RETHINKING
Sukkot
WOMEN, RELATIONSHIPS 
& JEWISH TEXTS
Rethinking Sukkot:
Women, Relationships and Jewish Texts

a project of

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Shalom Colleagues and Friends,

On behalf of the JWI Clergy Task Force on Domestic Abuse in the Jewish Community we are pleased to re-issue this wonderful resource, *Rethinking Sukkot: Women, Relationships and Jewish Texts*. This guide is designed to spark new conversations about iconic relationships by taking a fresh look at old texts. Using the text of Ecclesiastes, which is read on the Shabbat that falls during Sukkot, as well as prayers, *midrash*, and modern commentary, the guide serves to foster conversations about relationships. It combines respectful readings of classic texts with provocative and perceptive insights, questions and ideas that can help shape healthier relationships. We hope it will be warmly received and widely used throughout the Jewish community.

We are grateful to our many organizational partners for their assistance and support in distributing this resource in preparation for the observance of Purim. We deeply appreciate the work of the entire Clergy Task Force and want to especially acknowledge Rabbi Donna Kirshbaum, project manager and co-editor of this guide. We also thank Rabbi Amy Bolton, Rabbi Marla Hornsten, Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin, Rabbi Sean Gorman, Rabbi David Rosenberg and Rabbi Rachel Ain for their participation in this project.

Please visit [jwi.org/clergy](http://jwi.org/clergy) to learn more about the important work of the Task Force. We welcome your reactions to this resource, and hope you will use it in many settings.

Wishing you a joyful Sukkot,

Rabbi Marla Hornsten
Co-Chair, Clergy Task Force

Rabbi Ari Lorge
Co-Chair, Clergy Task Force

Lori Weinstein
CEO/Executive Director, JWI

Deborah Rosenbloom
Vice President of Programs & New Initiatives, JWI
The Goal: Conversations about Relationships

Whether you happen to be sitting in a sukkah just now or not, I’m glad you have this holiday guide in hand to help begin important conversations. Jewish holidays are a time for celebration and to pass on cherished traditions, but I also believe that holidays are times to talk about the things that matter deeply.

JWI’s Clergy Task Force on Domestic Abuse in the Jewish Community hopes this guide, Rethinking Sukkot: Women, Relationships and Jewish Texts, the third in our continuing series, will start conversations that help create clarity about what constitutes a healthy relationship. The central text for Sukkot is Kohelet, Ecclesiastes, and it is said to be written by King Solomon. One of the most familiar activities of the holiday is eating in a sukkah – an ideal setting for thought and conversation. Our commentators have chosen passages of text that call attention to three critical themes that are common to healthy relationships:

- **Inspiration:** Who or what inspires you, and are you and your partner sources of inspiration for one another?
- **Protection:** What brings you a sense of being sheltered and protected, and are you able to protect others?
- **Spiritual growth:** What, if anything, does one partner owe the other in terms of each one’s happiness and spiritual growth?

I wish you a Sukkot that allows you time to question – and to begin harvesting answers that lead to more health, safety, and wellbeing for you and those you love.

*Hag Sukkot sameakh,*

Rabbi Donna Kirshbaum

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Clergy Task Force

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FAQs and Facilitator Tips

Q: What are some of the ways this guide can be used?
A: We envision women, men, families, friends, study partners, and other sitting around tables in beautifully decorated sukkahs, eating delicious food, and engaged in discussions based on the conversations starters in the guide.

Q: Is this guide for women only?
A: No, not at all. Men are often part of the equation of a healthy relationship, and we hope they’ll join the conversation!

Q: What is the recommended amount of time for the program?
A: Forty-five minutes to an hour will allow you to introduce the guide, read one text and commentary, and begin a conversation. An hour to 1 ½ hours would allow you to select readings from each of the three themes and have substantial conversations about each of them. If the group is really engaged, you can always plan to continue the discussion at a later date.

Q: What if the group does not feel comfortable reading Hebrew texts?
A: This guide is designed to be accessible to everyone. Each text is in its original language and translated into English. Let the participants decide which language they prefer to use.

Q: What needs to be done before the discussion takes place?
A: Simply assign one person the responsibility to read the entire guide and to select the texts and commentaries that will be used for discussion. Alternatively, a more informal, free-flowing discussion may be fitting depending on the nature of the group. Either way, make sure each participant has a guide to follow.

Q: What is the format for the program?
A: Once everyone is seated, the ‘leader’ should explain the goals of the program, the themes that will be discussed, and, briefly, some reasons for sharing this resource. Participants may be asked to say or think of the name of someone in whose honor or memory they want to devote this study. Ask for volunteers to read the text and the commentary out loud. Try to ensure that everyone who wants to read has an opportunity to do so. Use the accompanying prompts to begin the conversation and encourage everyone to participate. If a prompt doesn’t lead to a vibrant conversation, move on to the next. If there is additional material to cover when the allotted time is over, then make plans to get together again.

Q: Are there guides like this one for other holidays?
A: Yes, the “Rethinking” series also includes guides for Purim, Shavuot, and Shabbat. If you have any questions, or want to share feedback, please email Deborah Rosenbloom at drosenbloom@jwi.org.

We’d love to hear from you!
Theme: Inspiration

Text • Ecclesiastes [Kohelet], attributed to King Solomon • Chapter 3: 1 – 8

לכל יום ויום לכל חפץ תחת השמים

A season is set for everything, a time for every experience under heaven.
A time for being born and a time for dying,
A time for planting and a time for uprooting the planting;
A time for slaying and a time for healing,
A time for tearing down and a time for building up;
A time for weeping and a time for laughing,
A time for wailing and a time for dancing;
A time for throwing stones and a time for gathering stones,
A time for embracing and a time for shunning embraces;
A time for seeking and a time for losing,
A time for keeping and a time for discarding;
A time for ripping and a time for sewing,
A time for silence and a time for speaking;
A time for loving and a time for hating;
A time for war and a time for peace.

[Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures, Jewish Publication Society (JPS) 1988]
Commentary by Deborah Rosenbloom

King Solomon got it right. Indeed, life includes all these different emotions and behaviors, particularly when we’re in a relationship. But he emphasizes that there is a set time for all of these experiences. My question is: how do we know what time it is?

How do we know whether it’s time to hold on or to let go? What if we’re wrong and we choose ‘to keep when we should discard,’ or ‘to uproot,’ rather than ‘to plant?’ What are the consequences of not knowing the time? What happens to our self, our partner, our relationship when we choose to be silent when it is time to speak, or when we fail to acknowledge that it is time to cry?

How can we know what time it is? By listening to the quiet voice inside each of us, the voice we’d sometimes prefer to ignore, the one that we hear in the hush of the night, in the quiet of the dawn, the voice that may be saying something different than what our friends advise, what our favorite columnist might say, or what we want to hear, but the voice that is often truest.

Trusting ourselves to know what time it is can be hard when there’s so much competing wisdom. But if we trust that like Kohelet says, there is a time for all experiences, it may make it easier to acknowledge what time it is.

Deborah Rosenbloom is the co-editor of the “Rethinking” guide series. She is the vice president of programs and new initiatives at JWI, working closely with the Clergy Task Force.

Conversations

1. To whom or to what do you turn to when you want advice about a relationship?
2. Think back to a time when you ‘listened’ to your inner voice – did it help you make the right decision? How do you know?
3. Think back to a time when you ignored your inner voice – or didn’t even hear it. Were there any consequences that could have been avoided?

Listen to The Byrds, a folk group in the 1960s, sing “Turn, Turn, Turn,” based on these words from King Solomon and music by Pete Seeger. (Find it on YouTube.)
Baruch atah Adonai...

masheev haruach umoreed hagashem.

Blessed are You, Adonai our G-d, who causes the wind to blow and the rain to fall.

Commentary by Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin

The seasons in Israel are not like the seasons in America. Even more than differing by being hot or cold, they differ by being wet or dry. The land of Israel is sustained in the winter by renewing rains that recharge her cisterns, aquifers and rivers. But she is watered in the summer by the ephemeral gift of morning dew.

On Sukkot, as we enter winter and celebrate the harvest past, we pray that G-d returns the rains to replenish the land. On Passover, as we enter summer’s dry season, and begin the hard exodus from slavery through the wilderness, we pray that G-d gives us the blessing of dew. These prayers remind us that throughout our lives, our days are punctuated now with dustings, now with rushes, of the nourishing features of life.

Sometimes our spiritual nourishment comes in gushes – when we are smothered in a rain of mother’s kisses, encircled by a warm group of friends, graced with accolades for a job well done. Other times, though, we hit hard, dry spells. Perhaps it is because we are stuck in a barren wilderness of harshness. Perhaps it is because others just don’t have time to notice. Perhaps it is because of the lonely exodus out of a dark place that we have at long last had the courage to make. It is then that the dew, the tiny drops of life-giving moisture that seem to come out of nowhere and just as quickly disappear, can best be seen for the nourishment they give. The offer of a friend to visit and listen; the peace and safety in the house late at night; the hug of a trusting, grateful child; the care of a community; the freedom to begin again.

When the season of rain is not yet here, these delicate, daily doses of dew, the blessings that seem to come from thin air especially after the darkest nights, can nourish us and remind us that we are not alone, that we can hang on, day by day, until the nourishing rains return.

Rabbi Cardin founded the Baltimore Jewish Environmental Network and the Baltimore Orchard Project, which grows and distributes food to the needy. Her publications include The Tapestry of Jewish Time: A Spiritual Guide to Holidays and Life Cycle Events and Tears of Sorrow, Seeds of Hope: a Jewish Spiritual Companion for Infertility and Pregnancy Loss. She is a member of JWI’s Clergy Task Force and received her ordination from the Jewish Theological Seminary.
Conversations

1. Think about the ‘rain’ and ‘dew’ in your life, in the life of your partner, and in the life of your relationship. Are they provided by the same sources? Do they overlap? Would your lives improve if there were more overlap, or would it be detrimental?

2. Are you and your partner able to provide both ‘rain’ and ‘dew’ for one another?

3. Can you share how you’ve sustained yourself and/or others through life’s “hard, dry spells?”

4. At the end of Sukkot comes Sh’mini Atzeret, a day on which we specifically pray for nourishing rain, the kind that penetrates to the roots of crops and grasses. Do you have roots that need rain at this time?

Text • The Zohar • Helek Gimmel, Amud 103b

The Zohar (aka Kabbalah) is the collection of mystical commentaries on the Bible.

Ye shall dwell in booths…. (Lev. 23:42) Observe that when a man sits in this abode of the shadow of faith, the Shekhinah [divine presence] spreads her wings over him from above and Abraham and five other righteous ones make their abode with him. Rabbi Abba said, “…and David with them.”

... Rab Ham’nuna the Elder, when he entered a sukkah, used to stand at the door inside and say, “Let us invite the guests... And he used to greet them, saying, “...Sit, most exalted guests, sit...” He would then raise his hands in joy and say, “Happy is our portion, happy is the portion of Israel, as it is written (Deut. 32:9), ‘For the portion of the Lord is his people” and then he took his seat.

[translation from Soncino Classics edition of the Zohar, published by Davka]
Commentary by Rabbi Sean Gorman

One delightful sukkah custom is to invite special guests [ushpizin, an Aramaic word for guests] to join us, at least in our imaginations. Traditional ushpizin were illustrious men from our tradition (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joseph, and King David) but now the list has expanded to include heroines from the Bible such as Sarah, Miriam, Hannah, Deborah, and Queen Esther. My own family has the practice of telling our flesh-and-blood dinner guests to come with their own ushpiz – their own imagined guest. We then spend time around the table introducing our ushpiz and sharing what it is about them that inspires us. Our ushpizin have included my Aunt Min, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, and Woody Guthrie. Many of our modern ushpizin would still count as giants of Jewish history; others have played smaller roles, some in our local community’s history or even in our family’s history.

With the addition of ushpizin, Sukkot becomes a holiday to tap into people as sources of inspiration. Tucked into a sukkah, we can also think about what is inspiring about the people sitting around its table and more broadly about whom we invite into our homes and choose to break bread with. Further, we have the chance to think about, and share with others, those who inspire us to be our best selves. And if we’re in a relationship with someone who does not inspire us, we can use this special time to confront that difficult fact.

Sharing a meal in a sukkah with living people – and sharing with those living people the memories of those who have inspired us – provides for the possibility of a very special type of intimacy.

Rabbi Gorman serves as the rabbi of Pride of Israel Synagogue in Toronto and is a U.S. Navy chaplain currently in reserve status. He is a member of JWI’s Clergy Task Force on Domestic Abuse in the Jewish Community.

Conversations

1. Thinking about those whom you have loved and lost, who among them most inspires you at this point in your life and why? Who and what are other sources of inspiration in difficult times?

2. Whom have you inspired? How would you most like to inspire others?

3. Who would you invite as your ushpiz for Sukkot?

4. Do you think it’s your partner’s job to inspire you to be your best self? If yes, then how do you communicate that? How do you react when you feel your partner is not doing this job?

5. What do you think makes Rabbi Ham’nuna (see accompanying text) so happy that G-d’s ‘portion’ [lot, destiny] is the Jewish people? If you share our tradition’s claim that the Jewish people have a special relationship with the divine, do you think it’s part of our job – communally or individually – to inspire G-d?

Invite sukkah guests to return another time to watch the prize-winning 2004 Israeli comedy drama, Ushpizin.
Theme: Protection

Text • Siddur • Hash’kiveinu [from the evening service]

_hashkiveinu_, Adonai Eloheinu, l’shalom, v’haamideinu malkenu l’chayim, ufros aleinu sukat sh’lomecha,

Lay us down to sleep in peace, Eternal One our G-d and raise us up to renewed life. Spread over us the shelter of Your peace.…

Commentary by Rabbi Rachel Ain

You and I belong to a tradition that, every autumn, makes a fascinating shift in its relationship to G-d. From Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur, we are meant to feel judged by G-d; we pray for forgiveness and mercy. Immediately following Yom Kippur, we begin building a sukkah, a special symbol of protected space, and our image of G-d becomes one of Protector.

Being protected, nurtured and cherished, is at odds with being judged. Our culture however is judgmental, which is often reflected in our own relationships with the people we care about. We get married under a chuppah, the wedding canopy that symbolizes our new home, and a reminder of G-d’s protection. Like the sukkah, the chuppah is open, fragile and temporary, and is a reminder that we should cherish our relationship. Although we don’t get married every day and we only build a sukkah once a year, we’re fortunate that the sukkah appears in every evening prayer service, on Shabbat and weekdays. During the Hashkiveinu prayer in which we recite the text quoted above after the extended Shema section, we ask to live under G-d’s shelter of peace (sukkah shalom). This image of G-d can be comforting as can the notion that, just as our ancestors built temporary shelters during their wilderness journey as a symbol of G-d’s protection, we still do the same in our backyards and on our balconies.

The holiday of Sukkot dares us to hold on to memories of the coziness and sweetness of sitting in a sukkah, dares us to allow ourselves to turn away from judgment and enter into partnerships based on trust and the expectation of protection. The Hashkiveinu dares us to remember all this, always – every night in fact. During this Sukkot may we be reminded of the places and people in our lives that serve as protection for us and may we find the courage to be protectors more often than judges of others.

Rabbi Ain serves as the rabbi of Sutton Place Synagogue in New York City and was a member of JWI’s Clergy Task Force on Domestic Abuse in the Jewish Community. Most recently she was the senior director for National Young Leadership of the Jewish Federations of North America. She also served as the senior rabbi of Congregation Beth Sholom-Chevra Shas, a Conservative synagogue in Syracuse, N.Y., from 2004 to 2011.
Conversations

1. How can sitting in the sukkah remind us, until the High Holidays come around again, to protect ourselves and the ones we love, rather than to be judges, critical and exacting?

2. Do you ever feel judged by your partner, rather than protected or comforted? How does that make you feel? How do you react? Do you judge yourself harshly? Why?

3. Can you share how, if you’re feeling judgmental, you manage to restrain yourself? Are you more likely to offer judgment rather than support, in some situations than others?

4. How do you or can you help create a shift toward nurture and protection?

Listen to the Hashkiveinu from Leonard Bernstein’s composition for solo cantor (tenor), mixed chorus and organ, performed at the Park Avenue Synagogue in New York in 1945; to Craig Taubman’s Hashkiveinu; and to the West Wing Hashkiveinu. (Find them on YouTube!)

Text • Ecclesiastes [Kohelet] (attributed to King Solomon)

(ב) ה블 הבכלים אמר קהלת הבל הבכלים הכל הבכל: Utter futility!—said Koheleth. Utter futility! All is futile! (Kohelet 1:2)

Only this, I have found, is a real good: that one should eat and drink and get pleasure with all the gains one makes under the sun, during the numbered days of life that G-d has given to us; for that is our portion... that is a gift from G-d. (Kohelet 5:17–18)
Commentary by Rabbis Marla Hornsten and Amy Bolton

How do we find the balance between the Book of Ecclesiastes and the Festival of Sukkot?

Reading the book of Ecclesiastes can be discouraging, leaving us with the overall feelings of disenchantment and depression. Better to go to a funeral than a party. There is, indeed, a time for every experience under heaven, including doom and war and death. Over and over again, the text begs the question, where is the meaning in life? For Kohelet says, “I have observed all the happenings beneath the sun, and I found that all is futile and the pursuit of wind.” Mirth—futile. Revelry—madness. Wealth—useless. So, where is the potential for hope?

We can in fact find hope in the sukkah itself, when we remind ourselves that the book of Ecclesiastes and the festival of Sukkot go hand in hand. Despite the cool autumn weather that sometimes accompanies this holiday, it is a festival filled with warmth, abundance and prosperity. Sukkot is even called by our Rabbis z’man simchateinu, the season of our overflowing joy. Simply being in the sukkah reminds us to take advantage of the moments we have, however fleeting, with those we love; to treasure the legacy of those who have come before us and made us who we are today. This, to quote Kohelet, “is a real good.”

Although the sukkah is a fragile structure, it nevertheless protects us, shelters us, and provides refuge. It can serve as the antidote to the hopelessness of Kohelet. The sukkah doubles as our home, or the way a home should be—a place of safety and a place where we feel cared for and loved. When we dwell in the sukkah, we can open ourselves up to the experience of G-d’s warm embrace, reminding ourselves that in fact, there is time for every experience under heaven: including a time for healing, a time for laughing, a time for dancing, and a time for peace.

Rabbi Bolton is the spiritual care counselor for Visiting Nurse Services of New York and a member of JWI’s Clergy Task Force.

Rabbi Hornsten is a rabbi at Temple Israel in West Bloomfield, Michigan, where she has been for the past 13 years. She is the co-chair of JWI’s Clergy Task Force and is also involved with domestic violence prevention work in her local community.

Conversations

1. When you are feeling hopeless or in despair (as the writer of Kohelet often seems to feel), from what or whom do you take the strength to go on? Can you share an experience of how your heart was healed after a period of hopelessness?

2. In his commentary on Ecclesiastes 5:17, the medieval scholar Rashi challenges us to be "happy with our portion." How can we do that when we face difficult, seemingly unbearable, challenges?

3. Are there possible new avenues for help and protection this year that you feel ready or almost ready to investigate? What is most likely to help you take the first step toward them?
Theme: Spiritual Growth

Text • Ecclesiastes / Kohelet 9:9

(ט) ראה חיים עם אשה אשר אהבת כל ימי חיים בלך אשר נתן לך

Enjoy happiness with a woman you love all the fleeting days of life that have been granted to you under the sun – all your fleeting days. For that alone is what you can get out of life and out for the means you acquire under the sun. [JPS translation, 2003]

Text • Kohelet Rabbah [Midrash] on 9:9
(midrash are rabbinical homiletics used to explain the text)

ראה חיים וגו, א"ר יהושע בן לוי, כל השרוי בלא אשה שרוי בלא חיים

Enjoy (lit. see) life... (Kohelet 9:9) Said R. Yehoshua ben Levi, “whoever abides without a wife abides without life, as it is written “enjoy life with a woman whom you love.”

Commentary by Rabbi David Rosenberg

Sukkot is considered to be the most joyous of the pilgrimage festivals. “You shall rejoice in your festival…you shall have nothing but joy” (Deut. 16:14-15). Ecclesiastes [Kohelet] the biblical book associated with Sukkot, finds happiness in the context of intimacy: “Enjoy happiness with a woman you love all the fleeting days of life that have been granted to you under the sun...” (Eccl. 9:9). Other biblical verses similarly proclaim, “it is not good for the human to be alone” (Gen. 2:18) and “you shall rejoice with your household” (Deut. 14:26).

The teachers of midrash cannot find joy outside marriage: “Any [man] who does not have a wife abides without goodness...without joy, without blessing...” (Kohelet Rabba ch. 9). In his Torah Temimah, Rabbi Baruch Epstein (d. 1941) wonders why this passage does not positively celebrate the joy of one who is married (comment to Eccl. 9:9, note 33). Rabbi Epstein then suggests an answer. While a caring spouse can pave the way to joy, a bad spouse will embitter the life of his or her partner. Even the pursuit of happiness can become futile, selfish, destructive. Sukkot serves as an antidote. The ‘festival’ par excellence teaches that joy results when we gladden those whom we love and to whom we are responsible (Eccl. 9:9 and Deut. 16:14).

Rabbi Rosenberg is the coordinator of Jewish educational services and liaison to the Orthodox Jewish community for Jewish Child and Family Services in Chicago. He is an active member of JCARES, the Jewish Community Abuse Resources, Education and Solutions of Chicago and of JWI’s Clergy Task Force on Domestic Abuse in the Jewish Community.
Conversations

1. Does happiness mean the same thing to you and your spouse? How do you know? Can you share a special way you’ve made those whom you love happy?

2. Because “joy is not a simple matter” and “even the pursuit of happiness can become futile, selfish, destructive,” how can we maintain a sense of joy in our relationships that is unique and exciting and continue to search for joy with optimism and hope?

3. Think about ways you can use this holiday to reflect on any bitterness in your life and then commit to changing it.

Commentary by Rabbi Donna Kirshbaum

“How life with a woman you love all the days of your life… “ The beginning of this verse from Kohelet, the traditional text read on Sukkot, certainly sounds upbeat, even romantic. Then we come to the rest of it: “all the days of your life of hevel [often translated as vanity or emptiness] that have been given to you under the sun….”

Enjoying-life-with-someone-you-love-throughout-your-empty-life certainly fits the gloomy reputation of Kohelet, which, our tradition holds, was written by King Solomon near the end of his complicated life. In fact the two main ideas usually associated with Kohelet’s overall tone of despair are both repeated twice in this verse – hevel [emptiness] and tachat ha’shemesh [under the sun, known to many from Kohelet’s first chapter, “there’s nothing new under the sun”].

But might there not be a more positive way to understand Kohelet’s emphasis on emptiness [hevel] and the idea that there is nothing new under the sun [v’ain kol-hadash tachat ha’shemesh]? Hevel could be translated literally, i.e., as ‘steam’ or ‘water vapor’, symbolizing things that we see and know to be real but that soon disappear, like the breath we exhale on a cold day. Further, in this hopeful view, we may choose to re-interpret the phrase “under the sun” (repeated 29 times, in fact, in Kohelet’s twelve brief chapters) as a reminder that something also exists above the sun. Thus, even during our own brief lives we can make a connection with something eternal – as long as we don’t become preoccupied with things that last only for a while and then disappear, such as possessions that clutter our lives and claim too much of our attention.

*R I am indebted to Yaakov Astor for elaborating on this approach to Kohelet at aish.com

Rabbi Kirshbaum is a member of JWI’s Clergy Task Force on Domestic Abuse in the Jewish Community and is the project manager and co-editor of its holiday guides. She served as rabbi of the Reconstructionist Congregation String of Pearls in Princeton, N.J. for five years before making aliyah in 2013. She is a contributor to the Project S.A.R.A.H. website and to A Guide to Jewish Practice: Everyday Living, a winner of the 2011 National Jewish Book Awards in the category of Contemporary Jewish Life and Practice.
Conversations

1. If you feel an ‘above-the-sun’ spiritual connection with your intimate partner, please share how you created that connection and how it is maintained. If you don’t feel such a connection, do you miss having a spiritual bond? Does your partner? If so, what can you do together to develop that connection?

2. Many of us own more ‘things’ than we can ever use. Do you think that an overabundance of possessions is an obstacle to a positive relationship with a partner? If so, what might be some ways to reduce the hevel in our lives and create relationships that aim ‘above the sun’? If not, discuss how possessions can be used to create positive connections.

3. In chapter seven, verse 28, Kohelet yearns for a deep and lasting connection with another human being, thus dropping us a hint about where such a taste of eternity could come from. Taking that hint, how do we ourselves create and then sustain a connection that feels eternal?
Acting on Our Learning

1. Ask your friends to save their etrogs and invite them to your kitchen for an etrog cooking fest. Some ideas include a salad with etrog juice in place of lemon juice, etrog marmalade, etrog bundt cake, or, if you’re really in the mood for a party, prepare some etrog liqueur. Recipes can be found at www.jwmag.org and other websites.

With its curvy shape, much like the shape of a woman, the fragrant etrog that we use on Sukkot is a symbol of fertility, a symbol of beauty, and a delicious fruit. “A midrash suggests the etrog, not the apple, was the forbidden fruit Eve ate in the Garden of Eden. Because the pain of childbirth was Eve’s punishment, it is a tradition for a Jewish woman to bite off the tip of the etrog on the last day of Sukkot, then give charity and say a prayer: ‘Rescue me that I may give birth with ease, and without pain, and that neither I nor my child suffer any harm.’ A woman in labor may also bite off the pitom (the tip of the etrog) and place it under her pillow to ease the pain; expectant mothers may make etrog jam… and eat it on the 15th of Shevat, the New Year for Trees, in hopes of an easy delivery. Russian Jewish women often sent a gift of etrog marmalade to a new mother.” By Aliza Green, September 2010, “Etrog: A Holiday Fruit Filled with Flavor and Female Symbolism,” Jewish Woman magazine, at www.jwmag.org.

2. Watch the Israeli movie Ushpizin (2004); it’s all about relationships. Invite some friends over to watch the movie together, enjoy etrog treats, read through this guide and use the conversation starters to discuss your relationships.

3. Support JWI’s National Library Initiative (NLI), an ambitious undertaking to establish 100 children’s libraries in homeless and battered women’s shelters across the United States. Books, teddy bears, rocking chairs – these simple items can turn a battered women’s shelter into a ‘Sukkat Shalom’ for children!

There are many ways to support the NLI, which is made possible by a partnership of dedicated volunteers, businesses and corporations:

- **Start a new library** in your own community or anywhere in the United States.
- **Hold a fundraiser** to restock bookshelves as a Library Ambassador. (This makes a great mitzvah project).
- **Make a donation** to enable JWI to open libraries in shelters on our waiting list.

For a woman fleeing an abusive relationship, the immediacy of danger often means leaving home with only her children and the clothes on their backs. To help ease this traumatic upheaval, the NLI transforms a basic shelter space into a library complete with furniture, hundreds of books, a computer and various comfort items – and it quickly becomes both an educational resource and a safe haven for the youngest victims of domestic violence.
Jewish Women International is the leading Jewish organization working to end violence against women and girls domestically and internationally. JWI’s multifaceted advocacy focuses on the Violence Against Women Act and the International Violence Against Women Act while JWI’s healthy relationship and financial literacy programs help girls realize the full potential of their personal strength. JWI convenes the Clergy Task Force on Domestic Abuse in the Jewish Community and the Interfaith Domestic Violence Coalition, which advocates at the national level for anti-violence legislation.