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# Kol, Bena, and Koach Years:

## An Overview for Group Leaders

We have been so heartened by the way that both girls and leaders have embraced the *Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing!* program. Soon after the launch of the Lev and Ruach years, we learned that they wanted their groups to continue more than just two years. More importantly, many girls told us that they didn't just want to continue meeting, they wanted to take more responsibility for their group experience—sharing the planning and facilitating.

At the same time, we learned that many older high school girls wanted to begin participating in the program—but they required age-appropriate materials to do so.

The Kol, Bena, and Koach years are the result of those two requests. Each year teaches various aspects of leadership and also functions as a laboratory in which the girls can practice these skills. At the same time, each year encourages girls to look inside themselves and to transfer the knowledge they have gained into action in the outside world.

### **KOL YEAR: GEARING UP FOR LEADERSHIP**

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The Kol curriculum is an **introductory** or **transition year**. It prepares the girls for the more intense leadership training that follows by slowly introducing more opportunities for participant-directed programming. Groups that have experienced the Lev and Ruach years of the program will recognize many familiar elements:

- opening and closing rituals,
- personal reflection and discussion, and
- varied modes of personal expression, including writing, crafts, and song.

Groups that have not previously experienced *Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing!* are also introduced to the observance of **Rosh Hodesh** and have a new opportunity to learn about themselves and to bond with other Jewish girls their age. This **bonding and group formation** lays essential groundwork for the leadership training aspects of the next two years.

The underlying theme of “**Journey Inward, Journey Outward**” is woven throughout the Kol year. The year begins introspectively, examining issues such as


- personal passions and priorities;
- legacies of continuity and change;
- body image and the beauty industry;

- physical and emotional stress;
- positive and harmful relationships.

The themes gradually shift focus to **social action** and **social justice**. Girls learn about challenges in their communities and across the world and have the opportunity to explore different models of meeting these challenges. This culminates in a year-end **social action or advocacy project designed and implemented by the girls with the guidance of the group leader**.

There are two additional new features in the Kol Year:

### ***Moonbook***

Part scrapbook, part collective journal, the *Moonbook* gives the girls an opportunity to record highlights of their group's Kol year. As a first step toward leadership, a different girl takes the *Moonbook* home each month. It is her responsibility to complete the pages for the gathering she has just experienced, imprinting the book with her own personal style using pictures, paraphernalia from the meeting, quotations from the group, etc. At every gathering, the girls have an opportunity to look at the new pages, admire their friend's work, reminisce, and bond again over the recorded events. To help you in creating your keepsake, you will find a camera icon , marking good photographic opportunities.

If your group is *beginning* with Kol year, gauge whether this activity fits the girls' interests and their available time between gatherings. If your group is *continuing* from the Ruach year, you will probably find that the girls will embrace this opportunity to preserve memories of the year—especially if they are highly craft-oriented. Some groups have so enjoyed their Moonbook that they have continued it in subsequent years!

### **Take it Out**

Each month's curriculum includes suggestions for how the girls can take what they have learned and experienced and bring it into the larger world. In this way, the program not only strengthens the girls, but in turn encourages them to strengthen the communities in which they live.

## **BENA AND KOACH YEARS: LEARNING LEADERSHIP**

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The final two years of the program give girls the skills and knowledge they need to lead in any setting: in the classroom, on the sports field, as a member of a group or committee, in their own personal lives, or even as the group leader of their own Rosh Hodesh group! Among the topics covered are

- the stages of group development,
- working with challenging personalities,
- active listening,
- giving and receiving feedback, and
- leading among boys.

Participants also have the opportunity to delve into developmentally appropriate topics for older girls including—to name just a few—

- gender identity and gender bias,
- when and how to stand up for a cause they believe in, and
- intimacy and sexuality.

## INCREASED LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE GIRLS

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This two-year curriculum doesn't only discuss skills and self-exploration—as participants in the program, girls participate in a living laboratory, trying out their newfound skills in a safe and supportive environment. As might be expected, there are increased leadership opportunities for girls in these two years.

In the **Bena year**, girls are asked what leadership roles—from a prepared list—they would like to try. You can use this information as a guide for soliciting assistance throughout the year. In addition to those things that they might already be doing—sending e-mail reminders, leading the recitation of the opening blessing, etc.—girls are encouraged to perform essential group management functions, such as keeping time and managing side conversations.

These opportunities are introduced during the Bena year and stepped up during the **Koach year**. The girls are also encouraged to take on more complex roles, such as choosing content, facilitating discussions and craft projects, and presenting on topics of their interest. A “**Leadership Deck**,” dealt at the end of every gathering, facilitates this process. The Koach year culminates in a **project or program envisioned and implemented completely by the girls**.

## SEQUENTIAL GATHERING PLANS

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One important way in which the Bena and Koach years differ from the previous years is that they are **sequential**; each month sets the stage for the next one. Unlike the material in earlier years, the gathering plans for these years often **assume knowledge or skills gained in a previous month**. For instance, participants might learn about managing group dynamics one month and be asked to facilitate a discussion in the following one.

If it is your custom to skip a month's plan (for instance, you haven't held a meeting in Tevet because it's hard to schedule around winter holidays and finals, or instead of your regular meeting during Nisan your group goes to an amusement park), or you know that there is only time in your schedule for eight meetings, we encourage you to **selectively combine** the material found in neighboring chapters, so that essential information is not missed.

## NEW GATHERING PLAN FEATURES

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There are several new features in the Bena and Koach year Gathering Plans:

### Wonderful Women

Role models are called “Fabulous Females” in the Lev (and some Ruach) *Essence Sheets*, and are integrated into some of the Kol year gatherings. In Bena and Koach, “Wonderful Women” handouts present Jewish women from many periods of history as role models, most of them 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century leaders who will appeal to a teenager’s sensibilities. These women—such as Hannah Senesh, Jennifer Bleyer, Rose Schneiderman, and Barbra Streisand—were chosen for their diversity, as well as for their connection to the topic of a particular month. In many cases, the Wonderful Women are an **integral part of the gathering plan**, serving as examples of the empowerment that *Rosh Hodesh: It’s a Girl Thing!* seeks to impart.

### Worldly Wisdom

Teenagers love quotations; they’re a fixture on lockers, notebooks, and social-networking pages. Each month, girls will find quotations in their handouts entitled “**Pirkey Avot**” (Ethics of the Fathers) and “**Pirkey Imahot**” (Ethics of the Mothers). The former come from the mishnaic book of the same name, codified around the year 200 CE, which contains adages from our rabbinic sages. The latter is a collection of insights from (mostly) Jewish woman throughout the ages, gathered from a number of different sources. It is our hope that through these quotations, the girls will have an opportunity to appreciate and connect with an even wider circle of wonderful Jewish women.

### Bring It In

In this section, the girls will have a moment to sit back and absorb all that they have discovered over the course of each gathering. They will be invited to **reflect** on an idea or quotation, or **think about** strategies to best incorporate what they have learned into their daily lives.

### Leadership Question

Each month, as the gathering draws to a close, girls will be asked to **take notice** of something relating to the month’s gathering plan over the next few weeks. In this way, girls will be encouraged to put their newfound discoveries into action.

### Leadership Deck

As mentioned briefly above, in the final year of the program, the curriculum includes a Leadership Deck. This group of cards names tasks that the girls are asked to undertake in support of the group. This deck can be **tailored** to your group; you can add cards that reflect unique leadership opportunities in your group or omit cards that are not applicable. Assignment sheets are provided to help the group keep track of designated responsibilities.

## Looking Behind the Curtain

Another way in which these Gathering Plans differ from those in previous years is in their **transparency**. At several points during each year, participants are given a look “behind the curtain” and shown what goes into planning and facilitating a Rosh Hodesh gathering. For instance, as part of learning how to create a welcoming environment, participants discuss the environment that was created for them as they arrived at the gathering; as part of a gathering on criticism and feedback, participants evaluate the session in which they just participated.

## Shifts in Your Role as Group Leader

Just as the Bena and Koach years ask more of the group participants, they ask more of the adult facilitator. She must now both **model** and **process** her leadership skills. As a result, facilitation of the material in these two years requires more finesse and more in-the-moment judgment calls, while presenting additional challenges in time management

At its best, facilitation in these years is both **shared** and **transparent**. As mentioned above, the topics and activities in the scripted material support this process. In addition, you are encouraged to stop at strategic times throughout the program to **point out**, **explain**, or **discuss** techniques you have used or choices you have made.

For example, imagine that you are faced with the introduction of a tangential topic. You are called upon to either respond on the spot, at the likely expense of a planned activity, or to redirect the conversation to its intended focus, possibly addressing the alternative topic at another juncture. Having made your choice thoughtfully, you might take that opportunity to highlight and explore your thought process with the group.

Similarly, you can respond to challenging group dynamics by using objective, factual language to describe your observations and solicit confirmation and/or input from the group. We encourage a judgment-free approach, such as “I notice that. . . . Can you help me understand what’s going on? Any ideas about what we can do about it?”

The “Leadership Deck” can be another tool for transparent leadership. Processing the experiences of group members in their assigned roles is a unique and potentially important aspect of leadership facilitation.

Through all these kinds of transparency, participants will learn to notice productive and unproductive behaviors and how to weigh facilitation options. However, while you are encouraged to seek out and maximize these opportunities, be judicious in choosing which moments to process, as the scripted Gathering Plan is full.

The Bena and Koach years, designed to foster an understanding of the skills and dynamics behind effective leadership, will ideally bring out the insights and talents of both facilitator and participants!

## IN CONCLUSION

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We hope that at the end of this three-year cycle, girls will not only have all of the tools they need to lead a Rosh Hodesh group of their own—among their peers, on a college campus, or as a *Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing!* group leader for younger girls—but will be confident, empowered women who are able to lead in any venue, public or private.

*We hope you enjoy the journey with them!*

