



**To Thine Own Self Be True: Authenticity and Spirituality
in the Modern Orthodox Classroom**
by: Ms. Chana Krasnjanski

My teaching career has spanned 15 years, nearly all those years spent in Orthodox day schools, particularly high schools. The irony of my career is that I have remained teaching in religious institutions as my life choices have led me further away from the practice of my faith and traditional practice. I've self-consciously carried the weight of this knowledge in all those years and within all the different classrooms I've occupied, from a Chassidic school to a Syrian community to a Modern Orthodox environment. My subconscious and perhaps irrational mind speculated that my very presence was a problem because it represented a rebellion against the various schools' mission statements. Consequently, I assumed my life choices were something which should, perhaps, remain hidden because of how they challenged the schools' values. I joined the Machon Siach spirituality focus group because it felt like due time to shift my self-consciousness away from burdened awareness to a more deliberate integration of place and identity. This shift would naturally include an examination of my self-consciousness because I suspected it was cobbled together by assumption and innuendo but not cemented by anything concrete.

I have come to realize during my tenure at SAR high school that my question, which I thought personal and perhaps unique in my school, is actually relevant not just to myself as a teacher. I believe there is value in exploring divergent spiritual beliefs and practices within a mission-driven school because the question is applicable to students as well.

What should a student do who attends a Modern Orthodox Yeshiva, placed there likely by their parents, only to discover an emerging spiritual identity that doesn't neatly align with the school's values? How much room exists to explore gently divergent or even more strikingly clashing identities? Should we make room for these voices? And, most importantly of all, is there even value for teachers or students to bring their spiritual identities into the classroom, or should the academic experience remain separate from a spiritual experience?

In the paper below, I explore why authenticity is crucial in the high school classroom and why spirituality has to be a part of that authentic expression, focusing on the secular studies classroom.¹ I will explore the value of doing so and present its challenges, especially as regards the conflict borne from a teacher and/or student not identifying with the school's mission statement. My goal is to highlight the value of bringing authenticity in the classroom and, by extension, spirituality into a secular classroom, a spirituality that embraces students' unique diversity while supporting the true values of the school's mission. I conclude this paper by considering several practical ways to bring spirituality into concrete lesson plans.

Though (often) little more than a few walls and some desks, a classroom is one of the most exciting spaces in the world. Magic happens in a classroom, mysterious and deep like the transformation from chrysalis to butterfly or embryo to human. While this magic is sometimes captured tangibly, most of the magic is invisible to the eye. We are, each of us, a soul in a body, perfection wrapped in layers of imperfection, completion housed in a work in progress. The engineer of our transformation and the pioneer of our individual band of assets is our mind. Yes, the heart is a crucial player in this process, but the mind is

¹ The classrooms in a Yeshiva day school devoted to Judaic studies are more confined to Halakhic practice, Jewish text study, and traditionally accepted forms of observance; consequently, they are outside the scope of this paper.

at the forefront and often immediately linked to our hearts. The classroom is, therefore, so much more than a venue to transmit technical knowledge. It is where we glimpse the gates that keep us trapped in ourselves and open them to welcome new and more expansive vistas. I've now spent multiple decades in a classroom, and it never loses its thrill, whether I am in the student's chair or behind the teacher's desk.

Within the confines of this magical space, the teacher's role is crucial. In fact, the magic emerges feebly or not at all depending on who stands in the front of that room. The first and, perhaps, most important step in bridging the gap between rote learning and true connection to learning is for the teacher to bring the entirety of him/herself into the classroom. Parker Palmer, an innovative educator who advocates for authentic learning, simplifies the complexity of what makes for good teaching to one thing: whether a teacher enters with an authentic identity or a manufactured persona.² Learning is more than simply collecting and incorporating new information; it is the absorption and transformation, which occurs internally where mind and heart meet. Teachers need to model this for students, but, even more than that, teachers will transmit what is located at the nexus of their mind and heart, so care must be taken to keep those meeting points transparent and present.

According to Palmer, we cannot teach without bringing our personal lives into the classroom. Our identities, as well as our vulnerabilities, have to find a way to be expressed in our classrooms. Aryeh Ben David clarifies that, within the parameters of the classroom, "Being vulnerable is not 'letting it all hang out.' It is not sharing with boundaries; it is having the courage to acknowledge our imperfections and to bring them, as part of our whole

² Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*, 10.

self, into everything we do, including into our classroom.”³ Nothing snaps a moment into the present or makes things more “real” than when we openly acknowledge our fears, uncertainties, or mistakes. Sharing those moments with our students transforms the classroom into a living, breathing space. Students witness authentic living and can learn from those moments, or even simply gain trust in their teachers. Best of all is when students can let themselves be vulnerable and make space for their own authentic experiences in the classroom.

We must be awake to our “inner lives” in order to be authentic. This is an ongoing and often challenging but necessary practice. Sometimes this means we are simply turning an ear towards our inner thoughts and feelings; other times, we need to reclaim our lost selves. We aren’t automatons or split beings, so we bring our mental state with us wherever we go; therefore, it is best if we work towards integration. While that is a lifelong task and a challenging practice often beset with setbacks, it is the striving that is crucial. This doesn’t mean that we share private⁴ information about ourselves but that we acknowledge who we are, what we believe, and what we are experiencing in the classroom.

One personal topic which comes up with my students is my past, though not every class will ask me about it, and what sparks the conversation can vary. Sometimes a student hears a rumor from another class, or they recognize that my name sounds Orthodox. Other times students stumble across my name online, a name I share with my sister-in-law who runs a local Chabad House. What also differs between groups of students is which details intrigue them and pique their curiosity. Is it the experience of dressing with extreme modesty? Simply the fact that I altered my life? Or is it the cultural

³ Aryeh Ben David, *Becoming a Soulful Educator: How to Bring Jewish Learning from Our Minds to Our Hearts, to Our Souls - and into Our Lives*, 17.

⁴ I distinguish the personal from the private; the former is suitable, while the latter is not.

knowledge I am privy to due to my upbringing? I am mindful of how I share my history because I have a responsibility to the school's value system. I can share, for example, that I was raised Lubavitch and was married while a member of that community, all information which can be found online. However, what I do not share and what my students do not know are my reasons for leaving that community and my subsequent attitudes towards my former community. That I altered my path is an elemental aspect of myself, and I cannot shed it when I walk into the building without paying the price of losing my authentic self.

Having been asked numerous times by students about my past affiliations because of something they saw online, I can speak to the potential bonding that is presented in those moments. If I want to encourage openness, I cannot shut down that conversation. In fact, every time I have engaged in conversation about my past, my students and I have grown closer, and the environment has subsequently shifted to a more trusting space, both in that moment and moving forward. One year, for example, a group of boys clustered daily in the front of the classroom, intrigued by my history. These boys were themselves from more religious homes or interested in becoming more devout on their own. When they learned I can read and understand Yiddish and know niggunim, all vestiges of a life reminiscent of the "old country," they suddenly saw me as an access point to a burgeoning interest of their own which they didn't find commonly mirrored in their Modern Orthodox classroom. Ongoing conversations included discussion of Yiddish and Chassidic music and general Chassidic lifestyle. Their interest, however, wasn't one sided and merely an expression of students' curiosity to better know their teacher; I could see how these students longed to tap deeper into their own heritage. Coincidentally, around this time, I had Shabbat lunch with a young man who was a religious Yiddishist and had

his own history with teaching others Yiddish and Chassidic music. I approached the boys shortly thereafter about starting a Yiddish club, to which they responded positively, and a new club was born. I felt the reverberations of this one conversation throughout the rest of the year because the students *saw* me, and I *saw them in return*. This visibility translated into a closeness which allowed me to be a better teacher and work closely with them on their writing because of the mutual trust that had sprung up between us.

Other times, the conversation takes a different turn, and the focus can be on the personal transformation. In fact, that same year, a group of girls from another class had numerous questions about my journey. They were struggling with finding their voices because they widely diverged from those around them, including in school and with family. One girl in particular came over after class to discuss her struggle with balancing her need to find her own way while remaining embraced by the family she loves. She, however, was not seeking to become closer to her faith but distancing from it, releasing its strong hold on her life. Again, a personal conversation had lasting effects on our classroom dynamics because we worked closely together. Perhaps it isn't surprising that I was asked to write letters of recommendation for a number of these students.

Teaching is a transactional process that is meant to be transformative for both the teacher and the student. Transformation cannot happen unless one is "open" to the moment. If we hide ourselves beneath shields of protection and an identity manufactured by our fears or in the shape of others, then we lose our ability to connect - to ourselves, our students, our material. Connectedness plays a crucial role in the classroom because, like vulnerability, it creates a vibrant space alive to the moment. At any given moment in a classroom, there is the intersectionality of student, teacher, and material. How a teacher is present to him/herself while s/he is simultaneously present to the student, all while

interacting around a given text or topic, sets the experience for the classroom. The more a teacher is connected within, the better the teacher is at connecting with the students, and the more everyone together can meet over the material. This is an important quality of a teacher since a teacher's "power is in their capacity to awaken a truth within us, a truth we can reclaim years later by recalling their impact on our lives."⁵ Teaching includes acquisition of knowledge and particular skills, but it is truly enriching when something deeper shifts or opens inside as the students encounter new ideas. The more what we learn resonates deep within us, the longer lasting the impression will be.

Students, in particular, benefit from a classroom environment that operates on authenticity and the personal because adolescence is a time dedicated to growth and self-discovery. Modeling how to identify one's voice and seamlessly bring it into the moment, then asking them to do the same, either via class discussion or the work done in class, helps the students in their personal as well as academic growth.

For the magic of teaching to happen, a classroom must be safe. Demonstrating openness and authenticity to the students, a teacher signals that students can do the same. Within those parameters, one of the most crucial aspects of freedom has to be freedom of knowledge. Nothing is as toxic to a wholesome learning environment as when ideas or questions are considered verboten. I was raised in a tightly controlled community and first taught at a Chabad girls' high school, so I have seen up close how noxious energy leaches out and taints the environment when something is marked as *forbidden*. The results were counterproductive as well because labeling something as verboten only enhances its allure. Unfortunately, such forbiddenness is also the quickest way to send

⁵ Palmer, 21.

someone down a dangerous path by shutting down honest inquiry. The harmful effects are, therefore, both personal and intellectual.

In contrast, Modern Orthodox day schools are uniquely positioned, of all Orthodox day schools, to welcome many lines of inquiry, and the learning environment can be warm and welcoming; they are uniquely positioned to honor the authentic presentation of both teacher and student, which allows for truly engaging teaching. Modern Orthodoxy approaches self-identity with greater balance because it embraces Jewish *and* secular aspects of a person's life. What is a warring battle for other Orthodox communities is a rich dialogue for the Modern Orthodox. Questions themselves are no longer a threat. In fact, SAR has taken this a step further and concretized this practice, even institutionalized it. *The Grand Conversation* takes place formally and informally at school, within classrooms and at assemblies, amongst peers and between faculty and students. It is one of the unique aspects of the school, born from Rabbi Harcsztark's thoughtful and creative pedagogical approach. The results of this dialogue can be broader, as well, by dismantling or reducing, at least, the lure of the *forbidden*. Ironically, to keep to a path, a person should simultaneously see which other paths run alongside it. Once again, the personal, the intellectual, and the spiritual all come together in the classroom, modeled by the teacher for the students.

If students and teachers alike should bring their authentic selves into the classroom, then spirituality is not far behind. The search for the "why" and deeper meaning of things is part and parcel of the striving for authenticity. Within the parameters of this paper, I define spirituality in the loosest sense of the word, as "the search for meaning and purpose that lies beyond the self but includes relationships with self, others, and/or ultimate reality or

ground of being.”⁶ This definition encompasses a belief, however nebulous, in “the beyond,” whether of the self or a godhead, which translates into a mindset that sees meaning or purpose in life experiences beyond the immediate. Whether there are attendant rituals or physical behavior to ground this “spiritual” approach can vary, with the more “secular” approach less concerned with practical manifestations and the more “religious” approach believing in their necessity. This paper embraces a hybrid definition of spirituality, understanding that the “search for the beyond” is best supported by grounding practices in behavior, though the specific attendant rituals may be selected for personal meaning and are not collectively instated or practiced. Authenticity in the classroom will, therefore, prompt a search for deeper meaning because, at least in a secular studies classroom, its expression can be freed from more limited definitions.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that addressing spirituality enhances the overall classroom experience. For example, a study of 339 participants who attended southeastern US universities revealed how spirituality leads to connectedness, a feeling teenagers need as they navigate their self-exploration.⁷ Furthermore, “spirituality contributes to the development of positive character, including maturity, work ethics, and healthy self-confidence.”⁸ On a personal level, incorporating spirituality *in* the classroom can lead to vital support *outside* the classroom. The public schools of New South Wales, Australia aimed to address the overall student’s well being since studies have “noted a serious decline in the mental health of modern youth...and some indications [it] is related to lack in spiritual well being.”⁹ The study was born from data culled from previous studies which “found that spirituality may play a role in how people experience and deal with

⁶ Dr. Joan Letendre, et al., “Teaching Spirituality in the Classroom: Building Compassionate and Non-Judgemental Conversations with Students”, 8.

⁷ “Exploring Spiritual Needs in the Classroom - Implications for Educators”, 13.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ Suzanne Schwebel, “Spirituality and Wellbeing: Primary Teacher and School Counsellor Perspectives”, 5.

difficult life situations.”¹⁰ It also references previous works, which concluded that those with “spiritual strivings were also found to have a greater purpose in life, better life satisfaction and higher levels of wellbeing,” aside from having greater mental health and “coping ability.”¹¹ For Rachel Kessler, the director of The Institute for Social and Emotional Learning and author of *The Soul of Education*, adolescence as a time of self-exploration only emphasizes the core questions that underlie a spiritual mindset, and if those fundamental questions aren’t answered, “they can turn inward, becoming toxic and explosive.”¹² Working closely with teenagers to sort through their questions and doubts, Kessler found this synthesis helped teenagers find balance in their lives and the means to integrate the different aspects of their identity.¹³

The entire adolescent experience, marked mainly as a time for individuation, is essentially a spiritual endeavor: the drive to understand what is beyond the surface, to make sense of oneself and the world around him/her.¹⁴ The development of metacognition is another key factor of adolescence, the ability to even question how one thinks. Meeting these evolving abilities is crucial for the student’s growth as a person; since a student’s well-being is inextricably linked with his/her success in school, it is incumbent upon teachers to address the student holistically. While self-development is a life-long pursuit, adolescence is, for many, the onset of carving out a path to the pinnacle of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs: self-actualization. This term can be understood using a spiritual framework to mean our deepest and most authentic selves. Maslow himself has

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² Laura Jones, “What Does Spirituality in Education Mean?”, 4.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ Lisa Miller, *The Spiritual Child: The New Science on Parenting for Health and Lifelong Thriving*, 235.

“referenced the ... incorporation of spiritual concerns into daily life in his book, *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences*.”¹⁵

Before I share practical lesson plans, I want to outline three general ways spirituality could be brought into the secular classroom, particularly the English classroom: (a) to further probe the text/author through the lens of spiritual identity; (b) to enable students’ self-reflection regarding their own values; (c) to import Biblical or traditionally theological allusions and juxtapose them with the literary examples. A good place to start when bringing spirituality into the classroom is in the way one reads a text. Are the characters on a journey of growth to learn something beyond themselves? Perhaps a character is stumbling through the dark by the lack of depth and meaning? Another thing to consider is authors themselves and how they imprint onto the story, whether consciously or otherwise. A text could also be a springboard for students’ personal exploration, how particular themes relate to their own lives. The third is the most obvious of connections, which is to explore a text via Biblical or other theological framing. My sample lesson plans below combine all three aspects, with the first sample focusing on the first option, the second sample combining the second and third options, and the third sample focusing exclusively on the second option.

The longer I am in the classroom, the more convinced I am of the value for authentic self-expression because I have also learned that disagreement does not have to breed conflict. Edward R. Murrow may have spoken his words in an entirely different context, but the wisdom is ubiquitous: “We must not confuse dissent with disloyalty.” The discussions born from disagreements are sometimes the richest conversations we have, so I no longer shy away from them. In a similar vein, I no longer shy away from my given

¹⁵ Dr. Russell G. Yocum, et. al., 2.

name. There were years when I resented “Chana” because it pegged me, whether I wanted to be “outed” or not. It also offered me cover and cowardice when I didn’t have the stomach to engage in my journey and wanted to “pass,” only ready for passive acceptance, not true reconciliation. I have used the past decade to actively work towards integrating my past and present selves so I can live authentically and harmoniously. I’ve now embraced my name; I’ve made peace within myself and embraced the dialogue it elicits, and I aim to bring that same authenticity to my classroom and my students.

Lesson Plan Bundle #1

Title: *The Catcher in the Rye*

Author: J. D. Salinger

Companion text: Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*
Method of Incorporating Spirituality: Reading a text with a spiritual lens

Objective: Salinger's own experiences in WWII splintered him by shattering his faith in himself and humanity, so the story he was working on which featured Holden Caulfield morphed into something more profound and lengthier, becoming the famous novel students continue to read. What could be read as a humorous tale of a teenage boy 'smarter' than everyone else who figured out the best kept secret - life is full of phonies - is actually a profoundly tragic story of a boy who never confronted his grief for the loss of his brother. This, however, is not where the story ends because this unresolved grief is a mirror for Salinger's own unresolved trauma from his experiences in WWII. The outlines for the following lessons give shape to these layers and explore the significance for having meaning in one's life. Pain is hard to accept and/or release when nothing makes sense.

To better understand Salinger, students will read Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* after we've finished discussing *Catcher in the Rye*. We will spend a few days discussing Frankl's work alone to make sure the core concepts are understood. Afterwards, we will apply Frankl's perspective to Salinger and see if probing his psyche will open the novel further.

Lesson 1-2:

Do Now - Journal entry to begin the discussion.

Journal #1

What are your thoughts on the book? Free write your impressions. (*What did you like? What stood out to you? What are you still thinking about? What is your takeaway?*)

Discussion Day 1 - Round Circle - Everyone sharing their favorite passages

Discussion Day 2 - Key aspects of the book

Lesson 3:

Follow up to our discussion will be another journal entry to reflect on our discussion and anticipate tomorrow's discussion, which will relate Frankl back to Salinger.

Journal #2

How do you think Frankl's account relates back to *Catcher in the Rye*? (There is no right or wrong answer, so write freely.)

Lesson 4:

Task: Students will read an excerpt of a *Vanity Fair* article that discusses Salinger's biography and the shaping of his novel. After, they will answer the questions attached.

Questions:

1. What was Salinger's experience like at the Battle of Normandy?

2. Salinger had to capture and turn in a Nazi collaborator in France, but things didn't go as planned. How do you think Salinger may have felt at the turn of events?
3. After the war, Salinger was part of the first battalions to enter Germany. What did he witness, and how was he impacted by it?
4. According to the article, why did Salinger focus on the chaplain's character in "The Magic Foxhole"?
5. Approximately, for how long did Salinger work on *Catcher in the Rye*? In what form was *Catcher in the Rye* originally? How did it change, and why is this change significant?
6. Why did Salinger write all through the war? What did it offer him?
7. Now, in light of the article, what do you think Salinger meant by the title, *Catcher in the Rye*? What is his message/purpose?

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ifwSipvmSuvAm7zahpVYaNqVpF47CMj02m75LacCkgA/edit>

Lesson 5: To follow up on our discussion and take it a step further, students will select one of the following.

Journal #3

Select **ONE** of the options below to write a **1-1.5** page reflection on J. D. Salinger after having completed Viktor Frankl's book on his survival of Auschwitz.

Option I:

This option has you directly analyzing Holden through the lens of Frankl's book. Frankl discusses the importance of *love* in one's life, the need for *purpose*, and the necessity for *apathy*. Select **ONE** emotion/drive, explain it, then trace its presence or absence from Holden's life and its effect on him.

Option II:

This option has you consider J. D. Salinger's war experience and how that influenced the shaping of his novel. Select **one** of the following prompts.

- 1) What mark did the war leave on him? How do you see it manifested in the novel?
- 2) Who do you think represents Salinger in the novel? How so?

Lesson 6: Discuss the journal entries and see how we can wrap up the novel by better understanding Salinger. I would likely answer the question below on the board and then chart the characters like this.

Salinger - What did he struggle with in the war?

	Holden	DB	Allie	Phoebe
Salinger - How are aspects of him in these characters?				
Salinger - Who is he in the novel?				

Lesson Plan Bundle #2

Title: *The Great Gatsby*

Author: F. Scott Fitzgerald

Companion Text: James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*

Method of Incorporating Spirituality: Interweaving Biblical concepts with literature

Objective: I use the companion text as a platform for the students to reflect on their own spiritual beliefs that are raised by the novel. Each day will begin with a journal entry to be followed by class discussion.

Day 1:

Journal Entry 1: Does saying in our tefillot that “You [G-d] chose us from amongst the nations of the world” breed a dangerous elitism? Why or why not?

Consider a question below if you need more guidance:

- Is this an elitist attitude as we look out upon the world?
- Is this a greater responsibility upon us as we look inward?
- Does it come with humility?
- Does it come with greater wisdom?

Day 2:

Journal Entry 2: How is your life enriched by having a hyphenated identity?

Discussion: Below is a quote by Randolph Bourne who, early in the twentieth century, wrote about America’s uniqueness as a country of immigrants and how to deal with the differences amongst the many people who live here.

We will discuss what the quote means, how the students see/experience this in their own lives, and then how it pertains to the characters.

“Assimilation, in other words, instead of washing out the memories of Europe, made them more and more intensely real... What we emphatically do not want is that these distinctive qualities should be washed out into a tasteless, colorless fluid of uniformity. Already we have far too much of this insipidity,—masses of people who are cultural half- breeds, neither assimilated Anglo-Saxons nor nationals of another culture... America is a unique sociological fabric, and it bespeaks poverty of imagination not to be thrilled at the incalculable potentialities of so novel a union of men. To seek no other goal than the weary old nationalism,—belligerent, exclusive, inbreeding, the poison of which we are witnessing now in Europe,—is to make patriotism a hollow sham, and to declare that, in spite of our boastings, America must ever be a follower and not a leader of nations.” (Randolph Bourne)

Day 3:

Journal Entry 3: The Torah enumerates many, many times that we must be empathetic to the stranger since we were once “a stranger in a foreign land.” An example: “You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the soul of the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Ex.23:9).

For this entry, you can answer one of the following questions:

1. What does it mean to you in your life to be kind to strangers?
2. The Torah wants us to remember that we carry within ourselves an ability to be “other” or “stranger” in a strange land. You can either reflect how you experience “otherness,” or you can reflect on the value for why it is important to carry this awareness close to our hearts.

It may be easiest to answer this by thinking about the following: How important is it to you to belong? What price are you willing to pay for social acceptance? Is there a price to pay that is too high?

Discussion: How is the narrator a stranger in a strange land? How does he extend kindness to others? How does he make himself at home?

Resources: Below are examples of where the Torah states that we must be kind to “strangers.”

“You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt”(Ex.22:20).

“You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the soul of the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Ex.23:9).

“The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Lev.19:34).

“You too must befriend the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Deut.10:19)

“You shall not hate an Egyptian, for you were a stranger in his land” (Deut.23:8).

Day 4:

Journal Entry 4: We are induced daily to remember that we were slaves in Egypt. For example, Talmudic statements like the following appear in daily prayers: “In every generation one must look upon himself as if he personally had gone out of Egypt” (Pesachim 116b). While this was a prelude for the birth of a Jewish nation, how can this daily injunction have a metaphoric meaning? What does it mean for you today to be in slavery? What in your life has a strong hold over you? Read the passage below and write about how you are “enslaved” and what it would mean for you to be “liberated.”

“*Mitzrayim*, the Hebrew word for “Egypt,” means “boundaries” and “narrow straits.” On the spiritual level, the journey from Egypt is a journey from the boundaries that limit us---an exodus from the narrow straits of habit, convention and ego to the “good broad land”of infinite potential implicit in the divine essence of the human soul.

Discussion: We reviewed what the students wrote.

Resources: The following is the full quote from which the excerpt is taken. “*Mitzrayim*, the Hebrew word for “Egypt,” means “boundaries” and “narrow straits.” On the spiritual level, the journey from Egypt is a journey from the boundaries that limit us---an exodus from the narrow straits of habit, convention and ego to the “good broad land”of infinite potential

implicit in the divine essence of the human soul. And the journey from *Mitzrayim* is a perpetual one: what is expansive and uninhibited by yesterday's standards, is narrow and confining in light of the added wisdom and new possibilities of today's station. Thus, each of life's journeys is an exodus "from the land of *Mitzrayim*": having transcended yesterday's limitations, a person must again journey from the *Mitzrayim* that his present norm represents relative to his newly-uncovered potential. In the words of our sages, "in every generation, and every day, a person is obligated to see himself as having today exited Egypt."

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/298376/jewish/Narrow-Escape.htm

FOOTNOTES: 1. [Exodus 3:8](#), *et al.*; 2. Talmud, Pesachim 116b, as quoted in Tanya, ch. 47 (the Tanya adds the words "and every day" and "today").

Lesson Plan Bundle #3

Title: *The Great Gatsby; Hey, Kiddo; and Fences*

Author: F. Scott Fitzgerald; Jarrett Krocuska; and August Wilson

Method of Incorporating Spirituality: Self-Reflection

Background: While it is important to develop our close reading and analytical skills, it is also important to develop our self-reflection reflexes. Over the course of this unit, you will be tasked to write personal reflections selected from the topics below. These topics were culled from the books we've been reading, so it is an opportunity to examine these themes from a new angle.

Task: Select 2 of the topics below and write a 1.5 page reflection each (*double spaced*) answering the prompts provided. *These entries are not contingent on the text of the play we are reading, so you can write them at any point over the course of the unit.*

Expectations:

* I am grading these for the level of thought you bring to these topics.

* The writing should be clear and developed, but they are still somewhat informal in writing and organization.

* These journal entries are personal, so you can use “I” as needed.

* You can bring in any of the novels we read in case you want to use them as further support.

Topics:

- 1) According to Nick, being grateful for his upbringing was meant to cultivate in him the habit of listening to others and suspending judgment. Is being a listener something you value in your life? If so, has it proven to be something helpful and fulfilling, or has listening proven to be problematic as it was for Nick? (There is a way to explore this without revealing information about others. See me if you are feeling stuck.)
- 2) *The Great Gatsby*, *Hey, Kiddo*, and *Fences* all focus on the impact (or lack thereof) of fathers/grandfathers. Use this reflection to explore what is particularly unique about the role of a father in contradistinction to a mother. Your reflection could be based on something you’ve experienced or witnessed.
- 3) *The Great Gatsby*, *Hey, Kiddo*, and *Fences* have all been about characters who faced challenges and surmounted them (or attempted to). What kind of challenges have you faced and overcome? Please select one and explore: what it was and how you overcame it. Did something or someone in particular aid you? Was it something inside of yourself?
- 4) *The Great Gatsby*, born from Fitzgerald’s own tormented relationship with money, presented wealth as something worth yearning for. In particular, it was meant to be Gatsby’s ticket into an exclusive society. In this entry, consider if wealth and material possessions are a valid way to determine a person’s value or standing.