

WOMEN'S LEAGUE FOR CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM

International Day of Study

JEWISH FAMILY TREE

Introduction

This International Day of Study of *Megillat Kohelet* features a special Judaic arts component to bring together adults and children. You will have the opportunity to create a family tree heirloom that includes your family history and the traditional blessings for children recited on *Shabbat* evening. We are suggesting that you consider making a family tree that shows three generations of your family enhanced with a blessing in micrography—small decorative script—in either Hebrew or English. Please use the short study texts to set the tone and provide background about micrography and family genealogy.

California Jewish educator, Gail G. Kogen, has designed a stylized tree which you can use to make your family tree. She has given us two models: a family tree outlined with the blessings recited to children on *Shabbat* and a plain tree around which you can inscribe your own blessing.

Blessing for Children

Enclosed are the blessings for boys and for girls. Each blessing is the length of one line. The blessing for boys is in the upper half of the enclosure. The blessing for girls in the lower half of the enclosure. The blessings have been repeated so that you can cut them line by line and use them individually or you can repeat the cut lines to surround the edge of the tree.

There are several ideas for other blessings that can be used. Consider the following:

Proverbs 17:6 Grandchildren are the crown of their elders, and the joy of children is their parents.

Psalm 145:4 One generation shall laud Your works to another and declare Your mighty acts.

Psalm 67:2 May God be gracious to us and bless us. May He show us His favor.

(These translations are from the Jewish Publication Society's *Tanakh*. You may use the English translation or go to the *Tanakh* for the Hebrew.)

You may create a blessing in your own words. Here is a sample.

May good fortune walk beside you.
May love support you.
May warm memories cheer you.
May happiness fill your heart.

Directions for Making the Tree, Using Micrography

Materials

Duplicated copies of the two sample tree designs
Micrography sentences
Scissors
Glue stick
“Sharpie” fine point pens, black ink and colored inks
Colored pencils or markers
Ruler

Preparations

1. Ask participants to bring with them a list of family member names, dates of birth (and death), country of origin, spouse’s name, names of children.
2. Duplicate enough copies of the sample designs so that each participant has the two sample trees.
3. Duplicate enough copies of the children’s blessing so that people have at least one copy.
4. Should the participants choose to create their own blessing or should they choose to use one of the suggested lines from *Proverbs* or *Psalms* either prepare the lines in advance of the session or have the participants write the line or lines that they choose in the smallest script they can manage and on a sheet of paper that will then be cut into strips.
5. Prepare and display a sample that has the three generations shown in the interior of the tree.

Getting Started

1. Distribute the materials.
2. Let each participant choose which tree design he or she will use. Children who are in the session with a parent or other adult should participate in making the choice.
3. Encourage the participants to use the colored pencils or markers to color the tree and give it dimension, e.g. they may wish to show the tree in bloom or with branches. Further, they may wish to decorate the area around the tree by adding sky and clouds or a view of their neighborhood.
4. Once the coloring of the tree is completed, have the participants measure the placement of each generation within the interior portion of the tree. (**NOTE:** They can fit much more information if it is typed on the computer using a font size of 8 or 9.)
- 5a. If participants have chosen to use the tree with the blessing of children in micrography, they should work in the interior of the tree. They should space each generation beginning with the grandparents.
 - a. Measure one inch down from the top of the tree and draw two lines horizontally to hold the names of the grandparents of the family.
 - b. Measure two inches from the grandparents line and draw two lines horizontally to hold the names of the parents of the family.
 - c. Measure two inches from the parents line and draw evenly spaced lines to indicate the children of the family.
 - d. Connect the generations by straight and diagonal lines.

5b. If the participants have chosen to create or use their own blessings, have them cut the lines that they have prepared and place them around the outline of the tree, then move to the interior of the tree. Carefully space each generation beginning with the grandparents.

- a. Measure one inch down from the top of the tree and draw two lines horizontally to hold the names of the grandparents of the family.
- b. Measure two inches from the grandparents line and draw two lines horizontally to hold the names of the parents of the family.
- c. Measure two inches from the parents line and draw evenly spaced lines to indicate the children of the family.
- d. Connect the generations by straight and diagonal lines.

Conclusion

Since the original intent of the use of micrography was to be decorative, and at the same time enlightening, feel free to use your message in micrography within the tree as well as the outline of the tree. Gail Kogen has given us the start of a new adventure in a Judaic art form that knows no bounds. Let your creativity take you wherever you want to go. Have a great time learning and doing.

Rita C. Altman, EdD
WLCJ Creative Judaic Arts Chair

Suggested Outline for Session

1. Welcome everyone and divide them into pairs such as parent or adult and child.
2. Explain that the goal of the session is to learn something about family timelines and micrography.
3. Share the information or read from the short study texts that follow.
4. Establish the working procedures for the session, including work rules and clean up.
5. Distribute materials.

Family Tree

A family tree is a presentation of a family history with names, dates and as much information as the participants are able and willing to share. We are creating a sample family tree in the shape of a tree with a micrography background that includes the blessings over the children on *Shabbat*. Please feel free to customize your family tree with your favorite prayers and/or blessings. Your family tree might include names, dates of births and deaths, countries of origin, etc.

Taken from the website: movinghere.org

Many of the techniques and sources for researching Jewish ancestors who settled in the United Kingdom are the same as those for tracing anyone else who has lived “anywhere.” Begin at home to assemble as many clues as possible and look for:

- Names
- Places
- Dates in any papers
- Letters (postmarks, stamps, sender’s address, mention of names)
- Certificates
- Photos (studio photos often indicate the photographer’s address; notes may be written on the back)

Contact relations, starting with the oldest. Write, talk to, video or record every member of your family you can reach. Ask for family memorabilia, such as passports, photos and marriage certificates.

The website, familysearch.org has a wonderful step-by-step, organized structure for studying genealogy and searching for information.

Micrography

Presented by The Library of JTS

Micrography, the scribal practice of employing minuscule script to create abstract shapes or figurative designs, is an art form that has been used by Jews for over a millennium. This intricate decorative technique was first practiced in Egypt and the Land of Israel in the tenth century.

Much of the earliest micrography we have is found in biblical codices. Unlike Torah scrolls, these Bibles in book form were not subject to the stringent rabbinic rules that stipulated the arrangement of the text and the design of the letters. Without the prohibition against ornamentation, which applied only to Torah scrolls, these books offered the scribe considerable latitude in arranging and decorating the text.

The most common text employed by scribes to create their micrographic artistry was the *masorah*. Originally, the *masorah* (a system of notations that ensure the correct transmission of the writing and reading of the Hebrew Bible) was copied into the margins of biblical codices. Later, scribes began to fashion these masoretic notations into floral motifs and intricate geometric designs. The production of a decorated codex could involve more than one artisan. A *sofer* (scribe) wrote out the biblical text, a *nakdan* (vocalizer) was responsible for inserting vowels, accents and cantillation, and a *masran* (masorator) specialized in copying the *masorah* into biblical codices. In some instances, however, these tasks were all performed by a single scribe.

Even after the decline of manuscript production in the sixteenth century, micrography continued to be used to decorate *ketubbot* (marriage contracts) and wall hangings. From the seventeenth century onward, scribes who practiced the art of micrography favored the texts of the five *Megillot*, Psalms and Proverbs as the basis of their art.

It is appropriate that a culture that has long emphasized the significance of the Hebrew word would foster a distinctive transformation of script into a unique decorative art. To this day, the art of Hebrew micrography is still practiced and the metamorphosis of text into image remains an unbroken Jewish artistic tradition across the centuries.

SAMPLE

