Abstract

The Impact of Traditional Performance-Based Grading Practices on Motivation and Spirituality in Secondary Judaic Studies

The average American high school student today faces enormous academic pressure to succeed in school. Keeping up with homework, tests, papers, and major projects can be challenging as teenagers navigate an increasingly complex world. However, for modern Orthodox high school students attending dual-curriculum yeshivas, that pressure is easily doubled as students work to succeed academically in twice as many courses. Educators at dual-curriculum yeshivas often utilize a traditional performance-based grading system in Jewish studies courses in order to assess and communicate students' skills in Jewish literacy and fluency. The use of such a grading system has been the subject of much debate in recent years: proponents argue that it enhances student motivation (Austin & McCann, 1992; Airasian, 1994; Halpern, 2012), while opponents argue that it undermines students' affinity for Jewish textual learning (Brown, 2018; Feld, 2018; Shepard, 1988; Bleich, 2000).

This qualitative phenomenological study examined the impact of traditional performance-based grading practices on motivation and spirituality, or religious affinity for Jewish textual learning, in Judaic studies courses. The data, gathered from transcripts of personal interviews with twenty high school students at three different modern Orthodox

high schools, was analyzed through inductive data analysis in order to search for patterns and themes emerging from the research relating to the positive and negative externalities of current traditional grading practices in Jewish studies.

The results of this study indicated that students felt extrinsically motivated to earn good grades in Judaic studies courses despite feeling a strong desire to be more intrinsically motivated to improve in their religious commitment. Students also shared that detecting a sense of relevance in Judaic studies is a strong factor in influencing intrinsic motivation as is the quality of the Judaic studies teacher. Results did not indicate any correlation between mastery mindset and intrinsic motivation. Recommendations regarding how to improve student motivation and spirituality are offered as well as further research possibilities.

The Impact of Traditional Performance-Based Grading Practices on Motivation and Spirituality in Secondary Judaic Studies

by

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Dedication

To Tehila, Tiferet, Meira, Akiva, and Hillel,

my favorite teachers

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CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW

The average American high school student today faces enormous academic pressure to succeed in school. Keeping up with homework, tests, papers, and major projects can be challenging as teenagers navigate an increasingly complex world. However, for modern Orthodox high school students attending dual-curriculum *yeshivas*, that pressure is easily doubled as students work to succeed academically in twice as many courses. Educators at dual-curriculum *yeshivas* often utilize a traditional performance-based grading system in Judaic studies courses in order to assess and communicate students' skills in Jewish literacy and fluency. The use of such a grading system has been the subject of much debate in recent years. Proponents of the traditional grading system argue that it enhances student motivation (Austin & McCann, 1992; Airasian, 1994) because it encourages students to engage in Jewish textual learning (Halpern, 2012). Opponents of the traditional grading system claim that it undermines the overarching goal of Jewish education: namely, to instill religious passion and an affinity for Jewish learning (Brown, 2018; Feld, 2018; Shepard, 1988; Bleich, 2000). While there is much research regarding the impact of traditional performance-based grading practices on student motivation in general studies courses, there has been little research regarding the impact of such grading practices on student motivation in Judaic studies courses.

Likewise, there is also a dearth of research regarding its impact on spirituality, specifically student affinity towards engagement in Jewish textual learning and practice.

This study examined the impact of traditional performance-based grading practices on motivation and spirituality, or religious affinity for Jewish textual learning, in Judaic studies courses. The type of study conducted was an inductive qualitative phenomenological study in an effort to understand the relationship between traditional grading practices and student motivation and spirituality from the perspective of those living the experience, namely the students (Hatch, 2002). The data was gathered through transcripts of personal hour-long interviews conducted by the researcher with twenty high school students at three different modern Orthodox high schools. Written consent was obtained from the participating high school principals, participating students, and their parents. The data was analyzed through inductive data analysis in order to search for patterns and themes emerging from the research relating to the positive and negative externalities of current traditional grading practices in Judaic studies. The NASW Codes of Ethics are relevant to the proposed research.

The results of this study can provide guidance to the field of Jewish education regarding effective grading policies in Judaic studies that will foster student motivation and spirituality in alignment with school mission and program goals.

CHAPTER TWO: THE STUDY PROBLEM

The average American high school student today faces enormous academic pressure to succeed in school. High-stakes testing, the college admissions process, and a highly competitive and rigorous school system all contribute to an overwhelming degree of stress for high school students. According to a 2018 American Psychological Association study on stress in America, over 30% of high school students reported very high levels of academic stress (Stress in America: Generation Z, 2018). A 2015 mixed methods study similarly found that 49% of students experienced a great deal of academic stress on a daily basis (Leonard, Gwadz, Ritchie, Linick, Cleland, Elliott, & Grethel, 2015). According to a 2013 survey conducted by NPR, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the Harvard School of Public Health, almost 40% of parents of high school students reported high levels of academic stress in their children (Education in Health and Schools: A Survey of Parents Summary, 2013).

Pope (2001) asserts in her qualitative study of five high-achieving high school students that stress is caused by students endeavoring to excel academically in too many courses. Students feel pressure from their high schools to take numerous college preparatory courses and excel on standardized tests. They feel pressure from their parents to earn good grades in order to gain admission to prestigious colleges and universities. They also feel pressure from their peers to academically compete with them and even

outdo them. What results is that students are not truly able to engage joyfully in the learning and instead look for ways to manipulate the system by lying, scheming, and cheating in order to succeed academically (Pope, 2001). In this way, earning good grades is prioritized at all costs - over engagement in learning, integrity, and even students' overall physical and psychological health and wellbeing.

The academic pressure plaguing high school students may be easily doubled for students at modern Orthodox *yeshiva* high schools who manage a dual curriculum workload. Modern Orthodox *yeshiva* high school students pursue academic achievement in both general and Judaic studies subjects and courses, albeit with less time after school than their public school peers to complete assignments, study for tests, and seek outside interests. Because the academic demands for these students are doubled, the negative ramifications may be doubled as well.

Consistent with general studies grading practices, Orthodox day school educators often utilize a traditional performance-based grading system in order to assess and communicate students' skills in Jewish literacy and fluency. The use of such a grading system in general studies has been the subject of much debate in recent years. Proponents of the traditional grading system assert that it enhances student motivation (Austin & McCann, 1992) by encouraging students to maintain good grades or work harder to achieve good grades. In Judaic studies courses as well, traditional grades have been most effective in motivating students to learn Jewish texts (Ross, 2010).

The traditional grading system can also easily and efficiently provide students and parents with feedback about their progress and achievement, and traditional grades can

also guide students regarding future coursework (Airasian, 1994). Furthermore, traditional grades can enable administrators to make informed decisions about student matriculation, retention, and college admissions (Airasian, 1994). Finally, the process of compiling traditional grades is not especially exhaustive, thereby providing teachers with more time to focus on instruction (Guskey, 1994). As an educator with twenty years of classroom experience across the country, I have heard from some students that grades provide the external motivation they need to regularly study Jewish texts. I have also heard from some parents that giving traditional grades in Judaic studies courses just as in general studies courses demonstrates consistency across both curricula.

Opponents of the traditional grading system argue that it may undermine the mission of Jewish education: namely, to instill a religious passion and a love of Jewish learning (Brown, 2018; Feld, 2018; Bleich, 2000; Shepard, 1988). In my experience as an educator, I have observed students who were initially passionate about Judaic studies begin to lose interest in their learning after Judaic studies tests were returned with low scores or after report cards in Jewish subjects showed low grades. I have also heard reports from students who felt judged by their grades which seemed to impact their self-concept as it relates to their ability to achieve mastery in Judaic studies. Similarly, some day school administrators have reported to me that they grapple with the issue of parents threatening to remove their children from the day school to public school because they do not want low grades in Judaic studies to impact their children's future educational opportunities in general studies. Furthermore, while data on grade inflation in Judaic studies courses has not been systematically collected, several administrators shared with

me over the years that their teachers occasionally inflate grades in Judaic studies courses in order to give their students a feeling of success and accomplishment in Judaic studies as well as promote a feeling of positivity between the teacher and the students. This practice may cause students to have a false understanding of their abilities, strengths, and challenges in Judaic studies.

Traditional performance-based grading practices can also have a negative impact on students' affinity towards religious connection and practice as they mitigate opportunities for spiritual growth and inspiration and instead lead students to feel judged and criticized (Pelcovitz, Goldberg, & Rosenberg, nd). This may be a reason why Jewish day school students report the lowest religious vitality and religious passion compared to other religious school students (Pelcovitz, Goldberg, & Rosenberg, nd).

It is the mission of Jewish schools, and their educators, to enhance students' religious affinity and connection towards Jewish learning. In fact, this desire to foster a religious affinity and connectedness towards Jewish learning is precisely why many teachers enter the Jewish educational field, more than their public school counterparts (Salomon, 2010). However, in pursuit of this lofty goal, Jewish educators often encounter the riddle of the Sphinx: on the one hand, aiming to inspire within students a love for learning *Torah* for its own sake and without any external motivation; while on the other hand, knowing that the external motivation of traditional grades in Judaic studies will encourage students to engage in Jewish textual learning. As Lehmann noted in her qualitative study examining literacies and discourses in Judaic and general studies courses at a modern Orthodox high school, students often wondered about the place of

traditional grades in Judaic studies courses that endeavor to promote *Torah* learning for its own sake. They felt that traditional grades have no business in a religious context and that assigning grades in Judaic studies relegates such learning to just another academic endeavor alongside geography or chemistry. At the same time however, these students also admitted that traditional grades provide the impetus to learn *Torah,* and without such academic pressure in Judaic studies courses, these students might not ever really engage in Jewish learning (Lehmann, 2007). It is therefore important that educators consider how to support students in building motivation (Alderman, 2004) and spirituality in the Judaic studies classroom (Shepard, 1988) by exploring the impact of traditional grading practices through an inductive qualitative research design that investigates student perceptions of these issues.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

This section begins by defining the term motivation and then moves into prominent theories of motivation. It then defines the terms spirituality and religion and reviews relevant literature regarding spirituality and religion. Then, it discusses various grading systems, including traditional performance-based, standards-based, and alternative. Finally, it discusses the issues as they are relevant to Judaic studies courses.

Motivation

Motivation matters. It is widely considered to be the bedrock of progress, learning, and change (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and it appears in every phase of the learning process, from initiation to perseverance to conclusion (Campos-Sanchez, López-Núñez, Carriel, Martín-Piedra, Sola, & Alaminos, 2014). The term itself is derived from the Latin root word, *movere*, to move. This underscores the meaning of the word as what makes a person move towards a particular goal (Pintrich, 2003). Williams and Burden define motivation as "a state of cognitive and emotional arousal, a state which leads to a conscious decision to act, and gives rise to a period of sustained intellectual and/ or physical effort" (Williams & Burden, 1997). In other words, motivation represents the impulse of an individual to strive to attain a purpose, or to prompt, incite, or stimulate a particular action (Abbas, Lai-Mei, & Narjes, 2012).

Deci and Ryan (1985) distinguish between two types of motivation - extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation - in their cognitive evaluation theory, a subset of their self-determination theory. Extrinsic motivation occurs when productive learning is a means to an end, or when the behavior is driven by a desire for money, prizes, or fame. Extrinsic motivation is also connected to instrumental motivation, borne out of the desire to earn a good grade on an exam, be promoted at a job, or receive a reward (Abbas, Lai-Mei, & Narjes, 2012).

Pink (2009) asserts that extrinsic motivation, albeit often used by parents and educators alike, may create more problems than it endeavors to solve. It can stifle creativity, as demonstrated in Glucksberg's famous study (1962) in which participants were asked to solve Duncker's candle problem. In Duncker's original study, each participant was given a thumbtack box, approximately fifty thumbtacks, a matchbox, approximately thirty-five matches, and one wax candle, and they were asked to mount the candle on the wall in order to measure functional fixedness, a cognitive bias that prevents a person from seeing alternative uses for an object; in this case, the box could be used not simply to hold thumbtacks but as a platform on which to place the candle. Glucksberg took Duncker's study one step further by offering financial incentives to half the participants. Glucksberg found that offering financial incentives actually reduced the number of people who were able to solve the problem, and it also increased the amount of time it took them to solve the problem as well (Glucksberg, 1962).

Extrinsic motivation can also weaken an individual's sense of altruism. Mellström and Johannesson studied the effects of incentivizing blood donations and found that the

supply of donations from females decreased by half when an incentive was offered (Mellström and Johannesson, 2010). Extrinsic motivation can even promote bad behavior as seen in Gneezy and Rustichini's study challenging the deterrence hypothesis, the notion that introducing a penalty will reduce the number of occurrences of bad behavior related to the penalty. Gneezy and Rustichini studied ten day-care centers in Haifa, Israel at which parents routinely came late to pick up their children, thereby forcing a teacher to stay after hours until they arrive. After each of the day-care centers introduced a monetary fine to late-coming parents, the number of instances of tardiness actually increased (Gneezy & Rustichini, 2000).

Extrinsic motivators can be addictive as well in that they produce a ratchet effect, providing a jolt of pleasure at first but over time requiring larger and more frequent doses (Pink, 2009). Knutson, Adams, Fong, and Hommer studied brain activity during anticipatory intervals using functional magnetic resonance imaging as physically and psychologically healthy participants played a video game that would offer monetary rewards for completing various tasks. When participants anticipated a reward, the nucleus accumbens was activated, thereby releasing dopamine. This physiological process mimics the dopamine release that occurs with addiction (Knutson, Adams, Fong & Hommer, 2001). Further studies confirmed this correlation between abnormal reward processing and stimulant drug abuse (Just, Meng, Smith, Bullmore, Robbins, & Ersche, 2019).

Finally, extrinsic motivators can foster short-term thinking by distracting attention away from the learning process and onto the product of earning a reward. In one study in

which participants were paid to solve problems, the participants being paid typically chose easier problems to solve compared to the participants who did not expect a reward (Benabou & Tirole, 2003). When extrinsic motivators are introduced, individuals tend to sacrifice long-term learning goals in order to achieve short-term payoffs.

Intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, involves the inherent satisfaction that is produced during the learning process because the student is genuinely interested in participating in the learning process (Ryan & Deci, 2009). Gardner and Lampert call this integrative motivation in foreign language acquisition, learning a new language for personal growth or to integrate into a new language community (Abbas, Lai-Mei, & Narjes, 2012). In one quantitative study examining the motivation profiles of over eight hundred medical school students in the Netherlands, intrinsic motivation was specifically correlated to greater creativity, deeper and more impactful learning experiences, lower dropout rates, higher retention rates, and better behavior overall (Kusurkar, Croiset, Galindo-Garré, & Ten Cate, 2013). Intrinsic motivation is also positively correlated to a feeling of self-efficacy, the belief of an individual that he or she will be successful as demonstrated in a quantitative study of almost four hundred students in Indonesia examining the cause of academic fatigue (Ariani, 2017). Intrinsically motivated students are those who work hard, persevere, focus their attention on the task at hand, can work independently, enjoy learning, and inspire others. They are responsible about setting goals, resourceful in finding the means to accomplish goals, and resilient when faced with challenges (Kamla, Davis-Brezette, & Larson, 2006; Abbas, Lai-Mei, & Narjes, 2012).

Furthermore, intrinsically motivated students are more likely to achieve academic success than those with higher IQs or even talent due to a combination of passion, perseverance, and self-control (Deci & Ryan, 2008). In one landmark study involving United States Military Army West Point cadets and National Spelling Bee finalists, researchers found that intrinsic motivation was a significant predictor of long-term achievement (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). Two longitudinal studies of several hundred middle school students found that self-discipline stemming from intrinsic motivation outperformed IQ in predicting academic success (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005).

Kohn (1999) argues that, while all children are born with the intrinsic motivation to learn, their intrinsic motivation diminishes over time as they begin to earn prizes and incentives like good grades for their learning. The further they progress in school, the more children lose their innate curiosity and creativity, and the more they learn to think more like their teacher. This process of cognitive evaluation moves them away from internal motivation and instead moves them towards external motivation (Deci, 1975). Similarly, the overjustification hypothesis suggests that an individual's intrinsic interest in an activity can be undermined by the introduction of an external motivator because the resulting external justification for the activity is too strong (Lepper, Greene, & Nirbett, 1973). This was evidenced in a famous study by Lepper, Greene, and Nirbett examining the effects of introducing a reward to preschool children who expressed interest in drawing. When children were offered a reward for drawing, their interest in the activity decreased compared to those children who did not anticipate a reward (Lepper, Greene,

& Nirbett, 1973). Further research by Deci, Koestner, and Ryan (1999) confirmed these findings in their meta-analysis of 128 studies.

At the same time, however, according to cognitive evaluation theory, administering rewards for dull tasks may not necessarily negatively impact intrinsic motivation because there was never any intrinsic motivation to complete the dull tasks from the outset (Deci, Ryan, & Koestner, 2001). In addition, if the reward is unexpected, then it is also less likely to impair intrinsic motivation because the individual did not attribute the reason for completing the task to the reward (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 2001). Finally, it is possible to move from extrinsic motivation to intrinsic motivation over time if the learning proves interesting and engaging (Ross, 2010). Ultimately, it is important for educators to consider how to build intrinsic motivation in their students (Alderman, 2004), and educators must discuss how their schools' grading practices support or hinder that process.

Theories of Motivation

There are two primary theories of intrinsic motivation: self-determination theory developed by Deci and Ryan; and social-cognitive theory developed by Dweck and Leggett. Cognitive evaluation theory, a subset of self-determination theory, focuses specifically on extrinsic and intrinsic motivation within the context of self-determination theory. Achievement goal theory developed by Meece and Anderman is an outgrowth of social-cognitive theory. These theories have been further developed by Pintrich and Seifert.

According to Deci and Ryan's theory of self-determination (1985), all humans are motivated to grow and gain fulfillment in their lives due to three innate psychological and personality needs. These three needs are: the need for competence, that individuals are capable of mastering a skill or task; the need for social connection, that individuals feel part of a larger community; and finally, the need for autonomy, that individuals feel in control of their own behaviors and goals. People are motivated to behave in order to achieve self-determination through fulfillment of these three needs (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Deci and Ryan further explain three positive motivators and three negative motivators that exist in the workplace or classroom. The three positive motivators are: play, when an individual is motivated by the work itself because it is enjoyable; purpose, when the individual identifies with the outcome and value of the work; and potential, when the work increases an individual's potential. The three negative motivators are: emotional pressure, when an individual is motivated to work out of fear, shame, guilt, or peer pressure; economic pressure, when an individual is motivated to work in order to earn a reward or avoid punishment; and finally inertia, when an individual is motivated to work for no apparent reason. When the three positive motivators - play, purpose, and potential - are present, work tends to improve (McGregor & Doshi, 2015).

According to Dweck and Leggett's social-cognitive theory on motivation (1988), students set goals for themselves which direct their behavior. Depending on which goals they are working to obtain, either performance or mastery, a student will create a framework through which they will interpret and react to events. If the student is concerned with earning a favorable judgment of their performance or behavior, e.g.

getting a good grade on a test, then he or she will be more likely to develop a "helpless" pattern whereby he or she avoids challenges, performs poorly when faced with obstacles and exerts less effort overall in the future. However, if the student is concerned with achieving mastery or learning a competency, e.g. a particular academic or intellectual skill, then he or she will be more motivated to face challenges, increase effort in the future, and persevere. These different goals foster different behavioral response patterns within students: either the "helpless" pattern or the "mastery oriented" pattern. Teacher feedback also plays a role in determining which pattern the student absorbs: if the feedback is general, the student will be more likely adopt the helpless, fixed pattern; whereas if the feedback is specific, the student will be more likely to adopt the malleable, mastery-oriented pattern. Further research led to the conclusion that conceiving of one's intelligence as fixed resulted in the "helpless" pattern and decreased motivation, whereas conceiving of one's intelligence as malleable resulted in the "mastery oriented" pattern and increased motivation (Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

Meece, Anderman, and Anderman's achievement goal theory (2006) takes Dweck and Leggett's social-cognitive theory one step further. According to achievement goal theory, motivation can be understood as an attempt to achieve a goal. In the academic setting, student behavior is a function of the desire to achieve one of two goals: learning, or mastery, goal, or performance, or ego-oriented, goal. Goal structures are communicated to students by their teachers and their classroom practices: performance-goal oriented students perceive an emphasis on grades, competition, and one's ability compared to other students in the classroom; and mastery-goal oriented

students perceive an emphasis on effort, improvement, self-comparison, and the development of skills (Anderman, Cupp, & Lane, 2010). When schools emphasize the mastery goal of developing skills as opposed to the performance goal of outperforming one's classmates, students are more intrinsically motivated to learn (Meece, Anderman, & Anderman, 2006).

Research has further shown that students who focus on mastery goals also demonstrate greater effort, persistence, enhanced understanding of the material, as well as higher self-efficacy (Meece, Anderman, & Anderman, 2006). By contrast, students who focus on performance goals demonstrate more superficial understanding of the material, academic dishonesty (Tyler, 2015; Rettinger & Kramer, 2009; Anderman, Cupp, & Lane, 2010), lower grades (Kaplan, Middleton, Urdan, & Midgley, 2002), and self-handicapping behaviors (Akin, 2014).

Ames and Archer (1988) studied how specific motivational processes are related to performance goals in classroom settings. In their study on the use of academic strategies by almost two hundred adolescents, they found that the students who focused on mastery goals used more effective strategies, preferred challenging tasks, displayed a more positive attitude towards class, and held a stronger belief that success stems from effort (Ames & Archer, 1988).

Seifert (2004) combines the self-determination theory and the social-cognitive theory by positing that how students perceive competence, autonomy, and connectedness within the mastery or performance pattern are integral to motivation and resulting behavior. If students adopt a mastery pattern, they will find more meaning in their work

and will be more motivated to achieve competence, autonomy, and connectedness. In addition, they will show positive affect, flexible strategy use, deeper cognitive engagement, and persistence. Ultimately though, perceived meaning is integral in developing motivation (Seifert, 2004).

Pintrich (2003) similarly bridges various motivation theories by listing five social-cognitive constructs in motivating students - competence beliefs, control beliefs, higher levels of interest, stronger perceptions of value, and appropriate goals (Pintrich, 2003). Within the first domain of competence beliefs are self-efficacy and self-worth. When students believe that they can do well and are capable, they are more motivated to learn than students who do not (Pintrich, 2003).

Pintrich's second domain of control beliefs includes the notions that students who believe that they have control over their learning and behavior will perform better than students who do not. Intrinsically motivated students tend to have the ability to participate in self-regulated learning (Kaplan & Midgley, 1997; Pintrich, Anderman, & Klobucar, 1994; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Pintrich, Roeser, & De Groot, 1994). Self-regulated learning refers to the self-management process through which students take an active role in motivational, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of learning (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). The third domain, high levels of interest, includes both personal interest and situational interest. Personal interest represents the more stable and longer-lasting interest in being involved in an activity for its own sake. Situational interest refers to the psychological state of interest that develops through characteristics

of the activity such as humor or pictures. High levels of both personal and situational interest can lead to greater intrinsic motivation and higher achievement (Pintrich, 2003).

Pintrich's fourth domain of stronger perceptions of value refers to how important the task is. If the task value is high, then student persistence and performance will also be higher, and students may choose to pursue similar tasks in the future (Pintrich, 2003). When students are able to find value and personal meaning in the learning, they develop greater intrinsic motivation because they are more engaged and personally involved (Wolters & Hussain, 2015; Ocak & Yamaç, 2013). The fifth domain involving the pursuit of complex goals is related to effort and achievement in the classroom (Pintrich, 2003). Ultimately, student motivation is influenced by a variety of constructs within the classroom activities, interactions, and practices, and the educator therefore plays a valuable role in supporting student motivation (Pintrich, 2003).

Spirituality and Religion

A primary objective of religious education in modern Orthodox Jewish schools is to foster a sense of spirituality within the students in order to provide the motivation for further religious textual learning (Shepard, 1988). It therefore is important to define spirituality and religiosity, or religion, while at the same time, recognizing that because the two terms are often used interchangeably in the literature, it can be difficult to completely separate the two (Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001). The National Institute of Healthcare Research (NIHR) convened a panel in 1997 to review and discuss the research on spirituality and health, and they collectively defined spirituality as "the

feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behaviors that arise from a search for the sacred," (Larson, Swyers, & McCullough, 1997). Sacred is a subjective term not necessarily linked to religion and thus could be found in the non-divine, such as interpersonal relationships, nature, and even work (Pargament, 2013).

Religion, on the other hand, involves an organized system of beliefs, practices, and rituals borne out of a group of people with common beliefs and practices which facilitate closeness to a higher power (Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001). Both spirituality and religiosity focus on the sacred, on beliefs about the sacred, and how those beliefs affect behaviors (George, Larson, Koenig & McCullough, 2000). Religiosity can be guided by spiritual motivation as one searches for and develops a relationship with the sacred (Pargament, 2013). Spirituality and religiosity also share some overlapping values, such as prayer and forgiveness (Vance, 2007). However, religiosity and spirituality differ in that religiosity is linked to a formal institution, whereas spirituality does not depend on a collective or organized dictate (Pargament, 2013). In other words, spirituality is free of the rules and dictates normally associated with religion (Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001).

Theories of Spirituality and Religion

The research concerning spirituality and religion can be divided into two main categories: stage theories posed by Fowler, Parks, and others; and non-stage theories posed by Glock, Worthington, and others. I will present a sampling of stage theories of

spirituality and religion before moving on to non-stage theories, the focus of my research on spirituality and religion.

James Fowler (1981) developed a theory of six stages of spiritual development based on the cognitive stage theories of Piaget and Kohlberg. In the first stage, the intuitive-projective stage, the preschool child absorbs religious ideas from parents and society. In the second stage, the mythical-liberal stage, the school-aged child understands religious ideas in a literal and logical way. In the third stage, the synthetic-conventional stage, the teenager pulls together an all-encompassing belief system that incorporates religious beliefs from various social circles. In the fourth stage, the individuative-reflective stage, the adult begins to critically examine their religious beliefs and may become disillusioned with previously held religious notions. In the fifth stage, the conjunctive faith stage, the individual begins to accept the religious paradoxes in life. In the sixth and final stage, the universalizing faith stage, the individual lives life in the full service of others (Fowler, 1981).

Parks' (2000) work builds upon Fowler's stage theory of faith development by adding a fourth stage, the Young Adult stage, occurring during the college years. Parks felt the need to add this stage given developmental and economic changes emerging over the last few decades since Fowler's theory was first introduced. In Parks' Young Adult faith stage, the individual will examine the complexities of the world in an attempt to find meaning and purpose; the individual will also test his or her emerging sense of independence; and the individual will experience a mentoring community, a network of belonging and support (Parks, 2000).

While Fowler's stage theory of faith development and other stage theories of spiritual development have held sway for some time in decades past, there has been much recent criticism regarding its themes and applications. Critics argue that individuals do not progress through spiritual developmental stages in such a structured and logical manner as stage theories suggest. Additionally, stages theories are not universally applicable to different religions (Streib, 2001; Cartwright, 2001).

Charles Y. Glock (1962) developed a multi-dimensional non-stage theory of religious commitment in terms of five dimensions in which an individual adheres to core religious values, beliefs, and practices to various degrees in everyday life (Worthington, 1988). The dimensions operate as independent variables in that individuals may exhibit stronger religious commitment in some dimensions than in others (Stark & Glock, 1968). These five dimensions are: belief, or ideological, in which a person holds certain religious beliefs; practice, or ritualistic, in which a person follows religious practice; experiential, in which a person feels a connection to the Divine; knowledge, or intellectual, in which a person possesses knowledge about the religion; and finally, consequential, involving the religious beliefs borne out of the first four dimensions (Glock & Stark, 1965). Core religious values, beliefs, and practices in these five dimensions may include monotheism, prayer, fasting, and knowledge regarding religious holidays. Ultimately, according to this theory, religious commitment is measured by how much an individual integrates religious ideals into everyday life (Mockabee, Monson, & Grant, 2001).

Worthington (1988) expanded Glock's definition of religious commitment by adding more specific characteristics of religious commitment within the five domains such as: frequency of church or synagogue attendance; participation in church or synagogue activities; agreement with and support of theological components of faith; frequency of referencing religious texts; study of religious texts outside of church; the extent to which religious faith is incorporated into daily life; and status of membership in religious institutions (Worthington, 1988; Worthington, Wade, Hight, Ripley, McCullough, Berry, Schmitt, Berry, Bursley, & O'Connor, 2003).

Allport and Ross (1967) developed a theory of religiosity based on two dimensions. The first dimension is the extrinsic dimension in which the extrinsically motivated individuals possess a self-serving, utilitarian outlook. In exchange for practicing their religion, these individuals obtain comfort with salvation, sociability, safety, and status. They often selectively adapt certain religious beliefs in order to fit with their personal needs and desires (Holdcroft, 2006).

The second dimension of Allport and Ross's theory of religiosity is the intrinsic dimension in which individuals internalize all of the values of their religion. All personal needs and desires are altered in order to fit into the religious beliefs and practices. To put it simply, the difference between extrinsic religiosity and intrinsic religiosity is the difference between "using" religion and "living" religion (Holdcroft, 2006).

Grading Systems and Their Effects on Motivation and Spirituality

This section will discuss various grading systems and their effects on student motivation. Performance-based grading, standards-based grading, and competency education will be reviewed along with grading practices at Montessori schools, free schools, and modern Orthodox Jewish day schools.

The Traditional Performance Based Grading System. Grading in schools is a contentious issue because it is considered a sacred practice that not only shapes a school's philosophy but has the potential to undermine it (Olson, 1995). The measures by which students are assessed and how that information is communicated to students and parents comprise the nature of differing grading systems in America.

The traditional performance-based grading system has its roots in the use of a four-point scale developed by Yale University in the late 1700's (Marzano, 2000). By ranking students into four categories, universities and eventually high schools were able to easily and efficiently communicate student achievement.

In the early 1900's, the method of grading on a curve, or norm distribution, was introduced into the grading system due to powerful research regarding the lack of consistency in percentage grades among students with different teachers (Guskey & Bailey, 2001). Because the bell curve was shown to be relevant in determining student intelligence test scores, educators thought that it could be reasonably applied to student achievement as well (Guskey & Bailey, 2001). Grading on a curve allows teachers to assess and grade students according to a specific distribution of grades based on the

notion that student aptitude was both fixed and also varied from student to student (Vatterott, 2015). Grading on a curve ensures that all students are assessed in relation to their peers by minimizing or eliminating teacher variance in different subjects. It therefore offers a more balanced distribution of academic scores, allowing students to be more easily and fairly sorted and ranked.

In a traditional performance-based grading system, letter grades are assigned to students using a 100 point percentage scale based on an average of various criteria such as quizzes, tests, projects, compositions, ability to hand in homework on time, overall effort, participation in class, and specific work habits (O'Connor, 2002). As Stiggins writes, the purpose of letter grades is "to abstract a great deal of information into a single symbol for ease of communication" (Stiggins, 2005).

The academic criteria of the traditional grade consist of summative assessments that are utilized to evaluate students' work or their understanding of key concepts either for a single test or for an entire course. Summative assessments are formal, high-stakes measures of student learning and academic achievement at the conclusion of an instructional period. Formative assessments, on the other hand, are designed for the purpose of improvement throughout the instructional period, and they will be discussed in further detail in the next section on standards-based grading practices.

The typical grades awarded to students are:

A= 90-100

B = 80-89

C = 70-79

D = 60-69

F = Below 60

The traditional performance-based grading system offers multiple benefits. First, traditional grades can be used to easily communicate student achievement to parents, thereby affording parents the opportunity to partner with their child's teacher in supporting their child achieve success (Marzano, 2010; Guskey, 2004; Marzano, 2000; Stiggins, 2005; Tomlinson, 2005). Especially because most parents today also received letter grades when they were students, the traditional grading system can communicate information to parents that is easier to understand than other grading systems (Urich, 2012). Second, traditional grading practices can also quickly and easily provide feedback to students regarding their progress in learning (Marzano, 2000; Guskey, 2004). In this way, teachers are better able to give feedback to students more often. Third, traditional grades can assist administrators in determining the academic placement of students in advanced programs (Guskey, 2004) or for admission to college (Marzano, 2010). Fourth, the use of traditional grades can help administrators subdivide students into homogenous ability groupings for the purpose of tracking students, a common practice in high school because it supports differentiated instruction (Marzano, 2010). Fifth, traditional grading practices can motivate students through the use of incentives (Guskey, 2004; O'Connor 2002). Airasian posits that students receiving a low grade will be encouraged to put in more effort, and students receiving a high grade will be encouraged to continue or renew

their efforts (Airasian, 1994). Sixth, traditional grading practices can assist in evaluating the effectiveness of teacher instruction by providing educators with data as to whether certain educational programs or pedagogical techniques are in fact beneficial to the students (Marzano, 2000). Seventh, traditional grading practices can be used to document the evidence of student behaviors in class such as lack of effort or organization, thereby assembling a broader picture of student growth (Tomlinson, 2005).

Finally, using traditional grades in large classrooms can make it easier for teachers to monitor the progress of many students at once (Guskey, 2002; Guskey & Bailey, 2001). Using electronic gradebook software technology allows teachers to convert vast amounts of numerical data into grades with minimal effort. This enables teachers to spend more time on other educational matters such as lesson planning or instruction while still ensuring a fair grade since it was devised mathematically. This was especially relevant in the early 1900's when state governments legislated compulsory education for all children, thereby significantly increasing class population size for each teacher. For these reasons, advocates of the traditional performance-based grading system posit that such grading policies support best educational practices.

Opponents argue that the traditional performance-based grading system can discourage students from developing an intrinsic motivation to learn (Kohn, 1999; Pink, 2009; Reeves, 2006; Thorsen, 2014; Pulfrey, Darnon, & Butera, 2013; Shim & Ryan, 2005; Anderman, Cupp & Lane, 2010; Krijgsman, Vansteenkistec, Tartwijka, Maes, Borghouts, Cardon, Mainhard, & Haerens, 2012). One study investigating the effects of grades on learning found that students who are promised a reward or good grades for

solving multiple math problems lose interest more quickly in their learning (Benabou & Tirole, 2003). The students may conclude that, if their teachers needed to use grades as incentives, the learning is not so important (Pink, 2009). In addition, focusing on traditional grades may compel students to register for easier courses in order to maintain a higher GPA, thereby mitigating the intrinsic motivation they may feel towards a more difficult course (Schiffman, 2016).

Haselhun, Al-Mabuk, Gabriele, Groen, and Galloway (2007) explored teacher perceptions on the impact of traditional grading practices on student motivation. The 69 elementary and 28 middle school teachers surveyed reported a decline in student motivation as students transition from a more mastery-oriented grading system in elementary school to a more performance-oriented grading system in middle school. Of interest is the fact that the survey results did not indicate a difference in the elementary and middle school teachers' beliefs and knowledge about the two types of grading systems. In addition, both elementary and middle school teachers reported instructional practices that echoed mastery learning despite the fact that mastery-oriented strategies were less evident in middle school classrooms (Haselhun et al., 2007).

Traditional grades can also negatively impact students' interest and engagement in the learning process because students learn to perceive a negative grade as a judgment on themselves (Ames, 1992). Low grades can therefore negatively impact a student's self-confidence, dissuading them from future learning attempts (Guskey & Bailey, 2010). Worse, considering that over 80% of students determine their self-worth based on external sources such as academic performance, the lower self-esteem caused by

performance-based grades can lead to eating disorders, drug and alcohol abuse, and even school dropout (Brookhart, 2004).

Performance-based grading can damage the student-teacher relationship as well. Students who receive a low grade in a subject may feel that the teacher thinks poorly of them (Ames, 1992). Students in danger of failing a course may also misbehave more frequently because they do not see the value in listening to the teacher anymore (Reeves, 2008; Kohn, 1999). In addition, students who receive low grades may learn to view their teachers' feedback as meaningless or irrelevant in order to protect their self-image (Guskey, 2011).

Performance-based grading systems can negatively impact students' relationships with their peers by encouraging students to compete with each other. Especially when the use of a bell curve plays a role in the grading system, achieving success means outperforming one's classmates (Guskey, 2011). Students are thus discouraged from helping each other in learning because it could damage their chances of achieving academic success. Consequently, students learn merely for the purposes of defeating their classmates rather than for the sake of learning itself (Guskey, 2014; Kohn, 1999).

Performance-based grading systems may not effectively and clearly communicate information to parents. A study by Waltman and Frisbie (1994) examined parents' understanding of traditional report cards in sixteen fourth grade math classes. Results showed that parents and teachers interpreted the traditional report cards differently regarding whether the grading was criterion-referenced or norm-referenced and whether the grade reflected achievement alone or included behavior and effort (Waltman &

Frisbie, 1994). Cross and Frary (1999) also explored the lack of clarity in traditional grading practices in a study surveying 307 middle and high school teachers and 8,664 middle and high school students in the same single-school system. Both teachers and students reported the use of hodgepodge grading practices that do not clearly delineate attitude, effort, and achievement on the traditional report card (Cross & Frary, 1999).

Standards-Based Grading System. Standards-Based Grading is defined as assessing students' ability to meet specific learning goals and expectations outlined in the curriculum (Guskey, 2004; Marzano, 1998). Subject matter is broken down into specific and measurable target skills, and students are assessed on their progress and achievement of these learning goals throughout a term. In effect, standards-based grading replaces the omnibus grade with scores on specific measurement topics, and it also provides students with continuous opportunities to improve their scores throughout the semester and year (Marzano & Heflebower, 2011).

Standards-based grading practices rely more heavily on formative assessments whose purpose is to improve student learning throughout the instructional period. Formative assessments are usually low-stakes and therefore not graded, and they focus on whether students have acquired specific skills. Chastain (1990) explored the impact of ungraded, formative assessments on the overall quality of Spanish compositions written by fourteen Spanish language majors at the University of Virginia. Students wrote both a graded essay and an ungraded essay. While the graded essays yielded longer compositions with more complex sentences, there were no significant differences in the

quality of the essays (Chastain, 1990). These results support the notion that ungraded, formative assessments can serve as a viable form of feedback to students in order to improve learning.

Standards-based grading contains several key components that have been shown to improve student motivation in learning (Guskey, 2004; Marzano, 2003). First, the frequent use of formative assessments in standards-based learning encourages students to put in more effort (Hattie, 2009). The Armstrong School District in rural western Pennsylvania eschewed the use of summative assessments and performance-based grading, noting their negative effect on student motivation and learning. In implementing the alternative method of ongoing formative assessments outlined in Bloom's mastery learning approach, the school district found higher levels of student motivation, engagement, and achievement (Brookhart, Moss, and Long, 2008). Further research has shown that, as the focus on mastery in learning decreases in middle school and then high school, student motivation also decreases (Norton, 2014). In a qualitative study investigating the impact of emphasizing grades on student learning and motivation in an industrial technology classroom, results indicated that students engaged more in their learning when mastery was emphasized over performance (Norton, 2014). By stressing progress over product with the use of formative assessments, students are more motivated to keep trying and learning (Guskey, 2004; Marzano, 2003; Pink, 2009; Reeves, Jung, & O'Connor, 2017).

Conversely, the traditional grading practice of averaging together grades from the beginning, middle, and end of the learning semester can demotivate students. Students

may say that there is no point in working harder throughout the semester if the low grades they earned at the beginning of the semester will simply be averaged together at the end of the semester (Guskey & Bailey, 2010). However, when progress criteria is considered, students feel more hopeful about improving. In a short-term longitudinal study (Shim & Ryan, 2005) examining the relationship between achievement goals and changes in student challenge avoidance, self-efficacy, and intrinsic value in response to grades in college students, researchers found that performance-oriented students who received low grades demonstrated decreased intrinsic motivation and increased desire to avoid challenges. On the other hand, mastery-oriented students demonstrated increased motivation regardless of the grade (Shim & Ryan, 2005). In light of this research, it can be argued that the mastery-oriented feedback given to students in a standards-based grading system enhances their intrinsic motivation to learn as well as increases their overall self-efficacy.

In addition, the clear and direct feedback that is frequently provided to the students gives them an opportunity to take greater ownership over their learning (Hattie, 2009; Stackstein, 2016). With more descriptive feedback, students can develop a sense of competence and confidence as they feel more accountable for their own learning (Stiggins, 2005).

Finally, the value placed on each individual student's learning needs and goals in a standards-based grading system can also increase joyful learning (Tomlinson, 2000). When teachers stop encouraging competition amongst their students through the use of

the bell curve, students can stop worrying about how to outperform their classmates and start engaging in the learning process (Guskey, 2011).

Opponents of standards-based grading argue that parents and students have difficulty making sense of the wordier and more complex standards-based report cards. Standards-based reporting is also more time-consuming for teachers as teachers must give each student a score for each skill and standard per subject. Finally, although some universities like Brown University and Harvard University posit that a traditional report card is no longer necessary to gain admission to their universities (Guskey, 2014), most colleges and universities are only familiar with the traditional report card.

Judaic studies teachers may be wary of switching to a standards-based grading system for various reasons: they may be afraid of losing the extrinsic motivation that performance-based grades provide; they may believe that standards-based grading does not permit the students to develop resilience in the face of challenging coursework and disappointing grades; and without a traditional performance-based grading system, parents and administrators may assume that real learning is not taking place (Feld, 2018, Gas or Electric).

Competency Education and its Grading Practices. Competency education has gained traction in the last few years as a growing number of school districts across the country are adopting competency education practices, and some colleges and universities are beginning to offer competency-education degrees. Competency education refers to learning as a progression towards mastering explicit, measurable skills that can be

transferred to the workplace. In this flexible student-centered school model, students advance through skills at their own pace, and a student's competence in a particular skill, not age or grade level, determines when he or she advances to the next level. Teachers work collaboratively with parents, students, community members, and other teachers in order to develop individualized and differentiated learning plans based on the needs and interests of each of their students (Competency Education Series, 2013).

Assessments in competency education can be meaningful and positive experiences for students. Teachers collaborate to determine well-defined and measurable competency goals that are communicated clearly to students. Teachers also collaborate to develop varied methods of assessment that evaluate students' abilities to apply their learning to real world contexts and situations. The focus of assessments is on student learning and progress, and assessments are conducted frequently so that teachers can adapt students' learning plans as needed. Grading is transparent and fair to all students, and it offers useful, meaningful, and timely feedback about student abilities as well as areas of improvement for the future (Sturgis, 2014).

While it may seem at first blush that competency education is identical to standards-based education in that students in both systems aim to master specific skills, the two systems are different. In competency education, students advance to the next level or course immediately upon achieving competency in a particular skill; but in standards-based education, students typically must remain in a given class for a specific number of hours or days in order to earn credit. In competency education, students are given learning opportunities to develop real world skills both inside and outside of the

school; in standards-based education, this may or may not take place. Finally, in competency education, students are assessed in multiple formats and methods; in standards-based education, this may or may not occur.

Montessori and Its Grading Practices. The Montessori system, created by Maria Montessori in 1907, is based on a strong and balanced triad of child, teacher, and environment which properly supports each individual child's intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development through choice, active exploration, and independent learning. Maria Montessori writes that, "Our aim therefore is not merely to make the child understand… but to so touch his imagination as to enthuse him to his inmost core. We do not want complacent pupils, but eager ones," (Montessori, 1989, pg 11). Children in the Montessori classroom learn through self-directed engagement with materials either individually, in small groups, or during a work cycle in which they are guided by the teacher to select an activity. In a work cycle, the students choose what they will work on, with whom, and for how long. The teacher meanwhile stands off to the side, observing her students to determine if any students need help selecting an activity or working with others (Marshall, 2017).

Montessori schools do not utilize a traditional grading system, and students learn to become self-motivated without relying on grades for feedback (Murray, 2011). Students gauge their own academic, social, and emotional successes based on goals they established with their teachers at conferences. If a student fails to achieve a goal within a time frame predetermined by the student, then the student does not receive a bad grade.

Instead, the student is asked to reflect on what went wrong as well as determine how to move forward (Murray, 2011). As a result, there is no competition amongst students for better grades (Murray, 2011).

Several studies note that Montessori schooling positively impacts student motivation. Rathunde and Csikszetnmihalyi (2005) compared young adolescents in Montessori middle schools to their traditionally educated peers and found that the Montessori students were more intrinsically motivated. Furthermore, the Montessori students exhibited more positive affect, feeling energetic, and undivided interest while engaged in their academic learning. These results stem from the lack of traditional grades (Rathunde & Csikszetnmihalyi, 2005). Further studies comparing Montessori students with students from traditional schools using performance-based grading systems revealed that the Montessori students demonstrated higher levels of creativity and self-expression (Thompson, 2006).

However, in a study investigating the effects of Montessori secondary education in Dutch Montessori schools, Ruijs found that Montessori educated high school students did not demonstrate higher motivation compared to their traditionally-schooled peers. Possible factors in the lack of disparity include: uneven quality of instruction, the lack of effective teacher training in the Montessori high schools, and that the Montessori educational system may be more effective for younger children than for high school students (Ruisj, 2017).

Free Schools and Their Grading Practices. The Summerhill School of England, founded as a democratic, self-governing school by A.S. Neill, operates based on the notion that students are naturally self-motivated to learn. Therefore, at Summerhill, students are given the freedom to choose what to learn and whether and how to be assessed on their learning. Summerhill claims that students are not motivated by grades but that they are innately self-motivated to learn. In addition, Summerhill asserts that grades can have a negative effect on student learning as the genius students learn to become mediocre and their creativity is stifled (Tan, 2014). Further research is required to explore how Summerhill's grading practices affect student motivation and whether such grading practices are transferable to more traditional school models.

Jewish Day Schools and Their Grading Practices. A modern Orthodox yeshiva high school is a private school that provides dual curricular instruction in secular and Judaic studies during a nine-hour school day. Students at modern Orthodox high schools may describe their educational experiences as stressful and overwhelming as they work to cram material in between tests. The school day is highly structured and rigorous, offering students little to no free periods to study throughout the day. Furthermore, students have very little time to pursue outside interests after school due to the nature of the dual curriculum workload of at least ten subjects.

The time spent on the secular and Judaic curricula is distributed evenly between the two as it maintains a *Torah U'Maddah* approach of developing a broad worldview while still aligning to Orthodox Jewish ritual and practice (Lamm, 1990). The general

studies curriculum is valued as most parents of the school would like their children to attend the finest colleges and universities in order to obtain lucrative careers in the future (Feld, Gas or Electric, 2018). In this vein, modern Orthodox high schools offer numerous AP courses in a variety of secular subjects.

The Judaic studies curriculum is also valued, and Jewish text-based learning is the norm in an effort to promote literacy and fluency in a variety of Jewish religious texts (Urkin, Fram, Jotkowitz, & Naimer, 2017). Students are also taught modern Hebrew language as these high schools aim to develop fluency or proficiency in Hebrew in order to better understand Jewish texts. Despite the fact that modern Orthodox high schools espouse equal emphasis on both Judaic and general studies, this *Torah U'Maddah* approach often leads one to be prioritized over the other, with many claiming that it is the general studies that is promoted to the detriment of *Tora*h learning (Krakowski, 2008).

Of primary importance at modern Orthodox *yeshiva* high schools is to inculcate students with a love of Jewish textual learning (Brown, 2018; Feld, 2018; Bleich, 2000; Shepard, 1988). In fact, this desire to inspire students to love Judaism and Torah is precisely why many teachers enter the Jewish educational field, more than their public school counterparts (Salomon, 2010). At the same time, Judaic studies educators recognize that their subjects are competing with general studies' subjects for the time, attention, and engagement of their students. They also recognize that students and their students' parents may not value academic achievement in Judaic studies as much as in general studies (Krakowski, 2008; Feld, 2018, Gas or Electric). In an effort to increase student engagement and motivation in their classes, Judaic studies educators frequently

use traditional performance-based grades to incentivize the learning (Krakowski, 2008; Feld, 2018), leaving many educators to wonder how it is possible to motivate students in Judaic studies without using a traditional performance-based grading system (Brown, 2018; Feld, 2018). This creates the riddle of the Sphinx of Jewish education: on the one hand, grades in Judaic studies courses can encourage students to engage in Jewish textual learning (Ross, 2010); while on the other hand, grades in Judaic studies courses can prevent students from learning *Torah Lishmah.*

Many modern Orthodox high schools in the New York area endeavor to motivate students to earn good grades in Judaic studies courses by rewarding students with a prestigious spot on the honor roll, membership in the honor society, placement out of final exams, and exciting school trips. Several high schools also encourage students to participate in *Mishmar,* an after-school learning program, by exempting them from final exams in exchange for perfect attendance at *Mishmar* events.

Despite these incentives, Jewish day school students report the lowest religious vitality and religious passion compared to other religious school students (Pelcovitz, et al., nd). This may be reasonably linked to the traditional grading practices in Judaic studies courses, but there may be other factors as well. Students reported in the RUACH study that performance-based grading in Judaic studies has a negative impact on students' affinity for spirituality and religious connectedness as grades may mitigate opportunities for spiritual growth and inspiration due to feeling judged and criticized (Pelcovitz, et al, nd). Results from the updated Jewish Beliefs Actions and Living Evaluations, also known as JEWBALE 2.0, measure further indicated that there is a weak positive correlation

between grades in Judaic studies courses and spirituality, and there is no correlation between academic achievement and spirituality for students in accelerated Judaic studies courses (Weinstein, 2019).

In one qualitative study examining the spiritual development of modern Orthodox high school girls, participants remarked that, due to enormous academic pressure, students view Judaic studies courses as purely academic disciplines; the sole aim of students is to earn higher grades, thus foregoing a search for meaning and inspiration (Weiss, 2007). Results from a second qualitative study exploring the spiritual impact of males during their post-high school year in Israel indicated that students may experience greater religious growth post-high school due to the lack of academic pressure to earn good grades in high school (Jacobson, 2004). Jacobson further noted that participants reported that they learned Judaic studies in high school within the academic structure in order to earn good grades, but after they received a grade, they forgot the material and ignored its relevance to their lives (Jacobson, 2004).

Furthermore, because some teachers may fear that students will view low grades as punitive and contribute to a negative affect towards Judaic studies and spirituality, some teachers may inflate grades in order to give their students a feeling of success and accomplishment in Judaic studies as a means of promoting positivity between the student and the subject matter. In one study examining grades in college courses, it was found that college professors are more likely to give an A in order to please their students (Rojstaczer S. & Healy C., 2012). This practice would result in students' having a false sense of their accomplishments and may even cause resentment at a later point when they

realize that they lack certain knowledge and skills that their peers possess. It also undermines the purpose of grading as a mechanism for feedback.

Traditional performance-based grades in Judaic studies also do not account for interest, passion, ethics, and commitment to Jewish learning and practice in determining the grade. Bleich further cites the problem of assigning grades to *Torah* study as it minimizes the potential of learning for its own sake, or T*orah Lishmah*, a Jewish directive (Bleich, 2000). While several Rabbinic opinions hold that it is beneficial to give prizes to young children in order to motivate them to learn, the *Rambam*, Rabbi Shlomo Aviner, and Rabbi Yaakov Kanievsky all agree that praise should replace prizes as children get older so that they can grow to study *Torah Lishmah* (Bleich, 2000).

Prior research exists regarding the impact of traditional grading practices on student motivation in general studies, but few studies have explored the impact of traditional grading practices on spirituality and on student motivation in Judaic studies. This qualitative research design exploring the positive or negative externalities of grading practices on motivation and spirituality builds upon the existing knowledge base by guiding the field of Jewish education towards best grading practices in Judaic studies courses that will foster student motivation and religious affinity and connection to Judaism and Jewish learning.

CHAPTER FOUR: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section will explain the theoretical framework that was used to explore the impact of traditional performance-based grading practices on student motivation and spirituality. The theoretical orientation will be identified, and the rationale for using it in the study will be explained. The theoretical framework will also help clarify the problem as well as organize and analyze the data efficiently.

This qualitative research study positioned the researcher as learner in the world of the participants (Maxwell, 2005). Qualitative research examines the participants' unique experiences in order to find the crux of those experiences (Moustakas, 1994) without adding any layers of meaning from the researcher's perspective (Creswell, 2012).

This study utilized phenomenological theory which explores the meaning of the individual's lived experiences (Hatch, 2002). Phenomenological theory developed from the work of philosopher Edmund Husserl in the early 20th century who asserted that the study of any human experience must begin with the experience itself. A phenomenological theoretical framework enables the researcher to study how people experience a phenomenon rather than studying the phenomenon itself. In this case, the research is most focused on the perceptions of the high school students themselves as they personally experience the positive or negative externalities of traditional grading practices on student motivation and spirituality.

Because this study contains two foci, I used two theories to guide the framework of this study because both theories discuss how individuals make sense of the world and their interactions within it. The first theory, Dweck and Leggett's social-cognitive theory of motivation (1988), framed the first focus of the study on student motivation. The second theory, Glock's theory of religious commitment (1962), framed the second focus of the study on spirituality and religious connectedness. I applied both theoretical models to understand whether traditional performance-based grading practices in Judaic studies help or hinder motivation and spirituality for high school students.

Social-Cognitive Theory as the Framework for Motivation

Dweck and Leggett's social-cognitive theory on motivation (1988) is centered around goals and goal-oriented behavior by identifying differences in thoughts and beliefs that may impact behavior. At the heart of their approach is the recognition of two distinct patterns in cognition, affect, and behavior (see Fig. 1). The helpless, or maladaptive pattern, is one in which the individual views difficulties as failures that indicate low ability and are impossible to overcome. The individual thus views any further effort to be pointless and as additional proof of inadequate ability (Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

Dweck and Leggett (1988) posit that the mastery-oriented, or adaptive, pattern on the other hand, is one in which the individual seeks out challenges and uses effective strategies in overcoming those challenges. This enjoyment of challenges and willingness to persevere through challenges is what characterizes the ability to adapt in difficult

circumstances towards valuable goals. Interestingly, the helpless pattern and the mastery-oriented pattern do not discriminate based on ability. Some of the brightest individuals exhibit the helpless pattern, and individuals of equal ability demonstrate markedly different levels of motivation in learning (Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

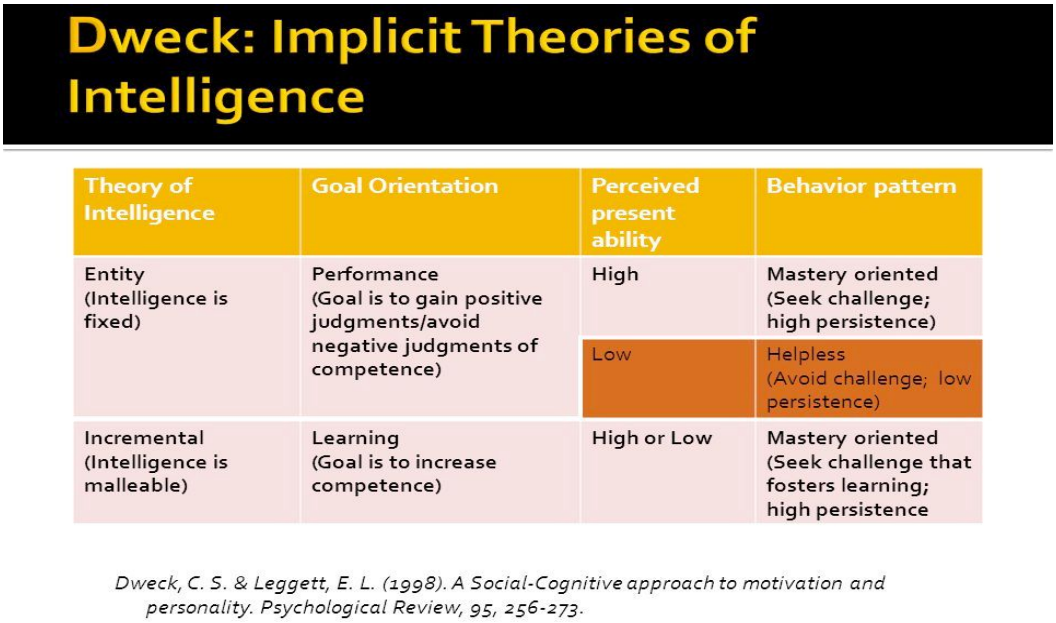

Fig. 1. Theory of Religious Commitment as the Framework for Spirituality

In a series of studies conducted by Diener and Dweck (1978, 1980), school-age children who had been previously identified as demonstrating either helpless or mastery pattern were asked to complete several tasks ranging in difficulty for children their age. When the participants became unable to complete the most difficult tasks, their responses were noted, and several distinct themes emerged. First, the helpless-oriented participants quickly began to attribute their inability to complete the difficult task to personal

inadequacy such as low intelligence, poor memory, or weak problem-solving skills. They also neglected to report on the consistent success they experienced on earlier tasks. Second, the helpless-oriented participants began to demonstrate negative affect by complaining about the task, expressing anxiety over their performance, and appearing disinterested in continuing. Third, the majority of the helpless-oriented participants verbally attempted to bolster their image by bragging about their skills and abilities in other areas. Finally, the helpless-oriented participants used less effective strategies as the tasks became more challenging (Diener & Dweck, 1980; Diener & Dweck, 1978).

Dweck and Leggett (1988) cited from Diener and Dweck's studies (1978, 1980) that the mastery-oriented participants, on the other hand, became more self-motivated as they progressed through the tasks. When confronted with difficult problems, the mastery-oriented participants viewed the problems as challenges they could overcome. They engaged in self-instruction and self-monitoring in order to exert greater effort and concentrate better. In addition, the mastery-oriented participants remained optimistic throughout the process, believing that they were capable of successfully completing the tasks with the proper amount of effort and strategy. Some mastery-oriented participants even showed more positive affect as each task increased in difficulty. Finally, the mastery-oriented participants developed more sophisticated problem-solving strategies as they worked through each challenge (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). These patterns were similarly repeated by children participants in a natural classroom setting (Licht & Dweck, 1984) as well by adult participants (Brunson & Matthews, 1981).

In light of this research on two distinct cognitive, affective, and behavioral patterns emerging from one identical situation, Dweck and Leggett (1988) posit that helpless children may pursue performance goals that serve as a testament of their ability and competence. On the other hand, mastery-oriented children may pursue learning goals of developing a new skill or extending their mastery (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). This hypothesis has been confirmed in multiple studies over the years (Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

Dweck and Leggett (1988) examine how goal setting creates specific patterns in cognition, affect, and behavior. In the cognitive domain, when performance goal-focused individuals face failure, they view it as a confirmation of their inability. Similarly, they view effort and ability as inversely related; high effort indicates low ability, and low effort indicates high ability (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). However, learning goal-focused individuals wonder how they can increase their ability. To them, failure is viewed as an opportunity for growth (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Likewise, learning goal-focused individuals believe that effort begets mastery; high effort leads to mastery, and low effort does not lead to mastery (Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

Goal-setting affects individuals in the affective domain as well. For performance goal-focused individuals, experiencing failure may cause anxiety, depression, shame, or defiance. However, for learning goal-focused individuals, failure may ultimately produce intrinsic rewards or pleasure because they embrace the challenge as one that stimulates meaningful effort (Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

Finally, Dweck and Leggett (1988) report on the behavioral reactions of different goal-oriented patterns. Performance-oriented individuals tend to seek out easier tasks which guarantee success, while learning goal-oriented individuals search for and embrace challenging learning experiences because it would not invoke any cognitive or affective distress (Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

Much research has shown that a consistent predictor of children's goal orientation is their mindset regarding intelligence (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). If they subscribe to an entity theory of intelligence, namely that intelligence is fixed and uncontrollable, then they are more likely to adopt a performance-goal outlook. These individuals endorsing an entity theory of intelligence will also respond to an academic challenge by first measuring their ability and subsequently giving up if their ability appears inadequate, thus demonstrating a lack of motivation (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007).

However, if individuals believe that intelligence is malleable and controllable, then they are more likely to adopt a learning-goal outlook (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). These individuals endorsing an incremental theory of intelligence will respond to an academic challenge by exerting greater effort or trying new strategies, thus demonstrating increased motivation (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007).

It should be noted that Li and Bates (2017) attempted to replicate Dweck's work regarding the effects of growth mindset on academic achievement, but they were not successful. Specifically, Li and Bates found that praising intelligence had no effect on academic achievement, and they also found that fixed mindset did not negatively impact cognitive performance (Li & Bates, 2017). While there are a number of suggested

limitations to their study done by Li and Bates, further efforts to replicate Dweck's research may be necessary.

Religious Commitment Theory as the Framework for Spirituality

Charles Y. Glock (1962) developed a multi-dimensional understanding of religious commitment in terms of the degree to which an individual adheres to core religious values, beliefs, and practices in everyday life (Worthington, 1988). His theory is comprehensive in terms of being able to measure religious commitment as well as how to relate personal religious commitment to different behaviors. His theory is applicable to any and all formal religions even though the religious expressions of individuals practicing different religions widely vary. In applying Glock's theoretical framework to this research design, I am assuming that religious commitment is present in individuals in varying degrees for any particular religion. I am also defining spirituality in traditional terms, as a subset of religion (Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001), and using spirituality and religiosity interchangeably as is widely practiced in the literature (Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001).

The first dimension of the theory of religious commitment is the belief, or ideological, dimension, which involves an expectation that religious individuals will hold certain beliefs. While the content of those beliefs may differ greatly among different religions, all religions expect adherence to particular beliefs (Glock, 1962). Examples may include beliefs in monotheism, prophecy, and the afterlife.

The second dimension of religious commitment theory is the practice, or ritualistic, dimension which asserts that specific religious practices are expected of its followers. Examples of such religious practices include worship, prayer, fasting, and dietary restrictions.

The third dimension is the experiential dimension in which religiously committed individuals will experience a feeling or a sense of communication with G-d or a Divine being. This communication may result in feelings of peace or feelings of terror. This subjective religious experience is a sign of the individual's religiosity (Glock & Stark, 1965).

The fourth dimension is the knowledge, or intellectual, dimension. The religiously committed individual is informed about and knowledgeable of basic tenets of the religion. While the belief dimension and the knowledge dimension may be connected logically, they are not necessarily positively correlated: an atheist may have a lot of knowledge but no belief; and another individual may hold deep religious beliefs but remain ignorant of basic knowledge underlying those beliefs (Glock & Stark, 1965).

Finally, the fifth dimension, the consequential dimension, is borne out of the four prior dimensions and their effects on the religiously committed individual. Because it is dependent upon the prior four dimensions, this dimension is more difficult to operationalize, and I am therefore not going to use it in my analysis.

Worthington (1988) expanded Glock's definition of religious commitment by adding further characteristics of religious commitment within the five domains: frequency of church or synagogue attendance; participation in church or synagogue

activities; agreement with and support of theological components of faith; frequency of referencing religious texts; study of religious texts outside of church; and the extent to which religious faith is incorporated into daily life (Worthington, 1988; Worthington, Wade, Hight, Ripley, McCullough, Berry, Schmitt, Berry, Bursley, O'Connor, 2003).

Utilizing both Dweck and Leggett's social-cognitive theory on motivation and Glock's religious commitment theory enabled me to identify, define, and organize relevant concepts and themes in the research. This framework assisted me in explaining positive or negative externalities of grading practices on student motivation and spirituality.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE RESEARCH QUESTION

This section discusses the key research questions that guided this inquiry.

RQ1: How do traditional performance-based grading practices impact student motivation in the Judaic studies classroom? Given the research regarding such grading practices on students' intrinsic motivation in general studies courses, the researcher sought to know if a similar impact on intrinsic motivation exists in Judaic studies courses as well as how these motivations may be classified.

RQ2: How do traditional grading practices impact student motivation to engage in Jewish learning outside of the mandatory curriculum? The researcher endeavored to understand how students feel about learning Jewish texts outside of school in their daily lives.

RQ3: How do traditional grading practices in Judaic studies foster engagement in advanced Judaic studies courses at school? The researcher sought to understand what are the primary reasons why students may or may not enroll in advanced Judaic studies courses.

RQ4: How do traditional grading practices in Judaic studies impact students' affinity towards spirituality and religious connectedness? The researcher endeavored to know what promotes spirituality and religious connectedness in high school students.

CHAPTER SIX: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The goal of this qualitative study was to explore students' perceptions through personal interviews with students of the impact of the traditional performance-based grading system on student motivation in Judaic studies and spirituality. The first component of the research examined the link between traditional performance-based grading practices in Judaic studies and student motivation to engage in Jewish texts and learning. The second component examined the link between traditional performance-based grading practices in Judaic studies and student affinity for spirituality and religious connectedness.

To explore students' perceptions of the impact of traditional grading practices on both motivation and spirituality, qualitative research was conducted as it examines the personal meanings of students' experiences (Creswell, 2007) and provides a richer and more descriptive data set which will in turn provide more in-depth results. There are several qualitative study methods available, such as ethnography, case study, grounded theory, and phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). This study applied a nondirective phenomenological approach of interviewing students because it leads to a richer and deeper understanding of student motivation through individual perceptions (Moustakas, 1994), as Bandura posits that people are more motivated by what they believe rather than by what is objectively the case (Bandura, 1995). A non-experimental strategy was

implemented as the researcher is not intervening or testing a hypothesis in this research design. Rather, the researcher is allowing the data to speak for itself and enable new concepts to emerge (Merriam, 2002). Prior to data collection, the researcher bracketed, or set aside, her feelings, personal biases, and preconceived notions about the phenomena being studied in order to best understand the perceptions and feelings of those living the phenomena (Hatch, 2002; Moustakas, 1994). In this way, the participants' interpretations and meanings maintain primary importance in the research study.

Qualitative research was conducted to address the following research questions:

RQ1: How do traditional performance-based grading practices impact student motivation in the Judaic studies classroom?

RQ2: How do traditional grading practices impact student motivation to engage in Jewish learning outside of the mandatory curriculum?

RQ3: How do traditional grading practices in Judaic studies foster engagement in advanced Judaic studies courses at school?

RQ4: How do traditional grading practices in Judaic studies impact students' affinity towards spirituality and religious connectedness?

Participants

High school students were selected to participate because it has been noted that student motivation is severely impacted in adolescence (Anderman & Maehr, 1994; Smart, 2014) due to several factors. First, elementary school students demonstrate higher academic competency levels and higher expectations for success than teenage students (Anderman & Maehr, 1994). Second, adolescents view their abilities as fixed based on previous learning experiences and outcomes in elementary school (Anderman and Maehr, 1994). Third, a high school student's social interests and pursuits compete more aggressively with academics (Riedel, 1995). Fourth, high school students begin to question the importance of academics as they recognize that they are now able to earn money independently (Rosenbaum, 1989). Finally, adolescents perceive less positive teacher-student interactions in high school than in elementary school (Smart, 2014).

In addition, high school students were selected to participate in this study due to the abundance of research attesting to the adolescent search for spirituality. Erikson, Piaget, and others describe the adolescent years as ones in which the individual embarks on a spiritual journey through which they develop their own identity and make sense of the world around them (Weaver & Wratchford, 2017). Their perceptions of and attitudes towards Judaic studies courses therefore become critical to examine.

Twenty students from three modern Orthodox *yeshiva* high schools, one co-ed school, one all-boys school, and one all-girls school, utilizing a traditional grading system participated in this study because this sample size allowed the researcher to extensively explore the lived experiences of the students and thereby better develop patterns and

relationships (Creswell, 2007). A sample size of twenty is generally considered satisfactory in a qualitative phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994). According to the needs of the study, participants were selected by the principal or from a personal relationship with the researcher in order to create a purposeful sampling that represents a diverse student population in terms of motivation and spirituality. This diversity of subjects enriched understanding of the issues, thereby increasing transferability.

Twelve female students and eight male students participated in this study. Five were freshmen, seven were sophomores, five were juniors, and three were seniors. They described their academic abilities within a broad range from weak to strong, and they described their levels of motivation to succeed academically within a broad range from highly motivated to not very motivated; students self-described weak ability/ low motivation, weak ability/ high motivation, strong ability/ low motivation, and strong ability/ high motivation. The students also came from diverse home environments: thirteen from modern Orthodox (M.O.) homes, two from traditional homes, and five from homes that lie between modern Orthodox and *yeshivish* as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Information

Name	*Grade*	*Gender*	*Type of School*	*Academic Ability*	*Motiva-tion*	*Home Obser-vance*
Akiva	12	Male	All-boys	High	High	M.O
Alex	11	Male	All-boys	Med	High	M.O
Avigayil	10	Female	All-girls	Med	Med	M.O.-*Yeshivish*
Beth	11	Female	Co-ed	Low	Low	M.O
David	11	Male	All-boys	Med	Low-Med	M.O
Devora	9	Female	All-girls	Med	High	M.O
Dina	10	Female	All-girls	Med	High	M.O
Eli	12	Male	Co-ed	High	High	M.O
Gabriella	10	Female	Co-ed	Low-Med	High	M.O
Joshua	12	Male	Co-ed	Low	Low	Trad-itional
Leah	10	Female	All-girls	Low	Low-Med	M.O.-*Yeshivish*
Rachel	9	Female	Co-ed	High	High	Trad-itional
Rebecca	10	Female	All-girls	Med	Med-High	M.O.
Sam	9	Male	All-boys	Low	Low-Med	M.O.-*Yeshivish*
Shira	10	Female	All-girls	Med	Med	M.O.-*Yeshivish*
Stephanie	11	Female	Co-ed	High	High	M.O.
Tamar	9	Female	All-girls	High	High	M.O.

Tehilla	9	Female	All-girls	High	High	M.O.-*Yeshivish*
Yaakov	10	Male	All-boys	Med	Med	M.O.
Yosef	11	Male	All-boys	Med	Med	M.O.

Approvals and Informed Consent

Prior to conducting the study, approval was obtained from the students' high school principals (see Appendix B). Students and parents of students under the age of 18 signed consent forms (see Appendices C and D). Before beginning each interview, the signed consent form was reviewed, and the researcher described how the participants' responses will be kept confidential in a password-protected file accessible only to the researcher for the purpose of data analysis. The researcher also reiterated that participation in the study was voluntary and that participants could decline to participate or withdraw at any time prior to, during, or after the interview. The researcher also shared that there were no risks or benefits associated with participating in the study.

To summarize, the researcher protected the rights of the participants in the following ways:

- Participants were notified in writing of the voluntary nature of their participation and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty from the administration, their teachers, or the researcher. They were also notified that they could decline to answer a question at any time.

- The research objectives were outlined in writing as well as verbally articulated to participants.
- Written consent was obtained from each participant.
- All data collection methods and activities were communicated in writing to the participants.
- Provisions were made to ensure confidentiality of the data.

Interviews

Van Kaam posited that a preconceived, experimental design imposed on participants in a research study may "distort rather than disclose" participants' perceptions (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, semi-structured interviews drawing upon constructs in the literature regarding student motivation and spirituality were conducted to gather specific qualitative data by balancing the flexibility of an open-ended interview with the focus of a structured survey. The semi-structured style also enabled participants to control the pacing of the interview and elaborate on their responses at any point in the interview.

One to one in-person interviews were conducted as they allowed the researcher to develop closer rapport with each participant as well as notice subtle signs from the participant that may indicate further explanation is required. Interviews were conducted at the participants' high schools in either the school library or a faculty member's office as it provided for a familiar, comfortable space for participants which allowed them to answer questions more openly and honestly. Interviews were conducted in a single

session and ranged in length from 25 to 75 minutes. Interviews were digitally recorded and then transferred to a computer for submission to an online transcription service. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant at the time of transcription, and all identifying information remained confidential.

The researcher also prepared a methodological summary of each interview immediately afterwards regarding the conduct, tone, progression, and protocol of the interview. This allowed the researcher to reflect on the experience in case any adjustments need to be made prior to the next interview.

Interview questions examined student perceptions about grading practices, motivation, and spirituality. The following anchor questions were examined in each interview with subquestions used as needed to explore further:

Background

- Background question: Tell me a little about yourself.
    - Subquestion: What interests, hobbies, etc. do you have?
    - Subquestion: What are your future career plans?
    - Subquestion: What subjects, classes do you like/ not like in school?
    - Subquestion: What do you like/ not like about these subjects, classes?
    - Subquestion: Describe how your school day went yesterday. How typical was this day for you?

Motivation

- Essential question: What sorts of things motivate you to learn in school?
    - Subquestion: How hard do you work in school, on a scale from 1 to 10?
    - Subquestion: Why do you study/ work hard in school?
    - Subquestion: In what classes are you the most motivated to do well? Why?
    - Subquestion: What advanced courses are you interested in taking?
    - Subquestion: Why are you interested in taking these courses?
- Structural question: What are some of the characteristics of a highly motivated student at your high school?
- Essential question: What are some of the characteristics of a successful student?
    - Subquestion: What enables them to be successful?
- Essential question: What does success as a student mean to you?
- Structural question: How would you describe how motivated you are in school?

Motivation in Judaic Studies

- Structural question: How do you decide what advanced Judaic studies courses to take?
    - Subquestion: If you get placed automatically into a particular track, imagine being given the choice - what track would you request, and why?
- Essential question: What motivates you to learn in Judaic studies?
- Essential question: What do you think are some reasons why some students might not do well in some Judaic studies?
- Essential question: What types of extracurricular learning opportunities do you have at school?

Spirituality

- Probing question: What do you think is the spiritual experience of high school students in the classroom?
- Essential question: How would you define spirituality?
- Essential question: How would you define religious commitment?
- Essential question: What do you think is the goal of Judaic studies classes? OR What do you think your teachers want you to get out of these classes?
- Probing question: Which Judaic studies classes do you find most inspiring?
    - Subquestion: What is it about these classes that makes them more spiritual to you?

- Background question: When or where do you feel inspired in or out of school?
- Essential question: What sorts of Jewish learning do you engage in outside of school?

Grading Practices

- Essential question: How important to you is getting good grades compared to other values like having friends, being happy, being healthy, etc?
- Background question: How do you feel about grades in general studies classes?
    - Subquestion: How do you feel when you get a good grade?
    - Subquestion: How do you feel when you get a bad grade?
    - Subquestion: How often do you think about grades throughout the day?
    - Subquestion: Have you ever observed a student cheating on a test?
- Essential question: How do you feel about grades in Judaic studies classes?
    - Subquestion: How do you feel when you get a good grade?
    - Subquestion: How do you feel when you get a bad grade?
- Essential question: How do you think your teachers calculate your end-of-semester grades? What do you think are the factors?
- Probing question: What happens when you get a bad grade?

CHAPTER SEVEN: RESULTS

Data Analysis

An inductive method of data analysis was utilized in which the researcher started with specific elements or pieces of evidence and then brought them together to form generalities from which a meaningful and whole picture can emerge (Hatch, 2002).

Hatch (2002) outlines the process of inductive data analysis. First, the transcribed interviews were read several times in order to identify frames of analysis in segments, items, or meaning units. Then, salient domains were determined and coded (see Table 2). Next, the data was reread, and themes across domains were explored. Then, a master outline identifying themes was developed. Finally, data excerpts were selected based on relevance and support (Hatch, 2002).

Table 2. Coding Template

	CATEGORY	**CODE**
Motivation	Intrinsic Motivation	Want to be challenged
		Find the subject relevant
	Extrinsic Motivation	Good grades
		College Admissions
		To please parents
		To please teachers
		Prestige
		To avoid taking a midterm or final exam
Factors Influencing Motivation		Quality of the teacher
		Easy to understand material
Social-Cognitive Theory	Mastery	Hard work->success
		Challenge -> try new strategy
	Performance	Natural skill-> success
		Challenge -> give up
Religious Commitment Theory		To know what *Hashem* wants
		To be challenged intellectually
		To feel closer to *Hashem*
		To be better able to practice Judaism
		To learn about one's

		heritage
		To align with the truth
		To see value in religiosity
		Teachers discussing *Hashem*
Extrinsic Motivation in Judaic studies		Good grades
		College admissions
Intrinsic Motivation in Judaic studies		Learning *Torah* for its own sake

Because the research study is also fulfilling a doctoral research requirement, the data analysis was also validated by the Principal Investigator. In these ways, the research established trustworthiness through ensuring credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was established when the researcher carefully analyzed the data to look for themes. Dependability was established when the audio interviews are transcribed by an outside transcription service. Confirmability was established by linking the data to sources. Transferability may be established with the diverse sample size of participants. The interviewer also shared two transcripts with a fellow graduate student who also independently coded the data. Then, the two met to discuss any potential discrepancies as well as the reasons for such discrepancies in the coding. This helped establish interrater reliability. In addition, the COnsolidated criteria for REporting

Qualitative Research (COREQ) checklist was completed in order to assure good qualitative research.

This research endeavored to discover the nature, level, and role of intrinsic motivation and religious commitment in engaging in Jewish texts in the high school students' academic experience. The survey data obtained from extensive interviews with participants revealed varied levels of academic motivation and religious commitment yet, at the same time, relatively similar views regarding the efficacy and effects of traditional performance-based grading practices on student learning and its impact on religious commitment and spirituality. There was no significant difference between boys and girls or between grade levels in any of the categories.

The results of the analysis are presented in seven groupings based on the categories of inquiry used in the interviews. These areas are: a) intrinsic motivation, b) extrinsic motivation, c) factors influencing motivation, d) social-cognitive theory, e) religious commitment, f) extrinsic motivation in Judaic studies, and g) intrinsic motivation in Judaic studies.

Intrinsic Motivation

The first category of questions sought to clarify the students' level of intrinsic motivation in school and to detail what motivates them in various academic subjects across both Judaic and general studies. Within the participants' responses, intrinsic motivation stretched across two domains: a desire to learn more because the learning is relevant; and a desire to learn more in order to challenge oneself (see Table 3).

Table 3. Responses regarding Intrinsic Motivation

Name	*Desire to be challenged*	*Find the subject relevant*
Akiva		
Alex		✓
Avigayil	✓	✓
Beth		✓
David		
Devora	✓	✓
Dina		✓
Eli		✓
Gabriella		
Joshua		
Leah		
Rachel		
Rebecca		
Sam		
Shira	✓	
Stephanie		
Tamar	✓	✓
Tehilla		✓
Yaakov	✓	✓
Yosef	✓	

Almost half of the students reported feeling intrinsically motivated in specific subjects they find to be relevant and thought-provoking. Several students shared that their favorite teachers often try to connect the learning to their lives in order to promote student interest. Devora shared,

> I like Science… I just think it's cool to learn about how everything works. You're just walking around all day, and you don't actually realize what's behind everything. Then you learn how everything is made and how everything is put together, and it's just cool to figure it out…. *Chumash* is an interesting story, I guess to call it, and just an important part of our history that we should know. It's cool to learn how they made mistakes. Then I try to learn from those mistakes and then try not to do them.

Almost one-third of the students expressed an intrinsic motivation towards learning a particular subject because they seek to challenge themselves. This desire to improve their proficiency in the subject area or to develop a deeper understanding of the subject matter is a strong intrinsic motivator. As social-cognitive theory posits, if the student is concerned with achieving mastery or learning a competency, e.g. a particular academic or intellectual skill, then he or she will be more motivated to face challenges, increase effort in the future, and persevere (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Yosef feels intrinsically motivated particularly in Judaic studies. He explained,

> It challenges you intellectually. In order to really learn the subject, you have to ask questions. You can't just be fed information and comprehend information and just use that for a test. It's not just going in one ear and out the other, but you really have to challenge yourself. You have to ask questions, and you have to think. I think that can really keep students, keep them focused, and keep them intrigued and make them want to learn.

Beth stated that a student's level of intrinsic motivation in a certain subject would also depend on whether the student intends to pursue a career in that subject matter. She explained,

> It depends on what you want to do, what you're interested in. Then you're much more prone to pay attention and try and do the best you can do and be very strict on yourself because, one, you want to know the information because you're interested, and two, you want to see if you can survive trying to do well on the test because if you are failing chemistry and you want to be a doctor, maybe you shouldn't be a doctor. You want to see how well you're going to do [in that profession].

Extrinsic Motivation: Good Grades

The second category of questions endeavored to delineate the students' level of extrinsic motivation in school, specifically regarding the nature of extrinsic motivators and how often the students think about such motivators (see Table 4). This category of

questions also sought to clarify the impact of family and teachers on extrinsic motivation in school.

Table 4. Responses regarding Extrinsic Motivation

Name	Good grades	College admissions	To please parents
Akiva			
Alex			✓
Avigayil	✓	✓	
Beth	✓	✓	
David	✓	✓	
Devora	✓		✓
Dina	✓		✓
Eli	✓	✓	
Gabriella	✓	✓	
Joshua	✓	✓	
Leah	✓		
Rachel	✓		
Rebecca	✓		✓
Sam	✓		
Shira	✓		
Stephanie	✓		✓
Tamar	✓	✓	
Tehilla	✓	✓	✓
Yaakov	✓	✓	
Yosef	✓	✓	

Survey data revealed that the students spend much of the day thinking and talking about traditional performance-based grades. Virtually all of the students articulated that they are extrinsically motivated to learn in order to achieve good grades. Almost all of the students defined success in high school as earning good grades.

Half of them admitted that they think about grades very often, both in school as well as outside school, and that it is a significant stressor as they are so focused on getting a good grade that they often find themselves unable to enjoy the learning process. Rachel explained that, when she studies for tests, she thinks mostly about how to get a good grade and not about learning the material.

> In Math, if I get a 97, I'll be mad. But if I got a 97 in Global, I'll be so happy. A good grade in Global is probably a 93. That would be a good grade in Global for me and a good grade in Chemistry. Chemistry is also really hard…. I got an 87 on the last test, but only five people passed. So I'd rather get a 94, but if I got an 87, I'm not so [mad] because everyone did bad.

Students who expressed that they often think about earning good grades presented in every domain of academic ability or motivation: they were among the low academic achieving and high academic achieving study participants; and they also ranged from not very motivated to very motivated in learning.

Students spoke at length regarding the challenges of traditional performance-based grading practices in their classes. Rebecca shared that the lack of clear feedback associated with performance-based grades often leaves her feeling frustrated.

> I think grades are important, but I think they can definitely find better ways to test us on the material. I do think you kind of need a basis to know how you're doing. I mean, it would be awesome to just have progress reports of just being like, 'Rebecca's doing well in this and this, and needs to work a little bit on this and this,' instead of being, 'It's an 80. It's a 90. It's a 75. It's 100.'

Roughly half of the students articulated that their teachers use grades to extrinsically motivate their students to focus and engage in the learning.

Devora shared,

> I don't really think about [grades] unless the teacher says something like, "You guys have to pay attention or else you're going to get a bad grade." And I'm like, I don't want a bad grade. So then I start paying attention a little bit more and then I start thinking about it.

Approximately three-quarters of the students also articulated their perceptions regarding the challenges of traditional performance-based grading practices on intrinsic motivation. They aptly describe the catch-22 of traditional grades: while grades motivate them to study, they also make the learning less enjoyable. Sam shared, "I would definitely like the class more if there weren't tests. I wouldn't feel like it was an obligation I had to do."

Avigayil said that she sometimes finds herself wanting to learn more about something, but when she remembers that it is not going to be on the test and therefore won't be graded on it, she stops thinking about it. Tehilla expressed difficulty imagining

a school program that fosters intrinsic motivation because performance-based grades are so prevalent in her school experience.

While Eli feels that tests serve a purpose in assessing what students have learned, he also feels that tests and other performance-based grading practices create an environment in the classroom in which students are asking questions solely in order to prepare for the test. He explains that, in such an environment, "The whole big picture just becomes, once I get that mark, then it's over and everything else sort of doesn't really matter anymore."

Yaakov agreed,

> Why does the school grade? We can see three reasons. One is to make kids not space out. And if you have a grade on it, you're like, 'Okay I'll have to pay attention.' I don't know, it's just a bad thing because let's say for the kids that actually want to learn, if you're told to do something that you already wanted to do, it just takes the fun out of it and it makes learning less enjoyable for people if it's about tests.

Of note is that almost half of the students prioritized earning good grades above challenging themselves academically. They shared that they would rather get higher grades in a lower tracked class than get lower grades in a more challenging class. Rachel described that, since she views herself as a 90's student, she would rather get a 93 in the regular track than an 85 in the honors track, even in those subjects she particularly enjoys learning. Stephanie explained,

> I just think that there is a pressure that comes with being in honors. I don't think I would be able to do it. I would be very hard on myself to do better and do this, which I guess is a good thing. But to an extent, I just think I don't want to be there and be like, "Oh, I got an 80." Like, no. I just don't think I would feel good about myself when everyone else is doing much better than me.

Avigayil shared that one of her classmates in the regular track is very capable of moving up to the advanced track in school, but her classmate said that she would rather be one of the top students in the regular track than one of the weaker students in the advanced track. Of note is that Avigayil disagreed with this sentiment. She explained that she feels that the pressure of being “the weakest link in honors” would motivate her to do better.

Extrinsic Motivation: College Admissions

Half of the students expressed an extrinsic motivation to get good grades for the purposes of college admissions. Tamar shared that, while she feels that the reward of studying lies in the effort expended and the independent learning skills that develop from it, she also thinks about the fact that earning good grades is important for college admissions.

Joshua explained that students often consider how to craft the most impressive high school transcript for college admissions.

> If you’re in 9th Grade and you’re not in Honors, and in 10th Grade, you get into Honors, then 11th and 12th Grade in Honors, it’ll show in your transcript that you

> were in Honors in high school. But if you did Honors in 11th Grade, it wouldn't show. Most kids are going to just give it up. If they're not in it by 10th Grade, 11th Grade, they just won't go into Honors…. There's really no point. If a college sees that he was consecutively, consistently in Honors for three, four years, then they know they were obviously motivated and they tried hard, but in 12th Grade, it just looks like a joke.

David shared that, when he was in 9th Grade, he didn't care too much about getting good grades. He explained,

> I'm probably going to go to a community college anyways, that they don't even require SATs or high school grades, all they require is … your diploma, no problem. You pay $900 for the admission fee and the test fee and then you get in. That's it. So my mentality was just to pass.

However, David continued that, now that he is in 11th Grade, he is starting to think more about the possibility of college, so he is working hard to bring up his grades in order to gain admission to a university. He is even toying with the idea of taking an Honors class or AP course to boost his chances of getting accepted to a prestigious university.

Tehilla shared that she is interested in taking AP courses because she knows they would improve her transcript for college. Sam added that he is interested in enrolling in AP English next year in order to get college credit. Yaakov shared that, while he enjoys liberal arts courses and believes they are important to becoming a well-rounded

individual, he does not like the liberal arts subjects because they bring down his overall GPA which may damage his chances of being accepted to a prestigious college.

Sam shared, "College is the thing that is the most important for me because that's specifically when I think about my grades, it's all about college, college, college. If there's no college, then why do I care if I fail?"

Extrinsic Motivation: To Please Others

One-third of the students expressed an extrinsic motivation to learn in school in order to please their parents and older siblings. One-tenth of the students felt that their parents encouraged them to work harder for more important, or more valued, subjects like Math or *Chumash*. Other students stated that they are motivated to learn so they can engage in discussions with their parents and older siblings at the dinner table. One-quarter of the students, all attending the same school, shared that they are extrinsically motivated to learn in specific classes because they want to please the teacher. Only one student said that she is extrinsically motivated to learn in school for the prestige that comes along with knowing more.

Factors Influencing Motivation: Quality of the Teacher

The third category of questions explored various factors influencing motivation. Students were asked questions regarding the role of teachers in influencing motivation as well as natural interest in various subjects across both Judaic and general studies (see Table 5).

Table 5. Factors Influencing Motivation

Name	*Quality of the teacher*	*Easy to understand material*
Akiva		
Alex	✓	✓
Avigayil	✓	
Beth	✓	
David	✓	
Devora	✓	
Dina	✓	
Eli	✓	
Gabriella	✓	✓
Joshua	✓	
Leah	✓	
Rachel	✓	✓
Rebecca	✓	✓
Sam		
Shira	✓	
Stephanie	✓	✓
Tamar	✓	
Tehilla		
Yaakov		
Yosef	✓	

More than three-quarters of the students expressed that the professional competence and likeability of a teacher greatly influence their intrinsic motivation. Joshua shared that he is more motivated in classes in which the teacher tries to establish a positive connection with students. Yosef expressed that teachers who make time to answer questions support a more intrinsically motivated classroom learning environment. When teachers allow students to ask questions, Yosef explained that it enables the students to be more engaged and more motivated to learn the material.

Of note is that virtually three-quarters of the students expressed that the quality, competence, or likeability of their Judaic studies teachers impacts their intrinsic motivation much more than the quality, competence, or likeability of their general studies teachers. This may be because the content of Judaic studies is usually more difficult for the students to access than that of general studies given the fact that it is taught in a second language, thereby requiring more direct involvement from the Judaic studies teachers. Relevance and purposefulness may also be necessary for increased student engagement, and some students may not intuitively find Jewish texts relevant at first blush.

Beth shared that she loves English and writing because she enjoys these subjects, and that she also likes *Tanach*, depending on who the teacher is. However, if her Judaic studies teacher is boring or too opinionated, then she is not intrinsically motivated to learn. Avigayil articulated that she particularly enjoys her *Chumash* and *Navi* classes because the teacher's style is interactive and thought-provoking. At the same time

however, she does not enjoy her *Halacha* class because she does not feel that the teacher has good classroom management.

Eli shared that, specifically in Judaic studies,

> A teacher could make or break the subject for me… [whether] they build a relationship with the class or if they're just like a stone wall spitting out information…. If it's more hands-on work, if the teacher's respected. If everyone's engaged in what's happening in the classroom versus not what's happening in the classroom, that can help or hurt the class.

Eli explained that he particularly enjoyed a double period of *Gemara* with one of his favorite teachers because the class dynamic was so positive,

> Everyone walked in and was excited to see the Rabbi, was excited to speak to the Rabbi and by the time we got to the learning, everyone understood, alright, now it's time to learn…. It was a sort of comfortable, safe, enjoyable environment that allowed the learning to sort of progress.

Devora agreed that the quality of the teacher mattered more in Judaic studies than in general studies. She explained, "I like general studies better just because I find [the subjects] more interesting, but some teachers in Judaic studies I like. They make the classes interesting."

Regarding Judaic studies classes, Tamar said that she likes Judaic studies classes, but she also stated,

> It makes it better when you have a good teacher. One that's friendly, and not so strict all the time. You can talk sometimes. I guess they want to take a lot of questions, and they'll answer the questions a lot.

Sam shared that one of his favorite Judaic studies teachers was energetic, fun, and funny, and he always tried to make class relevant and enjoyable for the students. This teacher also gave easy quizzes and no tests, and Sam explained that, "To get a teacher who I really like, and he opts to give us a hard test, I might not like it as much because now I'm, oh, now I have to study for it…" At the same time, it must be noted that Sam prefers easier tests over quality teacher personality or teaching style.

Tehilla also stated that she is more motivated in Judaic studies classes when the teacher varies the class activities each day and allows for student interaction and interactivity. Shira, Stephanie, and Leah agreed that active and interactive learning structures help them feel more motivated in Judaic studies classes. Stephanie added that the interactive learning structures are helpful because they enable the students to see the fruits of their labor in learning instead of "just sitting and learning" from the teacher's lecture.

Rebecca stated that she is more motivated in her *Chumash* and *Navi* classes.

> My *Navi* teacher is so organized, and I feel like I'm really making connections and she really guides you in the right way and just puts the class in together so beautifully…. My *Chumash* teacher is also very good at encouraging you to try to guess the answer and understand what the *meforshim* are saying. She has a very

welcoming environment, my *Chumash* teacher, she's very honest and nice, and you feel calm. It's not so much pressure in her class.

Social-Cognitive Theory

The fourth category of questions focused on the students' experiences in social-cognitive theory, specifically whether the participants possess a mastery mindset or a performance mindset and how either mindset impacts their responses to traditional performance-based grades in both Judaic studies and general studies courses (see Table 6).

Table 6. Responses regarding Social-Cognitive Theory

Name	*Mastery Mindset*	*Performance Mindset*
Akiva	✓	
Alex	✓	
Avigayil	✓	✓
Beth	✓	✓
David	✓	✓
Devora	✓	✓
Dina		✓
Eli	✓	
Gabriella	✓	✓
Joshua	✓	✓
Leah		✓
Rachel		✓
Rebecca		✓
Sam		✓
Shira	✓	
Stephanie		✓
Tamar	✓	
Tehilla	✓	
Yaakov		✓
Yosef	✓	✓

Almost three-quarters of the students shared their perception that possessing a mastery mindset helps to offset any potentially negative responses to traditional performance-based grading systems. Akiva shared that, when he earns a low grade on a test, he tries to focus on the progress he had made thus far and avoid comparing himself to anyone else. He explains that grades, even performance-based grades, enable a student to "see your own improvement." Shira shared that she tries to focus on the learning process in developing a sense of competence in mastering Jewish textual skills rather than on the grade itself. Tamar added that she seeks to challenge herself in learning and therefore does not pay much heed to performance-based grades. Avigayil shared that she enjoys learning in a non-competitive environment in which she is able to assist a classmate in mastering the material as opposed to a competitive, performance-focused learning environment.

However, seven of these same students expressed fixed mindset views that contradict previously held notions of mastery mindset. For example, while Joshua stated that he does not view grades as something that can determine the intelligence of an individual, he also expressed that poor grades can be caused by an incompetent teacher.

> You know if it's a bad teacher or just the teacher in general is a nice person, they just don't know how to teach the class or prepare the students well, and then the students just get to class, fool around, and the next thing you know, everybody fails the test.

Five students also expressed that they are more intrinsically motivated to learn subjects in which they are naturally more proficient. Because Stephanie speaks Hebrew at home with her parents, she shared that she is more motivated in Judaic studies classes because she feels more confident learning Jewish texts in Hebrew in these classes. This mirrors Dweck and Leggett's social-cognitive theory that one's intelligence as fixed resulted in the "helpless" pattern and decreased motivation, whereas conceiving of one's intelligence as malleable resulted in the "mastery oriented" pattern and increased motivation (Dweck & Leggett 1988).

Other students attributed low grades to unfair testing methods or lack of ability. Devora said that she gets frustrated by tests sometimes because she "isn't good at taking tests." When Rebecca was asked how she feels about receiving a bad grade, she responded, "If it's something I worked hard on, it's not fair that I got a bad grade." She added that she would love to learn Hebrew, but it is not something that comes easily to her. Yaakov explained that, since he is in the lower track, he feels that it is not necessary to put a lot of effort into his schoolwork. He explained, "I never really learned how to read Hebrew well, let alone *Aramaic*, so I am not so proficient inside the *Gemara*." All of these students viewed negative performance feedback with a fixed mindset.

Rachel shared that her *Ivrit* teacher fosters a mastery mindset in her students by calling on a student to answer a question in the text, but she wouldn't move on to the next student; instead, she would wait and help the struggling student until he or she figured it out. These mastery mindset teaching practices encourage Rachel to put forth greater effort in overcoming obstacles in her learning.

David suggested that a teacher's perspective about performance-based grades in Judaic studies can often impact student motivation. He shared that, after receiving a failing grade on a Judaic studies test in his freshman year, his teacher wrote on his test, "Don't worry, you're going to do better on the next one." He ended up working very hard to prepare for the next test, and while he still didn't get an A, he felt proud of the progress he was making.

Religious Commitment Theory

The fifth category of questions sought to define and clarify the parameters of the students' spiritual and religious commitment as it pertains to their engagement in Jewish textual study (see Table 7).

Table 7. Responses regarding Religious Commitment Theory

Name	*To feel closer to Hashem*	*To be better able to practice Judaism*	*To learn about one's heritage*
Akiva			
Alex	✓	✓	✓
Avigayil		✓	✓
Beth			
David		✓	✓
Devora	✓	✓	✓
Dina	✓	✓	✓
Eli	✓	✓	✓
Gabriella	✓	✓	
Joshua	✓	✓	✓
Leah			
Rachel		✓	✓
Rebecca			
Sam			
Shira	✓		✓
Stephanie			
Tamar	✓	✓	
Tehilla			
Yaakov		✓	
Yosef	✓		

Roughly one-third of the students expressed a desire to learn Judaic studies texts in order to know and understand what *Hashem* wants. Almost half of the students would like to feel closer to *Hashem* and view engaging in Jewish texts as a way to accomplish that. Almost half of the students expressed the value of studying Jewish texts in order to learn more about their heritage. Almost half of the students expressed a commitment to studying Jewish texts because they see value in learning it.

In comparing the curricular goals of Judaic and general studies, half of the students expressed a key distinction. According to these students, embedded within the Judaic studies curriculum is the teachers' desire to strengthen their students' spiritual connection and religious commitment in addition to developing proficiency in the subject itself; in contrast, according to these students, general studies teachers are primarily focused on enabling their students to develop proficiency in the subject matter alone. Yosef suggested that Judaic studies teachers must therefore put forth even more effort than general studies teachers in forging positive relationships with their students. These students believe that, because more is at stake in Judaic studies, some of their Judaic studies teachers more readily include other factors such as effort and good middot in order to offset a poor grade.

While these students shared that their Judaic studies teachers seek to foster spirituality and religious commitment, only one student shared that her teacher directly and openly discusses *Hashem*. Shira shared that, because her *Navi* teacher always talks about *Hashem*, Shira finds her *Navi* class very inspiring and enjoyable.

Less than one-quarter of the students shared that they learn Jewish texts in order to know and be able to identify with the truth. David shared that he has been struggling recently with spirituality and has a lot of questions that he feels his school could do a better job of addressing, but one teacher in particular has served as a tremendous spiritual support for him. David explained that this teacher really tries to relate the textual learning to daily life so that his students could develop a passion for learning throughout their entire lives.

Half of the students expressed that learning Judaic studies makes them better equipped to practice Judaism according to *halacha*. Akiva discussed his perception of the challenges of student motivation and religious commitment as it pertains to his high school's tracking system.

Akiva shared that many of his friends in the higher academic tracks are highly motivated to engage in Jewish texts but are not motivated to practice Judaism according to *halacha*. Because the higher tracked classes focus more on in-depth advanced textual learning, there is less time or emphasis on discussing religious commitment and spirituality. Conversely, the lower tracks tend to focus more on religious commitment and spirituality.

Akiva explained,

> I have friends who are smarter so they're put in the higher tracks, and then they're taught on a certain level that is very black and white. And it's not about spirituality…. Why is this kid learning skills about Gemara if he doesn't believe in God yet? And then the lower tracks are associated with kids who need that

> spiritual boost. And so the [teachers] in the lower tracks are warmer [than the teachers in the higher tracks]. But the association and the assumption that kids who are less smart are less religious and kids who are more smart are more religious, it's just wrong. And I think that with the tracking system in general, I think it's very wrong because it doesn't feed you what you need…. One of my best friends in school is a kid who is not, he's religious because he's a good kid, and he'll go through the motions and do things that he's told, but he doesn't feel any connection whatsoever, and I think it's so unfair that he's been in my [Honors] *shiur* for the past four years, in a place where we're just learning, and not being fed any of the more heartfelt stuff, the more warm stuff. And I know that's what he's needed for the past four years.

Extrinsic Motivation in Judaic Studies Courses

The sixth category of questions explored the presence and degree of extrinsic motivators specifically in Judaic studies.

Virtually three-quarters of the students shared that they engage in Jewish textual learning at school in order to achieve good grades. Avigayil expressed that she pays attention in her Judaic studies classes and takes good notes primarily in order to do well on tests. Gabriella shared that she studies in her Judaic studies classes in order to maintain a good GPA and avoid being placed in a remedial class.

Yaakov explained that many students need the extrinsic motivator of traditional performance-based grades because they would not learn *Torah lishmah* otherwise.

> The kids in the lower grade, the lower class, that are only sort of paying attention so that they can get a good, solid grade on a test. If the tests go away, they're just going to be spaced out the whole time, no regard for any of the *Torah* learning taking place in the classroom.

More than half of the students responded negatively to traditional performance-based grading practices in Judaic studies. Several students expressed that Judaic studies teachers, much more so than general studies teachers, should take into account student effort when calculating the overall grades.

Yosef expressed that,

> If a student is putting time and effort, and they're really trying as hard as they can to do well in a class, I think especially in Judaic studies, when that's a big part of the class, not so much about knowing information, but about trying to learn the information.

About half of the students shared that they are more agitated when they earn poor grades in Judaic studies classes rather than in general studies classes. Sam said,

> The thing with Judaic studies classes about the grades is that I think 'Well, it's not fair that I have to get a good grade because most people …. If I do bad on a *Gemara* test, it ruins my GPA. My GPA's being lowered from a class that most people don't even have to take. If I get a bad grade in Physics, well, every high school student has to do that. If I'm struggling in *Gemara*, it's like I'm struggling in a class that no one even really takes except for the very small percentage.

Eli shared that, “For things like Judaic studies, it would be nice to have that dynamic where the test isn’t everything that sort of matters.”

Sam shared,

> Compared to people in public school, I have more classes and a longer day, so it’s just even harder.... I do bad on *Chumash*, it’s because I’m in a Jewish school so now I have more classes to worry about and more tests to worry about.

Yaakov stated that earning poor grades in Judaic studies classes negatively affects the student’s relationship with the teacher more so than in general studies. Yaakov shared,

> You are going to think, ‘Oh, that Rabbi’s a jerk. He gave me a bad grade.’ Even if you deserved it, that’s just how the human mind works. We tend to assign blame to others. So the tests aren’t good in that way. And they definitely hurt the relationship between students and teachers in Judaic studies

Some may argue that this places Judaic studies teachers in a catch-22; they aim to communicate feedback to students through grades, but they also do not want to damage their relationships with their students.

Sam shared regarding his feelings of religious commitment to textual learning,

> My [overall] grades are being lowered because I’m being graded on a [Judaic studies] class that most people don’t need to know. You don’t really even need to know this. This is more religious. You don’t need to know this for a day in your future. When you get a job, you’re not going to need to know this. Basically, I say

this of Physics too. *Chumash* is specific for Judaism, so I'm graded on, based on my religion, I'm getting graded on this. It's not like an academic class.

Akiva feels that Judaic studies classes should be evaluated on a different scale than general studies classes.

> If you're going to track the students [in Judaic studies classes], I would not want to see it based on intelligence because that makes no sense unless your goal is to study it. And our goal is not to study *Torah*. It's to experience it, to live it. So we're not here to master it like math, it's not a competition of who could memorize this and that.

Akiva continued,

> It's not about the grades, not about the grades, not about the grades. Because they want to push this type of learning, They don't want it to be like math class…. For me, especially when I was in 9th Grade where it was a big adjustment, I was in a Rabbi's *Shiur,* very difficult, and for me it was all about the grade. For the first two weeks, I enjoyed it. And then after the first test, it was all about getting a good grade. And it was so now I thank God, I've gotten to a point where I can see past that, and enjoy the class, and I enjoy the learning. But I think for most kids, it's about the grade.

Both Akiva and Yaakov make a noteworthy observation here related to the nature and significance of *Torah* learning. They understand the pursuit of academic achievement in Judaic studies to include a holier, more spiritual quality that does not exist in general studies, and therefore must not be treated in the same manner as general studies.

Yaakov adds that students should not be graded in Judaic studies as it leads students to feel judged and criticized.

> A human can never measure the [reward] that you get from learning, so why are we putting a grade on it? That's God's job. So let's say if I get a 70 on the test but I really worked hard in the *Gemara*. And someone who's just better than me at *Gemara* gets a 100, I think even though I tried harder, I heard something like that *Hashem* judges you on that. In theory, why is the school giving me a worse grade when they don't know how *Hashem* grades it? It's kind of like them playing God….

Yaakov further elaborates on the challenges inherent in grading students within a tracking system in Judaic studies.

> The kids in Honors *Gemara,* they would learn *Gemara* in their free time. I don't think that's a big shock. So they don't need to be tested really. And that just takes the fun out of it for them to be tested because they're not learning *lishmah*. But the kids that testing is really meant for to keep them on track is the lower tracked kids who tend to not like *Gemara* as much. But doing that, one, discourages them from *Gemara*. And they're really not going to get great grades. They're lower tracked kids, so they tend to not have the best grades, even in their lower tracks. And they're also the kids that don't really care for *Gemara.* So instead of being like, "Oh you don't like something? I'm going to force you to do it." Why don't we just backtrack and make them appreciate the *Gemara*? Instead of just forcing

them to. It hurts the kids…. I think it's going to hurt their relationship with *Gemara* in the long run.

Yaakov continued,

I honestly think school hurts religiosity a lot. So it's a good environment to be around [in a Jewish school], I just think that the grading system hurts it a lot. Like they're forcing Gemara down your throat and they're like, "You need to do this so you get a grade." It's just like why am I going to want to learn then? It takes the fun out of it because it's more like a business relationship with the learning instead of "I want to learn this. Okay, I happen to be tested on it." I think if they're trying to force you to learn, it kind of hurts you. It's tough to be told to do something. If you make anything into being graded, you take the fun out of it really.

David reported that, while he believes that traditional performance-based grading practices have a place in general studies courses, he feels that schools should consider grades differently in Judaic studies due to the nature of the material. He shared,

If it really was a bother for me, testing and grades and Judaic studies, I wouldn't be in a Jewish school. But it is something I often think about. I don't think it's beneficial having yourself graded in Judaic studies. My reason for that is I think Judaism is something that you should be taught to love rather than something that you need to do just for a grade, so I was then, if you didn't have tests and you were taught just every day... you're not learning for homework, you're learning for

> life, so I think it would just be internalized a lot more rather than knowing you have tests so you're learning this just to get the grade.

Yosef agreed and stated that, based on his experience in Judaic studies, teachers tend to weigh a student's effort and class participation more heavily into the overall grade than they do in general studies classes. Sam also expressed that he felt that the Judaic studies teachers in his school are more lenient about grades.

Sam shared,

> Most of the Rabbis in the school, if you get a bad grade on the test, you might still pass a class just because they all care about just how you act. It's very much your behavior grade. If you're a good kid, they might be, 'Okay well, you're a good kid so I'm going to pass you anyway.' The tests don't matter nearly as much. When in the key English subjects you fail a test, that would really affect your grade.

Several students sense that teachers are utilizing alternative characteristics grading standards in Judaic studies courses, but they cannot easily define how their teachers determine the grades. For some students, this supports the notion that performance-based grades in Judaic studies are relatively arbitrary. This raises an important question which requires further study: do such unscientific grading practices foster an intrinsic motivation by downplaying the significance of the performance-based grade, or do they downplay the subject itself?

Half of the students shared that they are not extrinsically motivated to do well in Judaic studies for the purposes of college admissions because they believe that the grades

will have no impact on their ability to gain entry into college. Eli explained that, while he is very motivated to take advanced courses in general studies, he is not interested in pursuing any advanced Judaic studies coursework since it will not improve his chances of college admissions. Yaakov also stated that, "Secular colleges don't even look at *Gemara.* So if I knew that, I wouldn't have studied as hard for *Gemara* classes over my whole course because I don't need to."

Akiva , on the other hand, shared that students in his Honors Judaic studies class are interested in earning good grades because they believe good grades in any and all subjects will improve their chances of being accepted to a prestigious college or university. He explained,

> I'll be sitting next to a kid in class who doesn't feel any connection to God whatsoever. But he's there because he's applying to Ivy League schools and he wants to put H for Honors on his resume. And he was put there because he's smart, and that black and white, he was put there because he was smart and he's getting 95's on every test because he's able to memorize material, not because he cares about what he's learning.

Intrinsic Motivation in Judaic Studies Courses

The seventh category of questions sought to explore student perceptions of intrinsic motivators in Judaic studies courses and the conflict between religious commitment and traditional performance-based grading practices.

Half of the students expressed a desire to learn *Torah lishmah* in a class environment devoid of traditional performance-based grading practices. Eli shared that one of his favorite Judaic studies teachers worked hard to help the students develop intrinsic motivation towards learning *Torah*. The teacher was able to create a learning environment in which

> The test was a separate entity, and it serves its purpose just because it had to be there for logistical purposes. It was sort of like the class was running, and then the test was sort of that extra thing that we needed to give you a grade on paper, which was kind of cool, but obviously ideal.

Avigayil agreed,

> There are times when a teacher will bring out an idea, or a certain meforash (commentator) will say something, and I will say, "Whoa, that's a really interesting way to look at that." That's real life. I can connect that to my life so clearly, and it's so inspiring that they were able to overcome that challenge, and it's a very parallel situation to something in my life.

Approximately one-quarter of the students shared that performance-based grading practices undermine and interfere with students' ability to learn *Torah lishmah*. Yaakov added that most students view the objective of *Gemara* class is to earn a good grade on the test rather than understanding the *Gemara* and learning from it. In this way, Yaakov asserts that, "Tests are a necessary evil," in that they motivate students to learn, but they dominate the learning and thereby ruin a student's relationship with learning. Alex explained,

In some classes, you have math, physics, history, there should be homework to review to get it really in your brain, in your head. With *Chumash* and Judaic studies, let's say, I don't feel there's a need to do homework because you have your class, you have *Gemara*, you have two periods of *Gemar*a, you have your *Chumash* and *Mishnah*, it shouldn't be you're learning for the homework, to get credit for it. The only credit you should be getting is from *Hashem*. You shouldn't be getting credit from the teacher. Of course, you have to at school but it should be out of your will. You shouldn't be forced to do homework by your teacher and get graded on it…. I think English studies, you should have homework, it's important. I'm all for that but in Judaic studies, I don't think you should….It's *HaShem's Torah*. It should be our desire to learn. It shouldn't be-- If the teacher really wants to stress something, they should be stressing to the kids the desire to learn it, they should learn at home and they should be really encouraging it. I don't think they should be encouraging homework [in Judaic studies].

Shira explained,

For general studies, I say for school totally it's not a bad idea to give tests. But yeah, for Judaic, I'm a little iffy on it, like should you, should you not? I mean I don't love it cause I feel like I want to learn for the sake of learning. Not really to be tested on it and my knowledge of it. I just want to learn for the sake of learning. So I mean I guess I could understand why they would, because they need a certain amount to test us on.

Gabriella expressed her belief that schools should push their students more to learn Jewish texts outside of school. She sometimes attends classes outside of school with her mother, and she feels that these classes outside of school feel different. Gabriella explained,

> They just speak and you listen, and I feel like they always connect it to your life, and you learn differently than in school. I don't know how to explain it, you learn a lesson from it every time…. It's different going to school every day, you're learning information and you're just writing notes on the information.

In an effort to foster an intrinsic love for learning Jewish texts, some schools have implemented *Mishmar* programs, after-school learning sessions, for which students may be exempt from certain midterm or final exams with good attendance at these *Mishmar* programs. Of note is that only two of the study participants attend *Mishmar* programs at their schools. They stated that they attend these programs because they enjoy the learning, and they assert that they would likely attend these programs anyway even if they were not going to be exempt from taking a midterm or final exam. Other students, however, felt that this type of incentivization will not increase participation in learning because students are oftentimes very busy after school and will not be able to attend after-school learning programs. Akiva shared that his high school tries to incentivize learning by offering a pass on a course's midterm or final if a student attends night *seder* or bus *seder* consistently each week. He explained,

> If you go to night *seder* that's three times a week on average, it's for 40 minutes after school, then you don't have to take your midterm or final for *Gemara*. I have

> a thing called bus *seder* because we go on a bus. So if you learn on the bus, you have bus *seder*. I would say that most are doing it to get out of the test. Or because their mother or father wants them to. I drive two kids home, they're only doing it for the test.

Yosef shared that incentives like good food can incentivize learning programs outside of school. Eli agreed that good food serves to incentivize attendance at after school learning programs at his high school. He shared that students go to the program "If they like a specific teacher and are interested in learning, and they get the food anyway, and they're already in school, might as well. Then there's enough push and enough genuine wanting to go. And enough positive peer pressure." Eli added that it is easy and does not require tremendous commitment on the part of the students, so the advantages significantly outweigh the disadvantages.

Sam and Akiva both reported that the long school days make it difficult to engage in any learning after school. Leah also shared that she comes home from school very tired, and the level of fatigue she feels often determines how much time she spends on learning *Torah* after school. Yosef expressed that he does not participate in his school's *Mishmar* program due to the fact that he has other homework to do at night, and he wants to be able to relax for a little after school before starting his homework.

Summary

A number of significant themes emerge from the data regarding student motivation and religious commitment. Half of the participants described possessing an

intrinsic motivation towards learning in school, whether borne out of a desire to challenge themselves or improve their knowledge and proficiency in a particular subject. Virtually all of the students also felt extrinsically motivated to earn good grades in order to gain entry into a prestigious college or university. Few were extrinsically motivated for other reasons such as family pressure or exemption from a midterm or final exam.

Students shared that a sense of relevance or purposefulness is a strong factor influencing intrinsic motivation. Interestingly, three-quarters of the students shared that the quality of a Judaic studies teacher in particular is a very strong factor influencing student motivation. Students listed excellent classroom management, ability to connect with students, strong pedagogy, interactive learning structures, and effective instructional skills as specific characteristics of quality Judaic studies teachers. Not one student mentioned the quality of a general studies teacher as a factor in influencing student motivation in general studies courses. This may be due to the fact that Judaic studies, more so than general studies, is generally less accessible to student understanding because it is in a foreign language. Parent attitude towards Judaic studies may also play a role in student perceptions surrounding the quality of the Judaic studies teacher on student motivation.

Irrespective of its cause, this finding speaks to the monumental responsibility of teaching Judaic studies. On the one hand, it possesses vast potential in connecting students to Jewish textual learning and spirituality; on the other hand, it belies the challenge and pressure of teaching more than just a subject. Several students shared that their Judaic studies teachers seem aware of this challenge and seek ways to mitigate

negative associations with Judaic studies by inflating student grades based on effort and overall character.

While students shared that they think often about traditional performance-based grades, more than half also expressed mastery mindset perceptions. Few students mentioned teachers who actively foster mastery mindset in their classes. It is interesting to note that, of the students who participated in this study, those students who demonstrated a mastery mindset did not belong to a particular domain of academic ability or level of motivation. Mastery mindset was blind to academic ability and motivation. Some students described themselves as low achieving, while others described themselves as high achieving. Some students described themselves as highly motivated whereas others described themselves as unmotivated. More than half of the students who felt that hard work leads to success also felt that natural skill leads to success. And three-quarters of those with mastery mindset also claimed to be extrinsically motivated by college admissions.

Students shared that their motivation to engage in Jewish textual learning primarily emanates from a desire to feel closer to *Hashem*, to be better able to practice Judaism, and to learn about their ancestors as an impetus for spiritual and personal growth. Few students shared that their teachers speak about *Hashem* in their Judaic studies classes, though several mentioned that they discuss *Hashem* during informal, experiential, or after-school programs.

Of note is the apparent disparity regarding traditional performance-based grades and religious connectedness. While many students reported a strong desire to grow in

their religiosity and spirituality, they also shared that they often only pay attention in Judaic studies classes when the material is going to be on the test. They reported that they primarily engage in Jewish textual learning in order to earn good grades, and at the same time, they feel uncomfortable being graded in Judaic studies because of the holiness of the subject matter. The students want to learn *Torah lishmah*, but they also say that they need the grades to provide the extrinsic motivation.

Several of the participants also shared that students in higher tracks in their schools were not necessarily more religiously committed. Several students shared that, in their more advanced Judaic studies courses, many of their classmates did not observe *halacha*, whereas in the lower tracks, students often ask questions that demonstrate a desire to feel more connected to *Hashem*. This was surprising: one might think that the students who are more proficient in engaging in Jewish texts are also more interested in connecting with *Hashem* and practicing Judaism according to *halacha*.

Recommendations

Teaching style. The survey data suggests several recommendations for crafting a program that would increase student motivation and spirituality in Judaic studies classes. More than half of the students interviewed in this study reported that traditional, performance based grades provide them with the extrinsic motivation necessary to achieve academic success in Judaic studies. However, they also reported that traditional, performance based grades in Judaic studies may also have a deleterious effect on their ability to feel spiritually inspired in such courses. Therefore, it may be beneficial to seek

a balance between the two by affording students some measure of autonomy as proposed by both Deci and Ryan in their theory of self-determination as well as by Baumrind in her authoritative parenting style model (Baumrind 1966, 1996, 2012). The authoritative parenting style, measured by high warmth and high control, encourages independence while at the same time sets age-appropriate behavioral limits. In her longitudinal study of children, following them from preschool through adolescence, Baumrind found a positive correlation between an authoritative parenting style and student achievement which was consistent in both preschool and adolescence (Spera 2005). Durkin suggested that the high level of emotional security and better interpersonal relations and social skills caused by authoritative parenting lead to an increase in student achievement. However, these findings were not replicated with African American females and Hispanic adolescents, suggesting that socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and culture play a role (Spera 2005).

Given the fact that research demonstrates a positive relationship between an authoritative parenting style and student achievement, it is recommended that schools strive to implement a balanced approach by fostering student autonomy in learning while, at the same time, providing a structured system for feedback. This can be accomplished by offering autonomous learning opportunities as well as assignments and tests that assess curricular standards. Alternatively, it can be accomplished by adopting a balanced approach to performance-based grades: they provide feedback, but they are not and should not be viewed as ends unto themselves.

In addition, utilizing Baumrind's (1966, 1996, 2012) autonomy-supportive method of control, teachers can communicate structure by discussing learning

expectations with students, jointly establishing the rules, allowing for choice, and providing empathy for students' alternate wishes and desires (Grolnick 2012). Rebecca and Yaakov each suggested that teachers try to include students in conversations about learning expectations and provide some sense of student autonomy. This method of providing structure in an autonomy-supportive manner has borne positive outcomes in the research on student motivation, academic engagement, and perceived competence (Grolnick 2012). It is interesting to note that Baumrind's authoritative parenting style theory overlaps with Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory regarding the significance of autonomy on intrinsic motivation. When students feel a sense of control, they are more motivated to learn, much in the same way that children who feel a sense of autonomy at home are more motivated to behave. As Yaakov articulated, "If they're trying to force you to learn, it kind of hurts you [spiritually].... It's tough to be told to do something. If you make anything into being graded, you take the fun out of it really."

Mental contrasting. All of the participants in this study were able to clearly articulate the importance of learning *Torah lishmah*, but few reported feeling intrinsically motivated or fulfilled when engaging in Jewish texts. This may be due to the fact that students view *lishmah* learning as a long-term goal as opposed to the short-term goal of academic achievement. Because adolescents tend to struggle with long term goal setting and consistent striving to achieve said goals, Duckworth, Grant, Loew, Oettingen, and Gollwitzer (2011) studied the efficacy of directly teaching adolescents mental contrasting strategies with implementation intentions as a self-regulatory strategy of building

self-discipline. Mental contrasting enables strong associations between the desired future and the present reality by first developing an image of the positive future and then framing the negative reality as an obstacle to achieving the desired future. Duckworth, et al. found that actively teaching students mental contrasting strategies enables students to develop greater self-discipline (Duckworth, et al., 2011). This may be applied in a Judaic studies setting. For example, when learning with students or assigning long-term projects, Judaic studies teachers can help students mentally elaborate on the benefits of, and obstacles to, learning *Torah lishmah*.

Student achievement goals. Study participants who find Judaic studies courses particularly challenging as a result of poor skills or Hebrew language difficulties reported feeling especially frustrated and despondent when they receive low grades. These students reacted to receiving low grades by giving up, blaming the teacher, or discrediting the system. This bears out in secular research as well. Shim and Ryan (2005) found that student achievement goals are integral to motivation. Performance goals have drawbacks in the context of low grades, not in the context of academic success. Mastery goals were associated with increased motivation, irrespective of grades. When students focus on how they perform compared to other students, their motivation is at risk when grades are given. However, when focusing on self-improvement and mastery, student motivation improves regardless of the feedback that is given (Shim & Ryan, 2005). Therefore, an additional recommendation is that Judaic studies teachers emphasize mastery mindset with their students and foster a non-competitive learning environment

that emphasizes process and progress over product. When considering *Limmud Torah* as a commandment, it is comprised of both knowledge amassed and time and effort spent in its pursuit. Therefore, it is befitting that Judaic studies teachers emphasize process and progress over product.

Amending grading practices. Erickson (2010) suggests several changes could be made within a traditional grading system that may improve student motivation. Because certain grading practices that average students' grades together to determine final grades have been deemed unfair or inaccurate and do not consider student growth or improvement, teachers should use discretion to modify students' final grades if improvement is made by the close of the semester (Erickson 2010). This demonstrates an emphasis on mastery mindset, and several students shared that such teacher practices foster student motivation in learning Jewish texts.

Second, schools should change the percentage scale from 60% to 50% regarding a failing grade as well as eliminate, or minimize, the use of zeroes so that one poor performance does not prevent students from passing a course (Erickson 2010). Yaakov explained that, due to several absences, his overall grade for that course dropped to a point where he feels like it does not make sense for him to put forth effort in that class anymore.

Third, schools should eliminate behavior grades in determining a student's overall average and instead develop better methods of responding to classroom misbehavior (Erickson 2010). Several students in the study shared their confusion over the fact that

Judaic studies teachers often include behavior grades in computing their overall average in Judaic studies courses.

Fourth, schools should consider using the Latin honors system of *cum laude, magna cum laude,* and *summa cum laude* whereby students compete against the educational standards rather than compete against their peers (Erickson 2010). This can be accomplished by implementing standards-based grading practices in Judaic studies courses that will enable students to set goals of meeting standards rather than outperforming their classmates.

Fifth, schools should incorporate formative assessments into developing overall averages, e.g 85% of the course grade is summative, and 15% of the course grade is formative (Erickson 2010). This too can be accomplished by implementing standards-based grading practices in Judaic studies courses that will enable students to measure their progress in learning.

Finally, schools should support students in developing academic integrity by mandating an alternate assessment as well as an ethics study assignment in response to cheating or plagiarism (Erickson 2010). These changes in grading practices in Judaic studies courses may enable students to be more intrinsically motivated to engage in Jewish textual learning.

Religious commitment. Half of the students expressed their beliefs that grading practices in Judaic studies should not mirror grading practices in general studies due to the fact that Judaic studies courses involve a holy pursuit of the fulfillment of the

commandment of *Limmud Torah*. To assess students in Judaic studies courses in the same manner as in general studies courses may strip Judaic studies of its unique goal of fostering students' spiritual development. Furthermore, students have shared that earning low grades in Judaic studies can be misinterpreted as a criticism of their overall success as Jews. Implementing a more holistic model of grading in Judaic studies courses that assesses students' affective ability to apply Judaic studies content within a deeper and broader context of understanding in their lives may enable students to develop a greater sense of religious commitment. Such a model of grading in Judaic studies could include personalized assessments that examine students' emotional connections to Judaism as well as their progress in learning.

In addition, schools should consider *what* they are grading in Judaic studies courses. Should teachers teach and assess cognitive skills alone, or is there space to teach and assess the affective components of spiritual development? The latter may speak to the students' quest for spirituality and meaning-making they frequently discussed in this study. Such a shift in focus may also address the aforementioned need for student autonomy.

Problem-based learning, or project-based learning. Approximately half of the students shared that relevance is an important element in developing intrinsic motivation in learning. Recent research documented the challenges that modern Orthodox schools, in particular, face regarding relevance in Judaic studies courses due to a lack of a shared religious identity within their school populations (Krakowski 2017). To better provide

opportunities for such meaning-making in Judaic studies, problem-based learning may be one solution (Krakowski 2017).

Problem-based learning is a student-centered method of pedagogy in which students actively explore real-world problems in order to acquire deeper knowledge and specific skills. It may serve to close the gap between autonomy and meaning-making on the one hand and personalized religious identity on the other by providing opportunities for students to have choice and voice in their Judaic studies courses (Krakowski 2017). Some examples of problem-based learning units may include exploring real-life challenges in today's *kashrut* industry or developing new *hilchot Shabbat*-approved technology.

***Torah lishmah* learning programs.** In an effort to foster an intrinsic love for learning Jewish texts, some schools have implemented *Mishmar* programs, after-school learning sessions, which exempts students from certain midterm or final exams with good attendance at these *Mishmar* programs. Akiva shared his perception that many students at his high school participate in the school's *Mishmar* program in order to be exempt from taking a midterm or final exam. While this practice may serve as an extrinsic motivator to encourage participation in such a *Torah lishmah* program, it may come at a cost of distorting the *lishmah* flavor of *Mishmar.* Instead, as Eli suggested, schools should offer good food. Whether this specific type of extrinsic motivator negatively impacts student motivation and spirituality deserves further consideration.

CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION

Limitations

There are several limitations of this study. While the sample size of twenty participants is high for a qualitative study, the researcher did not exceed that number of participants, even in order to reach saturation on core constructs, so the results may not be highly transferable. In addition, because the purpose of this study is to explore student perceptions, other key stakeholders such as educators and parents were not interviewed. This may not provide a full picture of the impact of traditional grading practices on student motivation and spirituality.

This kind of qualitative research is limited by the unique features of the particular case under study due to the fact that the schools are all located in the New York metropolitan area and that the researcher may have prior rapport with some of the participants; while these two characteristics of the specific participant population carry some strengths, they also pose certain challenges which may impact the study's generalizability.

In addition, the interchangeability of the terms spirituality and religiosity may limit our ability as educators to develop curricular standards and assessments from which and with which to measure student spirituality.

Finally, the levels of religiosity and spirituality of the homes from which the participants come may play into their levels of motivation in Judaic studies courses. Participants whose parents promote extracurricular learning may be more intrinsically motivated to engage in Jewish texts than those participants whose parents do not promote extracurricular learning. Despite these limitations, this study provides a nuanced examination of the issues surrounding traditional performance-based grading practices and their impact on student motivation and spirituality upon which future studies can build.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study explored the impact of traditional performance-based grading practices on motivation and spirituality in secondary Judaic studies courses. While important conclusions were reached, a number of questions still remain that warrant further attention and exploration. Could a larger, quantitative study shed more light on how gender, age, or home religious observance affect high school students' perceptions of the impact of traditional grading practices in Judaic studies? How do traditional grading practices impact student motivation and spirituality in more right-wing schools or more left-wing schools? How would feedback in the form of formative assessment impact student motivation and spirituality in secondary Judaic studies courses? Are there significant differences in elementary school Judaic studies courses? How have grading practices shifted historically? How might students' experiences attending a post-high school *yeshiva* or seminary alter their perceptions of the impact of grading practices on

student motivation or spirituality? What are teacher perceptions regarding the impact of traditional, performance-based grading practices on student motivation and spirituality in secondary Judaic studies courses? What are parent perceptions regarding the impact of traditional, performance-based grading practices on student motivation and spirituality?

Implications

In making the case for Jewish day school education, an oft quoted passage by *Resh Lakish* from the *Talmud* states, "The world endures only for the breath of the school children" (Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 119b). His statement highlights the importance of Jewish continuity through a strong and compelling mission-driven Jewish education in which children experience religious connectedness and joyful learning. This raison d'etre of Jewish education, the desire to motivate students to engage in Jewish learning (Brown, 2018; Feld, 2018; Bleich, 2000; Shepard, 1988), is precisely why many teachers enter the Jewish educational field, much more than their public school counterparts (Salomon, 2010).

Furthermore, there are numerous studies attesting to the link between spirituality and prosocial behavior (Vance, 2007; Miller, 2015). Spirituality is also positively linked to character strengths such as meaning, purpose, optimism, happiness, and resilience (Miller, 2015; Vance, 2007). In addition, the research notes the buffering qualities of spirituality in adolescence against drug and alcohol abuse, depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and risk-taking behaviors (Miller, 2015; Vance, 2007; Korn, 2008).

In collecting data from students regarding their experiences of the impact of performance-based grading systems on motivation and spirituality, this research can guide the field of Jewish education in developing more informed, mission-aligned grading practices that cultivate intrinsic motivation, spirituality, and religious connectedness for our students.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY OF HEBREW TERMS

- *Aramaic* - a Semitic language in which the *Gemara* is written
- *Chumash* - the study of the Five Books of Moses
- *Gemara* - collection of Rabbinic analysis and commentary on the *Mishnah*, comprising the second part of the *Talmud*
- *Halacha* - corpus of Jewish law
- *Hashem* - God
- *Hilchot Shabbat* - Jewish laws pertaining to Sabbath observance
- *Ivrit* - Hebrew language
- *Kashrut* - Jewish dietary laws
- *Limmud Tora*h - learning Torah
- *Meforshim* - Biblical commentators
- *Mishmar* - after school learning program
- *Mishnah* - collection of early Jewish oral interpretations of the Bible in Rabbinic literature comprising the first part of the Talmud
- *Navi* - the study of the Book of Prophets
- *Rabbi* - Judaic studies teacher
- *Rambam* - 12th century Biblical commentator

- *Resh Lakish* - 3rd century Jewish scholar
- *Seder* - learning period
- *Shiur* - class or lecture
- *Torah* - the Bible, or colloquially, the sum total of Jewish teaching, culture, and practice
- *Torah Lishmah* - learning *Torah* for its own sake
- *Torah U'Maddah* - lit. *Torah* and secular knowledge, a philosophy of Orthodox Judaism regarding the relationship between secular knowledge and Jewish religious knowledge
- *Yeshiva* - Orthodox school that focuses on the study of Jewish religious texts
- *Yeshivish* - relating to the culture of emphasizing Jewish learning over secular learning

APPENDIX B: LETTER OF CONSENT TO PRINCIPALS

Dear Principal,

I am a doctoral candidate at Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education at Yeshiva University. I am currently conducting research for my dissertation, entitled "The Impact of Traditional Performance-Based Grading Practices on Motivation and Spirituality in the Judaic studies Classroom." For the purpose of my study, I am interviewing high school students in modern Orthodox high schools in order to better understand their perceptions of the impact of grading on motivation and spirituality. I would like your permission to interview some of your students.

Each personal interview will take approximately one hour to complete on campus, and all specific data will be kept strictly confidential. Consent will be obtained from each student prior to each interview.

If you are able to have your students participate in this study, please reply.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Bethany Strulowitz

APPENDIX C: LETTER OF CONSENT TO STUDENTS' PARENTS

Dear Parents,

Please review the attached consent form requesting your permission for your child to participate in a research study regarding student perceptions of motivation and spirituality. I am conducting this research under the auspices of Yeshiva University's Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Dr. Moshe Krakowski. It is my hope that, by understanding student perceptions regarding motivation and spirituality, schools will be able to implement best educational practices that will foster student motivation and spirituality.

Please feel free to reach out with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Bethany Strulowitz

APPENDIX D: LETTER OF CONSENT FOR STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

AZRIELI GRADUATE SCHOOL OF JEWISH EDUCATION

YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

Parental Permission and Young Adult Consent for Participation in Research

INTRODUCTION:

By signing this form, you have voluntarily agreed to participate in a research study examining motivation and spirituality which will be carried out under the supervision of:

Principal Investigator: Bethany Strulowitz

Contact: 917-261-8915

School: Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education at Yeshiva University

Office Address: 2495 Amsterdam Avenue, NY, NY 10033

Office Phone: 212-960-0186

CONFIDENTIALITY:

The study research records will be kept confidential, and you will not be identified in any written or verbal reports. Research records will be transferred to a computer where data will remain confidential by using numbers to identify each participant. Once your interview becomes anonymous, the transcript of your interview may be inspected by

members of the research team who have been requested to maintain confidentiality. Your records may also be inspected by the human research committee of the Committee on Clinical Investigations (CCI).

WHOM TO CONTACT WITH QUESTIONS:

You can call the supervisor of this research study, named at the beginning of this document in the introductory paragraph if:

- You have any questions related to this research project
- You have any questions about your rights as a research participant
- You believe you have sustained an injury related to this research study

You may also call the Administrator of the Committee on Clinical Investigations at …., Monday through Friday between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m.

STUDY SPECIFICS:

1. **PURPOSE:** The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of student motivation and spirituality in Judaic studies classes from the perspective of students.

2. **PROCEDURES:** In order to gain this understanding, you are being asked to participate in a personal interview with the researcher. This interview will take

approximately one hour. Participation is strictly voluntary, and participants do not have to answer any question with which he or she does not feel comfortable.

3. **AUDIO TAPING:** Interviews will be audio taped and transcribed. The subject's name will be identifiable, but maintained confidential. Tapes will only be used by the Primary Investigator for data analysis. Tapes will be kept in a secure location only accessible to the Primary Investigator.
4. **RISKS:** There are no risks involved in participating in the interview. All of your answers will remain confidential, and they will not be shared with your teachers, administrators, parents, or anyone other than the research team. General results of all of the interviews may be shared, but your individual identity and results will remain anonymous.

5. **BENEFITS:** There are no immediate benefits to you as a result of your participation in this study. However, it is a goal of this study to provide meaningful information and student insight with the world of Jewish education by providing a research-based exploration of issues surrounding motivation and spirituality in Judaic studies courses. It is hoped that this research will be valuable to schools in America and abroad in developing best teaching practices.

6. **ALTERNATIVES:** You may choose not to participate in this research study.

7. **WITHDRAWAL:** Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may be a participant in it only if you wish, and you may withdraw from this research study at any time. Your relationship with teachers, administrators, and staff at your school will not affect you in any way should you refuse to participate or if you enter the program and decide to withdraw later.

8. **SUMMARY:** The information contained within this informed consent document has been explained and discussed with you or read to you. You have also been given the opportunity to ask questions about this research and have your questions answered. A copy of this consent document has been given to you regardless of whether you have agreed to participate in this study.

_____

Signature of Participant Date

_____

Signature of Person Reading and Obtaining Consent Date

PARENTAL PERMISSION:

I voluntarily give permission for my child to participate in the research protocol.

_____

Signature of Parent or Guardian Date

APPENDIX E: INTRODUCTION TO SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Hello _____ (Student),

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study examining student motivation and spirituality in Judaic studies classes. What you share in this interview will be kept confidential. You will be given a pseudonym at the close of this interview in order to maintain strict anonymity. So please tell me what you really think and feel in your answers to the questions I will ask you. This will be most helpful in trying to figure out how to improve Jewish education in the future. I will be tape recording the interview to make sure that we have an accurate record of your thoughts and opinions. I will also be taking some notes for the same purpose.

Do you agree to allow me to tape-record this interview?

If NO: I will now turn off the tape recorder.

I will then ask you for permission to take notes and continue with the interview.

If YES: Thank you. I will continue with the interview.