recommendations," say Drs. Beck and Belzer, "to inform Moving Traditions' decisions about improving the *Rosh Hodesh* program for the next generation of girls."

If you have been part of *Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing!* we want to hear what you have to say. Check out <http://movingtraditions.org/evaluation>.

Moving Traditions is Nationally Recognized

Jim Joseph Foundation Report on Teens

Moving Traditions is highlighted in the 2013 Jim Joseph Foundation report, *Effective Strategies for Educating and Engaging Jewish Teens, What Jewish Communities Can Learn from Programs that Work*, as one of 10 Jewish organizations with scalable and innovative programs.

Noteworthy to the researchers is the “micro-community” that participants develop over time: “The result of successful groups is that the teens feel connected to a Jewish community of their own.”

Slingshot 2013-14 – Guide to Innovation



For the 8th year Moving Traditions has been chosen for the *Slingshot* guide – for the second year as one of 17 “Standard Bearers” – and has been named in a new supplement as “one of 18 leading Jewish organizations committed to impacting the lives of women and girls.”

According to *Slingshot 13/14*, “Moving Traditions is among the most ground-breaking, innovative programs working with Jewish teens...” weaving “the immediate concerns of teens with a safe peer support network seamlessly integrated into a Jewish values framework.”

“Moving Traditions has been a catalyst for changing the way the Jewish community engages with and impacts young girls and the women who work with them,” according to *Slingshot’s Women & Girls Supplement*.

Teens Stand with Women of the Wall

In a show of support for women in Israel who gather each Rosh Hodesh despite great obstacles to pray at the Western Wall, Moving Traditions ran a national contest to send three participating teens in *Rosh Hodesh* or *Shevet Achim*, each with a parent, to stand with Women of the Wall in Jerusalem on January 2, 2014.

Congratulations to our winners. To see their inspiring one-minute videos, visit www.movingtraditions.org.



Alexandra Schwartz,
Stamford CT
Temple Sinai
Tweet: *Eq-wall-ity*



Eliza Moss-Horowitz,
Florence MA
Congregation
B'nai Israel
Tweet: *Jewish women deserve equality at the wall*



Lucy Sattler,
Evanston, IL
Beth Emet The
Free Synagogue
Tweet: *Proud to pray like a girl*

Gender: A Bridge for Jewish Teens to an Integrated Self

An education director’s perspective on why he puts Moving Traditions’ programs at the core of his teen strategy



I find it ironic that in many liberal communities that value egalitarian practice, like the one that I currently work in, it is so difficult to “address” gender. The teens that I work with are struggling in their relationships with one another and with adults, and issues related to gender expectations are often central to those struggles.

Today’s teens, and especially teens in Los Angeles, are overwhelmed by instant, superficial communication. They experience digital interface more than human interface and in doing so, they do not experience genuine accountability. As educators, we need to be connecting teens with what it means to be a discerning participant in a shared dialogue. The Jewish community needs to step up and help them think about what it means to live with purpose.

By making the gender conversation central and owning it, Moving Traditions has created an innate bridge between pre-adolescence and adolescence. During my first encounters with the curricula and in my participation in a Moving Traditions seminar hosted by the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles, I was blown-away by the attention that Moving Traditions pays to teens and the journey through adolescence.



Moving Traditions’ educational approach begins with a deep understanding of the mindset of teens and a rare intentionality about the different questions that teens are asking as young women, as young men, and as human beings.

While other Jewish experiences are quickly compartmentalized by teens and placed neatly in a “Jewish” box, the work of Moving Traditions breaks down that process, allowing for them to fully integrate their Jewish selves and their whole selves. This process, of creating an integrated self, of developing a Jewish mindset, and of seeing the world through a discerning Jewish lens, is what led our synagogue to partner with Moving Traditions.

> Rabbi Yechiel Hoffman, Director of Youth Learning and Engagement for Temple Beth Am in Los Angeles, received Smicha from Rav Dan Channan of Yeshivat Pirchei Shoshanim in 2006.

Teens Face Very Real Challenges

Two Group Leaders' Perspectives

One of the most important factors in any teen program is the adult leader. Moving Traditions works with our partners – synagogues and other Jewish organizations of all affiliations – to find the most talented adult mentors. We then train these group leaders to draw on a gender lens and Jewish values to inspire teens.

Therefore, these rabbis, Jewish educators, doctors, teachers, social workers, and even the occasional documentary film maker make our programs come alive.



David Lieberman talks about the very real challenges the teen boys grapple with in his Shevet Achim groups.

I'm in my third year of mentoring a *Shevet Achim* group of teen boys at B'nai Jeshurun and I can honestly say that the discussions that we've had have been intense. For example, a couple of the guys in the group were at a party with a lot of drinking. They saw a sexual assault where an intoxicated 15-year-old boy was the perpetrator. The police were involved. After they began to talk about the events of the party, we discussed personal boundaries, respect, and sexual consent. We also talked about alcohol and drugs. This wasn't a "just say no" talk, but a talk about the reality that people in high school drink and smoke and how important it is to put checks on yourself so that you don't harm yourself or others.

In addition to these conversations, some of the most impactful and intense talks we've had have been around the issue of rage. Teen boys wrestle with what to do with their feelings of anger. Sometimes they feel like they want to break free from conformity and parental control and just destroy things. We talk about how you can be free without being destructive.

In all of our conversations, we stress how Judaism teaches us to be balanced – to be honest about our deepest human desires and, at the same time, to control our impulses.

How do you walk the line between what you want to do now and what is sensitive to the needs or desires of others? Asking that question is a core Jewish value that we address in the *Shevet Achim* program.

> *David Lieberman supervises six Moving Traditions' Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing! and Shevet Achim: The Brotherhood groups for Congregation B'nai Jeshurun in New York, where he also leads two Shevet Achim groups. Lieberman grew up in the B'nai Jeshurun community and has been giving back as a teen mentor.*

A film editor, Lieberman recently edited the documentary Magic Camp, which received the 2012 award for Best Family Film at the Newport Beach Film Festival.



Barbra Berley-Mellits helped create Moving Traditions' program, Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing!

In 2002, I gathered a 9th grade group of girls from Philadelphia's Main Line to pilot-test *Rosh Hodesh*. The sisterhood we created together was very special. It provided the girls with a safe space to discover and express their authentic selves.

It was our dream that the girls would be empowered to become contributing leaders in the varied communities they would join as they went out into the world. One young woman in this group, Elana, did just that, organizing *Rosh Hodesh* groups wherever she landed.

When she participated in a summer program in Israel, Elana called to be reminded of the melody of the blessing we sang as our opening ritual, because, on her own initiative, she was starting a *Rosh Hodesh* group for the young women on her program. And she wanted to start it off right.

Then, between college and law school, Elana did the year-long AVODAH Jewish Service Corps program, where she also began a *Rosh Hodesh* group, calling this time to consult with me on content. Then in law school in Washington, D.C., she initiated yet another group that is still meeting.

Proudly, here Elana is again, having landed a job in a Philadelphia law firm, with plans to convene another group which will include Ariel, who also participated in our original *Rosh Hodesh* group that started 13 years ago.

I think for Elana, *Rosh Hodesh* is an expression of what she values – tradition, community, personal growth, leadership. She is a true testament to our early vision for this program.

> *Barbra Berley-Mellits has helped Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing! grow since its inception as an author, facilitator and trainer. For over 20 years, her professional consulting work has focused on enhancing the self-esteem and interpersonal skills of people of all ages.*

**In 2013
Moving Traditions
trained 141 educators,
who joined more than
1,200 trained to lead
Rosh Hodesh and
Shevet Achim
groups.**

**In 2014
Moving Traditions
will partner with more
than 220 synagogues,
day schools and JCCs
across the country
to engage and inspire
teen girls
and boys.**

MOVING TRADITIONS at a Glance

Moving Traditions' National Footprint

Since 2005 Moving Traditions has partnered with 397 institutions of all affiliations across North America to operate *Rosh Hodesh* and *Shevet Achim* groups in 34 states and 5 provinces.



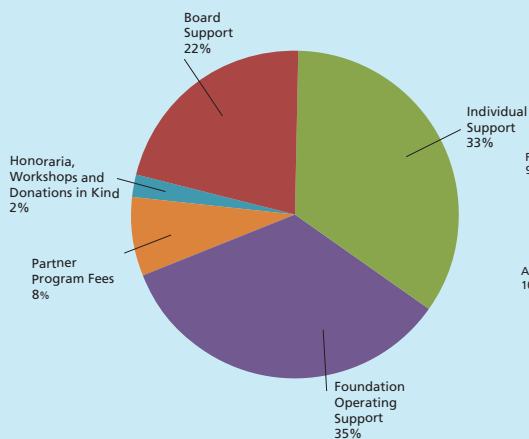
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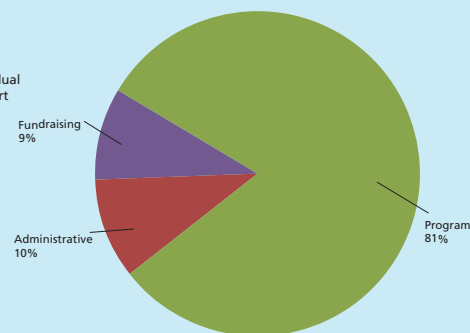
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Moving Traditions inspires people to live fuller lives—and to work for a better world for all—by advocating for a more expansive view of gender in Jewish learning and practice.

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261 Old York Road, Suite 734
Jenkintown, PA 19046
215.887.4511
www.movingtraditions.org

