

## Sample Text Studies to Engage Parents in Hopes and Dreams Conversations

Based on texts written for The Jewish Education Project and funded by UJA Federation of NY

### 1. Mordecai Kaplan, diary excerpt September 11, 1925, *Communings of the Spirit*

I experienced yesterday one of the most serene and joyous moments of my life at the opening exercises of the Teachers Institute...it happened to be the 16<sup>th</sup> birthday of my daughter Judith. Judith sat at the piano and played the music of the Hebrew songs which were sung by the students. Israel Goldfarb, the music instructor, led in the signing. I had Dr. Gamoran, who returned recently from Palestine, teach Judith the songs from which she played the music. All he had to do was sing them once and she immediately wrote down the notes...Such joy as seeing my darling child beautifully developed physically and mentally and spiritually participating on her birthday in the exercises of an institution which I have had the privilege of nurturing from its very infancy, and with the future bright for both my Judith and the Teachers Institute makes me wonder how much I really deserve.

### 2. Mordecai Kaplan, diary excerpt, April 1, 1929, *Communings of the Spirit*

Saturday night Lena, Judith and I went to see a Yiddish play called “Der Golizianer Chasuno”...[it] aroused in a Jewishly attuned mind a sense of homesickness for the colorful Jewish life of the old world. It portrayed, for instance, the passionate idealization of the value of Torah, and although it introduced a fragment of American Jewish life with a strident jarring effect, the contrast between the old and new Jewish life was saddening. When I learned that Judith felt exactly as I did I was convinced that the Judenschmerz (Jewish pain) has gotten hold of her too. Should a father be glad or sorry that his child is also a victim of the Judenschmerz?

### 3. Barack Obama - letter to his daughters (excerpts)

Dear Malia and Sasha, January 18, 2009

I know how much I've missed these past two years, and today I want to tell you a little more about why I decided to take our family on this journey. When I was a young man, I thought life was all about me—about how I'd make my way in the world, become successful, and get the things I want. But then the two of you came into my world with all your curiosity and mischief and those smiles that never fail to fill my heart and light up my day. And suddenly, all my big plans for myself didn't seem so important anymore. I soon found that the greatest joy in my life was the joy I saw in yours. And I realized that my own life wouldn't count for much unless I was able to ensure that you had every opportunity for happiness and fulfillment in yours. In the end, girls, that's why I ran for President: because of what I want for you and for every child in this nation.

I want every child to understand the great privilege of being a citizen of this nation comes great responsibility. That was the lesson your grandmother tried to teach me when I was your age. She helped me understand that America is great not because it is perfect but because it can always be made better—and that the unfinished work of perfecting our union falls to each of us. I hope both of you will take up that work, righting the wrongs that you see and working to give others the chances you've had. Not just because you have an obligation to give something back to this country that has given our family so much—although you do have that obligation. But because you have an obligation to yourself. Because it is only when you hitch your wagon to something larger than yourself that you will realize your true potential.

I am so proud of both of you. I love you more than you can ever know. And I am grateful every day for your patience, poise, grace, and humor as we prepare to start our new life together in the White House.

Love, Dad

4. **Sholom Aleichem - Excerpts from Sholom Aleichem's Ethical Will to His Children** (Solomon Naumovich Rabinovich 1859-1916)

My last wish for my successors and my prayer to my children: Take good care of your mother, beautify her old age, sweeten her bitter life, heal her broken heart; do not weep for me -- on the contrary, remember me with joy; and the main thing -- live together in peace, bear no hatred for each other, help one another in bad times, think on occasion of other members of the family, pity the poor, and when circumstances permit, pay my debts, if there be any. Children, bear with honor my hard-earned Jewish name and may G-d in Heaven sustain you ever, Amen.

5. **Wendy Mogel, Blessings of a Skinned Knee (excerpt p. 253-4)**

Children can learn to play tennis whether or not you play. They can even become champions...The Hebrew word for parents, *horim*, shares a root with the word *morim*, teacher. You are your child's first teacher. If you turn the religious and spiritual education of your child over to professionals, he may lose what he needs most—your touch, our life experience, and your angle on the issues...Sometimes the idea of ritual and religious obligation annoys or exhausts me. But I continue to study, hold a Shabbat dinner every Friday night, say the prayers, and perform the rituals. Susanna has already had her bat mitzvah, and in a few years Emma will follow suit. My husband and I don't want our daughters to use this rite of passage as a door out of Judaism, so I keep up with the traditions, making sure they evolve as my children get older.

## 6. Gluckel of Hameln (1690-1691) Excerpts from a Jewish businesswoman's letter to her children

We must hold fast to the Torah. As an example: A ship full of passengers sailed the sea. A passenger on deck leading towards fell overboard and began to sink. Seeing this, the captain threw a rope and called to him to hold tight and he would not drown. We in this world of sin are as if we swim in the sea, not knowing at which moment we might drown...gracious God threw us a rope for our guidance to which to hold fast to save ourselves. This is our Holy Torah. Hold tight to it and you will not drown...

People should love one another, for it is said, "Thou Shalt Love They Neighbor" (Lev. 19:18). This is a critical point. But we very seldom find in these times that a person loves another with his heart. On the contrary. If one can ruin another, he will do so.

## 7. Teach Your Children Well, Crosby Stills and Nash

You who are on the road

Must have a code that you can live by

And so become yourself

Because the past is just a good bye.

Teach your children well,

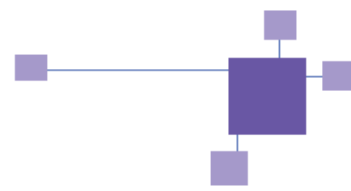
Their father's hell did slowly go by,

And feed them on your dreams

The one they picked, the one you'll know by. Don't you ever ask them why, if they told you, you would cry. So just look at them and sigh and know they love you. And you, of tender years, Can't know the fears that your elders grew by. And so please help them with your youth. They seek the truth before they can die.

## 8. Iggeret HaRamban - Excerpts from Ramban's letter to his oldest son (Rabbi Moses ben Nachmanides - 1195-1270)

"Listen, my child, to the instruction of your father, and do not forget the teaching of your mother." (Proverbs 1:8) Speak with kindness to all people always. This save you from anger, the major cause of misdeed...Always be humble; regard every person as greater than yourself...Study Torah regularly so that you can fulfill its commandments. When you finish your studies, think carefully about what you have learned; try to translate your learning into action...When you pray, do not think about worldly matters, think only of G-d...Read this letter once a week, and be regular in carrying out its requirements. By doing so you will always walk in the path of Gd and you be worthy of all of the good which is due to the righteous.



9. **Resiliency – Excerpt from Raising Resilient Children, Fostering Strength, Hope and Optimism in Your Child.** Robert Brooks and Sam Goldstein, 2002

What is it that most parents want for their children? Happiness, success in school, satisfaction with their lives, and solid friendships quickly come to mind. If we examine our parental goals, it would not be an oversimplification to conclude that realization of these goals requires that our children have the inner strength to deal competently and successfully, day after day, with the challenges and demands they encounter. We call this capacity to cope and feel competent resilience