

## DRAFT

10/19/15

R. Lee Moore on Jewish Fluency

### ***Jewish Fluency can equip staff and students with the knowledge and skills to integrate Jewish practices and sensibilities into their lives.***

Jewish practices and wisdom can offer resources for valuable guidance as we face the fundamental human questions, needs and concerns of navigating an increasingly complex world. Jewish ways of thinking, feeling and doing -- as effective lenses/tools – can help staff and students interpret reality, make decisions and flourish as human beings.

- Fluency transcends and includes Jewish literacy, as it is much more than textual learning. Fluency develops through doing – some of this doing is more obviously Jewish, such as practicing or (re)inventing ritual observances, applying Jewish values and sensibilities (such as *Elu v'Elu* or *b'Tzelem Elohim*) to everyday life and decisions, observing Jewish cycles of time and milestones, etc.
- Fluency does not require all Jews to be 'religiously observant.' Rather, it empowers staff and students with a knowledge base that helps them connect to traditions so they can tap into the reservoir of practical wisdom to be better people, to run their households in peace and enable workplaces to function with respect. Jewish fluency can help us on the path toward 'finding ourselves' spiritually, and to build communities that are healthy, loving and joyful.
- Like a language, Jewish Fluency is necessarily developed through contact and relationships with others. Role models and mentors demonstrate the value of applying Jewish practices and ideas, and invite others to try them on. Peers and colleagues, each on their own journeys, share in the important processes of acquisition, reflection and co-creation, and demonstrate how the tradition can bring reflection and depth to one's multiple identities.

Thinking of the tradition metaphorically as a language/system that grants access to wisdom and joy, what might that look like to familiarize staff and students with its vocabulary, syntax and grammar – in other words cultural memes, norms and habits – in ways that are relevant and applicable? What if the question were not 'are you *fluent* in Judaism' but rather, 'are you *conversational*?' Joining in the ongoing, evolving conversations that are intrinsic to Judaism requires a baseline fluency with the tradition, as well as an empowered authority to innovate it.

Fluency helps Jews make informed choices of whether and which kind(s) of Jewish path(s) to walk at each stage of life. Each person's Jewish journey will be unique. Those that sustain all share is a trajectory from passive participant to becoming a co-creator of Jewish experience, with agency. This transformation is not an external status change, but one that is internal. The shift requires fluency with Jewish traditions and its values, as well as confidence and competence to join the conversation and become a co-author of the ongoing Jewish narrative/conversation.

#### **Some questions:**

1. **Authentic Motivation:** What causes staff/students to want to or need to open the toolbox of Jewish wisdom and living?
2. **Basic Abilities:** What are the particular knowledge bases and skill sets that enable Jews to embody Jewish living, appropriate to their generation?

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3. **Opportunity:** Where is this kind of application happening? How are Jewish approaches and practices already enriching lives in this way on campuses?
4. **'Legitimate Peripheral Participation'** is key toward enabling any kind of fluency – how and where does it happen well?
5. **Immersive Experiences:** How can 'peak' experiences have 'leak' components? "Sinai happened in one day, we had sand in our toes for 40 years." What is the role of immersive experiences in exposing staff and students to the value and practices of being Jewishly fluent?
6. What kind of **role models** best inculcate fluency? Perhaps those who ...
  - are more facilitative and less didactic; not experts but guides
  - can apply wisdom, not just impart information
  - are honest about what they do and don't know
  - know how to connect individuals with resources – both communal and textual
  - invest their authentic self into the lesson plan/prayer service/organizational mission, etc.