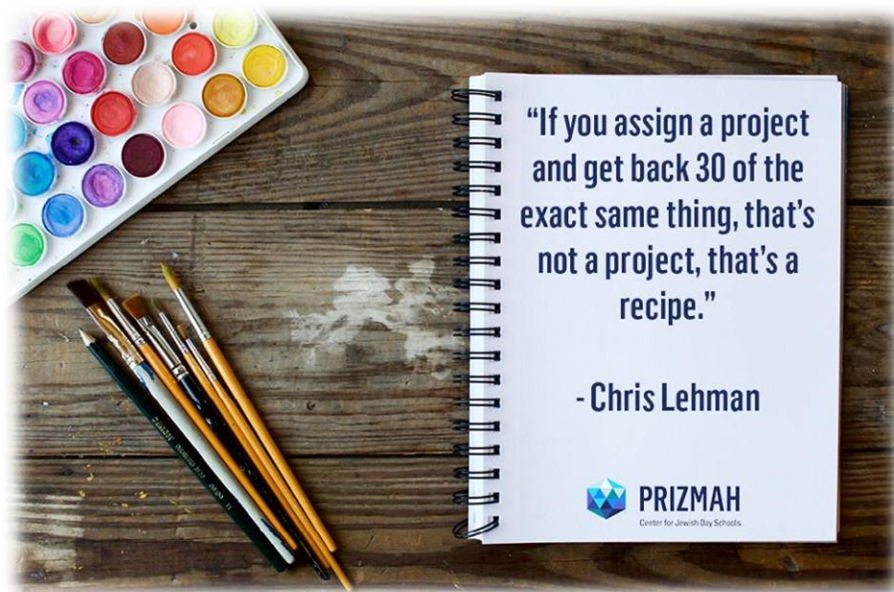


## Personal Reflection on the Real-World Learning for *Chopped*:



*But what if it's a project AND a recipe?*

Successful projects call for total engagement. Successful recipes compel the chef to keep coming back to them again and again. *Chopped* brought halachic learning to the student's experience of halachic living. It was fully engaging and inspired continued halachic practice and application even after our year of learning together ended.

*Halacha* lends itself to real-world learning as its very purpose is to guide our very real life. *Hilchot brachot*, in particular, are applicable beyond the classroom since food and eating are significant parts of a person's day. But how can a student in a classroom truly learn and experience these very *halachot* to begin with? Introductory *hilchot brachot* classes may plant gardens or go fruit picking to see the process that determines the specific *brachot* for fruits and vegetables. They might compare the processes of baking a *mezonot* dish and a *hamotzi* dish by experiencing them both hands on. How was my more advanced *hilchot brachot* class going to learn more complex concepts such as *ikar v'tafel* in a way that would inspire and facilitate sustained practice? How could I help my students learn to abstractly take a dish apart, to break it down to its basic components in order to determine its overall *bracha*? And once they got that, how could I help them understand that the very same ingredients can lead to dishes with completely different *brachot* depending on how the ingredients are used?

Inspired by the hit TV show "Chopped," I divided my class into teams. Each team received a unique "basket" of mystery ingredients (sample →). Within a team, however, each member was assigned a different *bracha*. Their challenge was to develop a recipe for a dish with the personally assigned *bracha* that would incorporate all of the assigned team ingredients. In addition to submitting recipes, each student also wrote up a "Bracha Reasoning" sharing the *halachic* explanation for why that particular dish required that particular *bracha*.

### **Chef Sarah, you are working with Chefs Devorah and Rachel.**

**Your basket ingredients include the following:**



**Sarah will make a recipe out of these ingredients whose bracha is *shehakol*, Devorah will make a recipe out of these ingredients whose bracha is *mezonot* and Rachel will make a recipe out of these ingredients whose bracha is *haadama*.**

The resulting recipes and reasonings were ultimately used to make a class cookbook.

Before assigning the mystery basket ingredients, students shared their favorite and least favorite foods as well as any food-related allergies. Taking students' food preferences and allergies into account when assigning ingredients kept motivation and real-world application high. Taking into account student interest helped create a learning experience in which students intrinsically wanted to engage. Although this was not a game-based project, the game-show roots of *Chopped* inspired a focused and driven energy reflective of the engaging spirit of competition.

A key factor in keeping motivation high throughout *Chopped* was that students were working towards a cookbook for an authentic audience. But students didn't wait until the culminating presentation to engage with real-world audiences. Due to school policy constraints, we couldn't try each other's recipes. With this in mind, students' families and friends served as the judges of the recipes outside of school to determine what cookbook category the recipe was best suited for (snack, lunch, etc.). While having a class-wide recipe feast would have benefited the overall experience in many ways, presenting their recipes to an authentic audience, one that they regularly cooked and ate with, allowed for greater generalizability beyond our classroom. Even something as simple as the initial ingredient shopping list that students brainstormed in class helped extend their thinking about the assignment and the *halachot* that they were learning to life beyond school.

*Chopped* gave students opportunities to contribute to our greater learning community in a positive and meaningful way. The process of the project encouraged each student to deal with and reflect upon her own feelings and the feelings of others. Students were given continuous opportunities to consider each other's perspectives and needs to reach informed decisions. This was particularly true in the ultimate recipes that each student developed. For example, students were careful to consider the food preferences and culinary skill sets of all of the members of the cookbook's intended audience (their peers). Students expressed how much it meant to them to feel needed, that the cookbook truly could not happen without each of them.

The excitement throughout the project allowed/encouraged for students from different teams to learn and work together. This fostered deep learning of concepts beyond those relevant to a student's own project. Additionally, the students made most of the choices during the project (within the guidelines I set for them). My sincere surprise at what each student came up with and developed reiterated for them that the success of this project was now in their hands.

Rather than calling upon a narrow discipline or subject matter, connecting multiple themes and academic disciplines was required to achieve the goals of *Chopped* successfully. Beyond learning the relevant halachic content, students wrote and iterated recipes. They experienced photography and the culinary arts hands on. Basic science knowledge of the states of matter was applied in determining how each ingredient should be incorporated into a dish to help produce their assigned *bracha*. A review and application of many of the concepts of ratios and conversion of fractions came up for nearly every individual at some point during the development of their recipes. Our school psychologist noted how positive it was to see these young women engaged in healthy conversations about food and eating. Navigating *Chopped* successfully also demanded communication skills, creativity, and collaborative problem solving, skills that are essential in the classroom as well as the world beyond it.

Students were also enabled to contribute to a collective goal and learn in a self-directed way. They reflected on and took ownership of the ways in which they each learn best. This continuous reflective process increased

students' meta-cognition and self-awareness of their own learning. Additionally, when students finally began working through the new *halachic* content, they had already personally set learning goals for themselves in a way that allowed for all learning to be conscientious and driven from within. Reflection and self-directed learning played major roles in making the further application of the learning more deliberate in the long run.

While engagement was at an all-time high throughout the project, I am proud of how my students regularly share (even three years later!) that they continue to use the cookbooks they created. The cookbooks kept students trying each other's recipes well beyond *Chopped*. A student later shared with me that she plays a game every time she makes one of the recipes: "I try to guess what the '*Bracha Reasoning*' for that recipe is to see if I still really remember the *halachot*. I usually win!"

The first-hand experience allowed for greater generalizability beyond the project itself. *Chopped* has had a lasting impact on my students.

Here are some noteworthy examples:

- A few students were introduced to cooking through this project and now help prepare Shabbat each week for/with their families.
- One student enjoyed the *Chopped* experience so much that she ran a *Brachot Chopped* event for teens in her community.
- Students now know from experience what can impact the *bracha*-outcome of a dish. They are empowered to determine *brachot* even for complex dishes.

At the end of the year, when it came time to reflect upon the project and the experience, one student shared, "When we started learning *brachot* this year, I thought it would be easy since we've been learning and saying *brachot* forever. Then I started seeing how complicated *brachot* can be and I was like, whoa, maybe I've never been doing it right! This is overwhelming! But by the end I feel like I can really do this and I even understand. I get that *brachot* isn't just a memorizing thing; it's an understanding thing. I know this because I got to experience it for myself. I didn't just learn this stuff in class but the project made me also learn it at my house, in my kitchen, the place where all the *brachot* stuff comes up the most for me."

Students noted over and over again that they wished all cookbooks were so *halacha*-user-friendly. And so, in creating this cookbook, they were providing a solution to a real-world need.

And, perhaps most importantly, *Chopped* promoted self-transcendent values. Students experienced firsthand that the exacting minutia of *halacha* does not need to be viewed as burdensome or acrimonious and, rather, can be seen as the fundamental, beautiful pieces that make up the greater mosaic of Torah-life.

#### What I wish I had done differently:

Students were so turned on to *halacha* and excited by *Chopped* that I wish I would have extended elements of the project throughout the year and not just at the end. For example, the class cookbook could have been overarching project for the entire year. By each topic of *brachot rishonot*, students could have developed and contributed a new recipe for the cookbook. Imagine the engagement and excitement of *Chopped* permeating the entire year!

Some examples:

- When learning about the *halachot* of *shiu k'viat seuda*:  
Create a recipe for a dish which could potentially lead someone to make a *mezonot* as the *bracha rishona* and *Birkat Hamazon* as the *bracha achrona*.
- When learning about the *halachot* of *brachot* for foods prepared in irregular ways:  
Our cookbook will include a section for a suggested Purim “*V'nahafochu*” feast. The food at this feast will require diners to make *brachot* that they wouldn't normally make on the given foods. Choose a fruit or vegetable to work with and create a recipe for how to prepare it in an irregular (but still delicious!) way.
- When learning about “*shiu'rim*” and their impact on *bracha achrona*:  
Our cookbook will include an hors d'oeuvres section. Create a recipe whose *bracha rishona* is (assign different *brachot* to different students) but that would not require a *bracha achrona*. (Create non-academically-differentiated working groups by pairing students with the same assigned *bracha*).

Extending this project throughout the year could also provide opportunities for enrichment extension or anchor activities.

Some examples:

- Create a recipe for a chocolate dessert that both Rav Dov Lior and Rav Moshe Feinstein would say *ha'etz* on.
- Create a recipe that helps ensure that the appropriate *bracha* is made on a commonly mistaken fruit, vegetable, legume, or fungus (such as pineapple, peanuts, artichokes, mushrooms, bananas, capers, etc.) by pairing the misunderstood food of your choice with foods that share the same *bracha*. In your *bracha* reasoning, please address the common misconception regarding the *bracha* for that food and explain why the true *bracha* is correct.
- Create a recipe for a dish whose *bracha* would be different depending on where in the world it is eaten.
- Create a recipe for an *ikar v'tafel* dish whose *bracha rishona* is *mezonot* but that, when eaten, would probably not be enough *mezonot* within *kdei achilat pras* to make an *al hamichya* yet would have been enough of the *tafel* to make the regular *bracha achrona* on the *tafel*.
- Write a *bracha* reasoning for saying *shehakol/haadama/mezonot* on raw cookie dough.

The final cookbook could also serve as a portfolio of students' work. Rather than students submitting every recipe that they create throughout the year, students can submit recipes that, through significant and meaningful reflection, they have personally determined meet overarching goals for the course.

Some examples:

- Submit a recipe that shows your growth this year.
- Submit a recipe that demonstrates your mastery of a new skill.
- Submit a recipe that required help from someone else to develop it.

The portfolio process would encourage further reflection of their work. It would also contextualize students' work within the realm of non-academic, real-world goals.

A cookbook at this scale- that includes so many recipes and gets at so many more of the intricacies of *hilchot brachot*- may also make it more marketable to a larger audience. Producing a cookbook like this could serve as a fundraiser for the school and also help the students present their work to an even greater real-world audience. After *Chopped*, a student reflected, “This wasn't a school project. This was a life project.” Extending the cookbook model to the rest of the curriculum could have extended the accompanying enthusiasm even further.