

God: A Profile

An Emergent Curriculum Exploring the Intersection of God, Self, and the World

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Rationale

Moses said to God, “When I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is His name?’ what shall I say to them?” And God said to Moses, “Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh.” He continued, “Thus shall you say to the Israelites, ‘Ehyeh sent me to you.’” Exodus 3:13-14
“Educate a child according to his way” Proverbs 22:6

The concept of God challenges people - daily. Myriad questions mire the minds of both young and old: “Who/what is God?” “Does God care?” “Where does God come from?” Yes, the Jewish community as a whole believes in the existence of one God, but the representations of that God differ for almost everyone.

In supplementary religious schools, Jewish educators aim to teach the primacy of three main ideas of Judaism: God, Torah and Israel. Torah and Israel form integral parts of the entire curriculum. Yes these schools often neglect teaching God outright, instead relegating God to the realm of special moments where learners might “feel” or experience God. Learners questions about God may arise, but often go unanswered or even worse, unasked. Regardless of whether or not God is taught explicitly, God remains an imperative and often complicated part of the Jewish narrative and learning process. For example, Jews talk often about the one true God. Yet, the term God may conjure a variety of images for different people: some may see a man in the sky with a beard, while another imagines a unicorn - unique and special. God necessitates unpacking and discovery; not so everyone arrives at the same definition of God, but so each person's unique concept of God may exist simultaneously.

One way to explore God sees each person in relationship with God. Torah presents a vision of humans made בצלם אלוהים, *b'tzelem Elohim*, in the image of God. Our relationship with God begins with human creation and continues to today. Therefore, what better way to discover a connection to God than through different kinds of relationships, developing outward

from a relationship to self (through discovery of God's "identity" - as humans understand it) to a direct, personal relationship to God through an exploration of God's expectations of and relationship with the greater world?

This curriculum ensures that God becomes taught explicitly, interweaving Torah and other Jewish sources with personal discovery to help elicit individual connections to God. Especially in a tradition steeped in questioning, God as a concept necessitates activity, conversation and interaction. The combination of God through self, a continual journey for each Jew, in connection with God through text, invites the Jewish learner to engage in the constant process of *תיקון עצמי*, *tikkun etzmi*, self-growth in terms of theological connection to Judaism. God provides a touchstone through which one can live and experience life, and especially Judaism. Just as the struggle for communal and personal understanding of God necessitates continuous discovery, so too does the understanding of self. By integrating the two, God becomes a personal entity with which each person may form a relationship and discover self.

This curriculum, meant for children in a community setting with high functioning autism or Aspergers, provides a framework for the educator to scaffold/accommodate learning in a way that God and the expressions of God in Judaism (through prayers, Jewish concepts/mitzvot, and Jewish texts) manifests from each learner's expression of self. More importantly, God becomes comprehensible through concepts that these learners can concretize through drawing parallels, reading texts and engaging in direct action.

Seeing as not everyone fosters a belief in God, this curriculum addresses lack of belief or reticence towards God, but encourages learners to suspend judgment on God's "true-ness" in order to discover other ideas about self and the world. Many questions may arise through the process of exploring God. This curriculum recognizes the importance of acknowledging the

distinct worries of the learners and therefore provides lessons to address the main "big" questions children often ask about God: why do bad things happen? Is God real? Where did God come from? Did God actually create the world/me? Many of the lessons in this curriculum work to address a question about God, so may need rearranging based on the questions the learners develop. Integral to the success of teaching God is helping the learners discover their own questions of God and working to answer them as a class.

Learners begin by exploring their own narrative and personal relationships they craft for themselves, to then delve into how the narrative of God and God's relationships. The God narrative utilizes specific language and concepts which require unpacking and group clarity before delving into bigger, more challenging issues with God. Once the learners become situated in God language, they begin to explore relationships between God and self/world by delving into how to emulate or interact with God through mitzvot: in this case by performing Godly action. Next, learners discover how to develop a relationship with God through prayer and ritual. Learners then progress to asking some of the difficult questions that inform God's relationship with the world. These big questions help the students delve into the expectations they hold about God and therefore what they believe on these subjects. Finally, learners re-approach their personal theology, to discover the evolution of their self in relationship with God. In the beginning and the end, learners will work to create their own Facebook page for God: a manifestation of their own theological understandings of God which they will then share with classmates and community members

The challenge of teaching God in any setting involves creating a fertile field where God exploration may occur. Another challenge arises when considering learners still in what Jean Piaget calls Concrete Operational Thinking - where their capacity for thought is deeply rooted in

thinking about concrete, not abstract concepts. Although these learners are at the chronological age where Abstract Operational Thinking begins, they may developmentally still need growth towards that milestone. Therefore, these learners may require exploration of the abstract concepts surrounding God in a much more concrete ways. The fact that God continually remains abstract necessitates a deep shift in the way God is taught - a concretization that also must consider the social interaction struggles learners on the autism spectrum sometimes demonstrate. Therefore, by allowing learners to individually express and explore their own connection to the particular concepts at hand, and only then discover how God also fits into the experience of that idea, the learners may connect to the God concept.

While many synagogues or spiritual communities espouse an interest in inclusion education, very few institutions have specific programs for special needs kids, especially kids with autism spectrum disorder. Yet, in order to become Bar or Bat Mitzvah, a learner must attend religious education for a number of years prior to the special day. This curriculum provides a supplementary learning opportunity for 6th and 7th graders with high functioning autism, in the year leading up to/including their B'nai Mitzvah experience. This course is intended for a community setting (or synagogue with a large enough special needs population), wherein many congregations may join together to provide an once weekly, hour-long learning session, where each session provides the opportunity to delve into talking about God and develop learners' own connections to the world around them. Due to the possible developmental and social challenges autism presents, this course enables these learners an opportunity to feel comfortable sharing and engages their natural inclinations - speaking to their developmental needs. This kind of community engagement model, especially facilitating inclusion, does exist in some communities,

but is largely lacking in the Jewish world. These children, just like typically developing young adults, merit the opportunity to discover their own voices and selves when it comes to God.

The following Enduring Understandings help exemplify why/how a curriculum on God is vital and important today:

- God is one, yet not singular.
- Each person's conception of God develops from a continual discovery of personal and historical representations of God.
- Everyone deserves the opportunity to experience God.
- Experiencing God necessitates openness/action.
- Jewish texts express God through feelings, sensations, and experiences.

Letter to the Teacher

Dear Teacher,

Teaching about God requires courage, vulnerability and passion. In order to teach God, you must be comfortable with your own experience of wrestling and/or struggling with God. The challenging nature of the materials may challenge you as the teacher and as a God-struggler, which is completely acceptable. You do not need to cement your beliefs about God, but you must be able to articulate aspects of your relationship with God, should students ask (you can also demonstrate your own humanity by admitting that you do not know, but finding the answers for the students). There will be many times that you will not know the answers.

In your role as teacher, you serve as a guide for these students, providing the opportunities for students to explore their own beliefs about God. Although it may be easy to overlay your own perspectives, try to remain as neutral as possible and encourage students to discover their own beliefs, wherever they may lay on the spectrum. Especially as this curriculum requires students to explore an incredibly abstract concept, they may grow frustrated with the necessary mental gymnastics. The lack of a "right" answer may be hard for them to accept, so affirming growth in terms of how students contribute to the group and how they maintain an open mind should be emphasized and applauded. A helpful resource to help assuage some students worries is a rabbi or educator. Because these people engage in thinking about God professionally, they may provide positive reinforcement about the necessity of struggling with God. Consider bringing them in before the end of the year should students need reassurance or have many unanswerable questions.

The teacher of this curriculum must have either a background in special needs and/or strong resources and background in teaching. Much of the curriculum will require in person

adaptations that can only come with experience or exposure to special needs populations. That said, many of the resources in Part I of the Resources section provide a foundational knowledge for teaching this curriculum and these. I recommend speaking with local professionals knowledgeable in Autism Spectrum Disorder(s) (ASD) and other special needs before embarking on this curriculum. In addition, although written for a classroom of students with high functioning ASD, this curriculum could easily be adapted for a variety of special needs as well as for any classroom, for any students, with or without specific adaptations for different learners.

In order to teach this curriculum well, I suggest you read “The Changing Perceptions of God in Judaism” by Rifat Sonsino, in *Teaching About God and Spirituality* (pages 6-19).¹ In addition it would be helpful to read the book *Finding God: Selected Responses* by Rifat Sonsino and Daniel Syme (revised edition).² Many of the ideas presented in this guide find voice in these books and also provide a good background in God in order to teach God. I assume that the students have a basic understanding of God, developed through their religious education and want to ensure that you have deeper-level God resources at your disposal.

This curriculum is made special by how you adapt it for the learners, based on their needs and may necessitate differentiating for specific student needs. The students may be at vastly different levels with regard to social interaction, problem solving, and fine motor skills. Although incredibly capable in one area, they may struggle in another. Therefore, the extent to which you differentiate the lessons will contribute to your success with the curriculum. I will guide you in that regard with notes throughout the lessons that will specifically pin-point what should happen to facilitate learning in the best way possible. One type of note in the lessons are notes to

¹ The entire book is a helpful resource: Roberta Louis Goodman and Sherry H. Blumberg, Ed., *Teaching About God and Spirituality* (ARE Publishing: Denver, 2002).

² Rifat Sonsino and Daniel Syme, *Finding God: Selected Responses* (URJ Press: New York, 2002).

teachers, underlined and in text boxes. These are notes about more fundamental parts of the lesson. In addition, you will find text boxes called **Autism Adaptations**, where the words are bolded. These are particular places where even greater adaptations may be necessary. Even though the notes exist, there may be even more places that you need to adapt the lessons for your specific students.

As the teacher, you should possess knowledge and have experience of how to work with students with special needs, specifically autism spectrum disorder (ASD). This includes ability to scaffold social interactions, provide sentence starters, concretize abstract concepts and more. For a general guide on how to work with students with ASD, please see the following guide (also in the resources section at the end of this guide): https://researchautism.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/An_Educators_Guide_to_Aspenger_Syndrome.pdf.

In terms of the actual lessons, the activities in the lessons generally follow one to another, but you can pick and choose if necessary. For the questioning sequences, many do not provide possible answers, because the curriculum is meant to be more emergent. However, due to the scripted nature of Unit I, the questions do have possible answers. The italicized answers in parenthesis next to the questions are those possible answers. With regard to the structure, try to ensure that you structure the lessons similarly (as they are laid out in the scripted unit). As these learners like structure, they will appreciate knowing that the general format of the class will be the same. One particular piece is the blessing for the study of Torah. As you did it during the first Unit, continue to formally begin each class with the blessing, so students maintain that continuity. In addition each lesson ends with an exit question. Provide students with a journal (or a folder with three prongs which you add to each week) at the beginning of the course and allow them to answer all the exit questions (as well as any other writing or drawing work) in the

journal. This allows them to return to previous answers and/or see how they have grown. One helpful tool includes typing out the exit questions each week. Although not included in the supplies list for each lesson, the journals should always be available in class.

Throughout the curriculum, certain activities are notated as an Authentic Assessment (AA) or Memorable Moment (MM) - these are particular elements of the curriculum meant to both elevate the learning and increase the applicability. An authentic assessment is a task or problem that finds applicability beyond the classroom to professionals, for academics, or for ordinary citizens. A memorable moment tends to be both memorable and a moment (instead of a whole curriculum/unit) and reflects at least one EU, while also utilizing resources outside the classroom and multiple intelligences.

Learners often have many questions about God. Although each lesson provides specific questions to ask and offers space for learners to write out their questions, my suggestion is to take the questions as they come and provide a space for learners to articulate their questions (like a “God” box where they can write questions and leave them at any point). Try to answer as best you can, but remember that the best answer is sometimes “I don’t know, but I will try to find out.” Often, it reminds the students that teachers/adults do not have all the answers, but are willing and able to learn. Especially on the topic of God, where there isn’t always a right answer, we have to remember humility and curiosity.

B’hatzlacha,

Elana Nemitoff

Scope and Sequence

Unit I: What is God?

This unit explores basic conceptions of God, including basic misconceptions, providing a framework from which to talk about God for the rest of the curriculum.

- Lesson I.1 Who/what is God? Expectations/understandings about God -
- Lesson I.2 God's existence: Can something I cannot see, hear, touch or feel exist?
- Lesson I.3 Describing God's self
- Lesson I.4 Shema: Oneness and listening
- Lesson I.5 Where is God? (Authentic Assessment)

Unit II: Interactions Between Us and the World Through God's Torah Commandments

The learner will ask themselves what God expects of them, through the lenses of Leviticus 19, the holiness codes. Judaism understands that there are many avenues through which to engage with and be like God, but God's mitzvot are one way to act in the way God expects. Therefore, learners explore different mitzvot and how enacting those mitzvot lead to holiness, and through holiness, to God.

- Lesson II.1 Holiness
- Lesson II.2 Honor your father and mother (AA)
- Lesson II.3 Tzedakah with the land: Leket and Pe'ah (AA)
- Lesson II.4 Stumbling Block before the blind
- Lesson II.5 Shabbat
- Lesson II.6 God's Mitzvot Wrap-Up

Unit III: Experiencing God in the World: Prayer and Ritual as Engaging Connections with God

The lessons require the learners to discover and articulate their own connections to God through prayer and ritual. Although God is often experienced in many ways throughout the world, Jewish prayer and ritual offer a unique communal lens through which to consider what we as people expect from God. The unit allows for an emergent understanding of God to occur through discovering our own expectations of God with regards to prayer.

- Lesson III.1 Does God listen to and/or respond to prayer/ritual?
- Lesson III.2 Yotzer Or
- Lesson III.3 Blessings in Everyday - How to give thanks! (AA/Memorable Moment)
- Lesson III.4 Havdallah
- Lesson III.5 Bar/Bat Mitzvah (MM)

Unit IV: Questions about God in the World (Interactions)

Here, the learner continues to grapple with God's relationship with individuals, but delves into God's relationship with the entire world. By drawing back from individual, personal relationships, the unit discusses expectations of God's relationship with the world. This unit delves into the bigger questions of suffering, how to fix problems, whether God cares and human creation. Here, much of the work comes from the learners' own conceptions and questions of God, which will foster greater exploration.

- Lesson IV.1 Did God write the Torah?

- Lesson IV.2 Did God create the world? A close reading of Genesis 1:1-2:4a
- Lesson IV.3 Suffering: Discovering when bad things happen to good people, why does it happen?
- Lesson IV.4 Who's in control: God or me?
- Lesson IV.5 Oops, I messed up - do I fix for God, for me, or for a combination of the two?
- Lesson IV.6 God's Comic Book (AA)

Unit V: **God and Me Now** (What has changed about my beliefs and what have I discovered about God?)

This unit focuses learners back to their personal identities and also encourages them to remain in conversation with the greater ideas of God articulated throughout. Learners will explore how their own opinions about God changed and look at the enduring questions: Where do I fit into a world with God? What do I want my relationship with God to look like/evolve into?

- Lesson V.1 Personal Theology as an Arc: How have my beliefs changed?
- Lesson V.2 How does God exist/act in the world?
- Lesson V.3 God "Interactive Museum" (AA/MM)
- Lesson V.4 God, Continued

Unit I: What is God?

God is like a mirror which never changes, yet everyone who looks into it sees a different face -
Pesikta d'rav Kahana 109b³

Curricular EUs:

- God is one, yet not singular
- Each person's conception of God develops from a continual discovery of personal and historical representations of God
- Everyone deserves the opportunity to experience God
- Experiencing God necessitates openness/action
- Jewish texts express God through feelings, sensations, and experiences

Unit EUs:

- A common language regarding God's characteristics enhances conversation about God
- Although God remains invisible to the naked eye, signs and symbols of God's wonder permeate the natural world
- Much like an onion, pulling back the layers of how God is understood reveals greater opportunities for depth and meaning making

Unit EQs:

- How does the language used for God shape the conversation about God?
- Why should I explore God?
- What does God look/sound/feel/exist like?
- How do I experience God?

Unit Goals:

- To introduce students to the concept of God, including the language for God
- To establish a common foundation of knowledge about God
- To explore ways God "exists" in the world
- To create a space where students learn to trust each other

Unit Objectives:

By the end of the unit, students should be able to (SSBAT):

- Describe ways they experience God in the world or might experience God in the world.
- Identify the language and concepts of God that resonate with them
- Create their own framework for discussing God

Key terms:

- *B'tzelem Elohim*: in the image of God

Unit Arc:

³ quoted in A Rabbinic Anthology, p. 6, taken from Harold S. Kushner, *When Children Ask About God* (Shoken Books: New York, 1989), 26.

This unit explores basic conceptions of God, including common misconceptions, providing a framework from which to talk about God for the rest of the curriculum (including addressing names for God, God's oneness, where is God). The unit intends to help students delve into how to talk and think about God so they share a common framework and terminology, even with the different perspectives that come from learning about such a multi-faceted concept (differing opinions on God are encouraged!). In order to assuage some of the students' initial hesitations in engaging with this curriculum, the unit addresses the challenges of talking to God and of asking questions about God's existence. One goal is for students to begin to trust one another. The foundation of trust will allow a greater engagement with the material, so students experience comfort in expressing and discussing their own emergent beliefs about God. Although focused on God, the unit contains the joint goals of learning about God and peer-to-peer engagement. In addition, as these particular students may struggle with engaging socially with their peers, this unit sets out to establish a safe space in which to do so.

Lesson 1: Who/What is God?

Expectations of ourselves and our interaction with God

To the pious man knowledge of God is not a thought within his grasp, but a form of thinking in which he tries to comprehend all reality. -Abraham Joshua Heschel⁴

Goals:

- To introduce students to each other
- To establish a Brit for the classroom
- To introduce the topic of God

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson SSBAT (Students should be able to)

- Identify each student in the classroom by name
- Identify and discuss their own emerging beliefs about God

Materials:

- Fidgets
- Soft stress balls
- Index cards
- Markers/pencils/pens
- Individual sticky notes (enough so each kid can have a at least 6-10)
- Play dough
- Appendix 1A: Torah Blessing
- Appendix 1B: Four Questions
- Journals

Key terms:

- *Brit*
- *Chevruta*

Timeline

00-05 Settle In

05-15 Introductions and Establish classroom

15-25 Brit creation

25-30 Intro Torah blessing and do it

30-45 God ideas activity and affinity grouping

45-55 4 Questions (w/individual questions AND discussion)

55-60 Wrap up (explain “journaling” - some way of processing what’s been done in class)

Expanded Timeline

00-05 Settle In

⁴ Abraham Joshua Heschel, Man Is Not Alone, (NY: Noonday Press, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), 108. (Also, in Rifat Sonsino, *The Many Faces of God* (New York: URJ Press, 2004), 49.)

Be present in the room with the schedule for the day written on the board. Welcome students into the space and introduce yourself to students as they come in. Invite them to help you put names on journals or just get to know the space. Have art materials out, to let the students explore in a physical way if need be. Some of these students require more structure, and so may need you to tell them what to do with their time. Invite them to help you set up the room or write the schedule on the board.

Have fidgets around the room for students if necessary.

05-15 Introductions and Establish classroom

Introduce yourself to the students. This part is essential to the creation of a positive classroom environment, but more importantly for these students. As students who cherish routine and structure, this is a new routine that will take some getting used to. Make sure to introduce yourself and tell them a little about yourself, as the more they see and know you as a person, the more they will be able to relate to you.

Then, have the students introduce themselves. **EXPLAIN:** In order to talk about God, we must first know a little bit about each other and trust each other. Just like in the Amidah, where we start with introducing ourselves to God, we also need to do that in the classroom. We will do that in two ways. The first is through a name game. I will start with the ball and say my name. Then, I throw the ball to someone, by saying: “Here you go, ____.” They respond by saying “Thank you, ____!” The one rule is you cannot throw it to someone next to you, or someone who already received the ball. If we get really good at it, we may add two balls, to see how well we concentrate. Make sure to focus on remembering names and not on athletic ability.

Additional ideas: This activity focuses on concentration and also remembering those around you, specifically those who threw you the ball. Once the students finish one round, see if they can remember who they received the ball from and to whom they threw it, as you play a second time.

EXPLAIN: The second way I will get to know you is two-fold. First, I will write a few things on the board and you will fill in the appropriate information about yourself on an index card. In addition, we are going to take individual pictures of ourselves to hang around the classroom and upon which we will place the information about ourselves. Once everyone finishes, we will share our fun facts or other things we wrote on the card to get to know each other.

- Name
- Grade
- Birthday
- Silly/fun fact about you
- The best way for you to learn
- Things that make learning hard for you

Note to teacher: These pictures will be used during the last unit as a compare and contrast for how people change and therefore how their understanding of God evolves.

15-25 Brit creation

EXPLAIN: Now that we know each other a little better, we need to take some time to get to know ourselves as a community. We need to create a Brit!

ASK: What is a Brit? (possible answers: *it's related to Noah and the rainbow, it means contract or covenant, it's an agreement between two people/groups of people about something*)

ASK: We are going to create a Brit for our classroom Why do we need a Brit? (*it helps us remember why we're here and what the rules are, it reminds us what's actually important and what's just kind of important, we need rules,*)

EXPLAIN: For our purposes, a *brit* is a broad vision statement for the kind of learning community we want to create. Because we want to make sure we all respect the rules, we will make them together.

Next, do brainstorming of rules the students think should be the classroom rules. Write all the suggestions the students give on the board. If the student suggestions become unrealistic, try to rein them back in. Otherwise, let them share all the ideas they come up with.

Once they've given all the suggestions, work with them to consolidate into 3-5 solid rules that encompass what the students said. Try to keep the rules concrete, but general and positive. So, instead of "no kicking," respect physical property, etc.

Once finished, write up the rules (or allow a student to do so). Ensure that each student and you as the teacher sign it, and hang it up in a prominent spot in the classroom.

25-30 Intro Torah blessing

Instructions: have the blessing for the study of Torah transliterated on a piece of paper and hung up somewhere in the classroom (It can be found in Appendix 1A: Torah Blessing). Point to it and ASK why we might say the Torah blessing here. (Possible answers: *we're Jewish, we're studying Torah, becoming Bar/Bat Mitzvah, we learn Hebrew, Torah's important, God told us to*).

EXPLAIN: All that we learn in religious school is Torah. We may not specifically learn Torah each day, but we live Torah in what we do. So, by saying thank you to God for the opportunity to say Torah, we make it even more special and remind ourselves that it is a gift for us to study Torah!

Then, teach them the Hebrew - both how to say it and what it means - and then the song, *Sweet as Honey* in Appendix 1A. Once everyone has mastered it, do it as a class! Explain that we will do this each week, at the beginning of class.

30-45 God ideas activity and affinity grouping

EXPLAIN: Our theme for the year is God.

Note to Teacher: The God ideas activity should encourage students to become comfortable with the concept that there aren't right or wrong answers for talking about God. They should become familiar with talking about God/God language as well as manipulating it for their learning. Also, this same activity will be used in the last unit to explore how thoughts have changed, so keep the post-its and groups that the students create (if possible).

Throughout our lives, many of us maybe talked or thought about God, and all of us probably have different ideas about God. Therefore, in order to talk about God in here, we need to start with a vague idea of what we all think and know.

On individual sticky notes, we are each going to write EVERYTHING we know about God: characteristics, words, ideas, images, and thoughts we may have or have heard. That way we will be able to know what we believe now, and reference them in the future. Some of us may have repeats, which is alright. Try and make at least 7 sticky notes.

- | | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| • Sky | • Fish (God spelled backwards, | • Israeli flag |
| • Controller | translated from | • community |
| • He | Hebrew) | • Nature |
| • Western Wall | • Israel | • Rabbi |
| • Ruler | • Beyond gender | • Tree |
| • Planet | • Fluffy cloud | • Air |
| • Man with a beard | • Jewish star | • Creation |
| • Helper | • Wind | • Me |
| • Earth | • Forgiveness | • Bug |
| • Prayers | • Universe | • Synagogue |
| • Water | • Jerusalem | • B'tzelem Elohim |
| • Busy | • Shema | • Dreams |
| • Bossy | • Alone | • Imagination |
| • Torah | • One | • Baruch Atah |
| • Floods | • King | Adonai |
| • Hebrew | | • Shadow |

Once students complete their sticky notes, instruct them to place the notes on a big board space. When everyone is finished, have a few students go to the board and find two notes that they think are related (repeats should be combined as well, but don't count). If there are certain sticky notes that seem to go with another grouping, they can place those together. Rotate through the students and continue doing that until all the notes have been grouped. If there is a particular note that students don't agree on, it can be in its own category, or off to the side. Remind students that there should be 10 or less categories (because it's easier to discuss and think about). Once all the words are grouped, have students find a particular category that they like and come up with descriptive names for that grouping of words/concepts. Continue doing that until all the groups are named. If students do disagree, or have questions, allow that conversation, because it may elicit an interesting dialogue.

Once everyone is finished, share the groupings as a class and discuss (time permitting).

Possible Questions:

- Why did you group the words the way that you did?
- What did you include in specific groups that was hard to do?
- How are some groupings a better match than others?
- What other groupings might you think we should include? Or leave out?
- What about these groupings defies your expectations?

45-55 4 Questions (w/individual questions AND discussion)

EXPLAIN: In order to know or understand God, we must continue to learn what we think about God! Otherwise, it is much harder to talk to other people about God. So, we are going to answer four questions about God for ourselves, which we will look at and think about at the end of the year.

Start with posters of the questions printed around the room with each of the four questions, or put it on the board. Let the students think about the questions for about 30 seconds and ask any clarifying questions.

Then, give them paper with the questions printed on them and pencil/marker/pen and ask them to answer. They can answer in anyway - but have to make sure they can explain it to a friend or the teacher.

See Appendix 1B: Four Questions for a worksheet of the questions

(Note: within the first three questions, the students are meant to be able to share anything they know or think about God.)

1. Where is God?
2. How do you experience God (where, when, why)?
3. What does God look/sound/feel/taste like? (for this, you can give students play dough if it will help them show you, but they have to explain what they make)
4. What questions do you have about God?

If there is time, once students answer their own questions, pair them up with a classmate to compare their answers. The point is for them to realize that each person has a unique idea of what God is, and that is okay. We all may have a different relationship with God, and we want that. Because if we do, we can learn together and develop stronger ideas of God!

Students may not get there on their own. Walk around the room while they are working with a partner (or discuss in a full class discussion) and offer points where the students agreed and places where they had vastly different answers. Ask why.

Autism Adaptation: As these students might struggle with peer to peer social communication and engagement, you may need to facilitate this part of the exercise or adapt it for the students. If the students seem capable of peer work, EXPLAIN that in Judaism, we often work with another person to sharpen our own ideas, learn more about what we think, and to help others clarify their thoughts. This concept is called *chevruta*. The task as a *chevruta* is asking questions about someone's answers, asking them about places where your answers differ from theirs, and challenging answers you don't necessarily understand or feel are fully formed. If students can't do *chevruta*, try to discuss in a big group so students can hear each other's opinions.

55-60 Wrap up - Journaling

EXPLAIN: We will finish each class with a "journaling" experience. This is not traditional journaling. Rather, your job is to begin processing what we learned in class and let me as the teacher know what you got out of the lessons. You can write, draw, or even talk to the teacher,

but there has to be some physical evidence that you've thought about the question by the end of the five minutes. Each day, a question or two will be written on the board at the end of class.

Today's exit question is: What more do you want to know about God?

Appendix 1A: Torah Blessing

SWEET AS HONEY

By Dan Nichols

Sweet as honey, sweet as honey, sweet as honey on our tongue
Sweet as honey, sweet as honey, sweet as honey on our tongue
Ba-ruch A-tah A-do-nai
E-lo-hei-nu Me-lech ha-o-lam
A-----sher k'-di-sha-nu b'-mitz-vo-tav v'-tzi-va-nu
La-a----sok b'-div-rei To-rah
La-a-sok b'-div-rei To-rah
Sweet as honey, sweet as honey, sweet as honey on our tongue
Let us soak it up and let it all sink in-----sweet words of Torah
Sweet as honey, sweet as honey, sweet as honey on our tongue
Let us soak it up and let it all sink in-----sweet words of Torah

Torah Study Blessing

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ
בְּמִצְוֹתֶיךָ, וְצִוָּנוּ לִעְסוֹק בְּדַבְּרֵי תוֹרָה.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech HaOlam Asher K'dshanu B'mitzvotav v'tzivanu La'asok b'divrei Torah.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Ruling spirit of the universe, who has made us holy in Your mitzvot and commanded us to immerse ourselves in the words of Torah.

Appendix 1B: Four Questions

1. Where is God?

2. How do you experience God (where, when, why)?

3. What does God look/sound/feel/taste like? (for this question, you can use play dough, or markers or writing or music or a prayer from the prayerbook or anything else that helps you express this)

4. What questions do you have about God?

Lesson 2: God's Existence

Can something I don't see, hear, touch or feel exist?

I do not feel obliged to believe that same God who endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect had intended for us to forgo their use. -Galileo

Goals:

- To demonstrate that although we cannot see God, we can see the byproducts of God's existence/presence
- To expose students to the idea that God is real even though God is not tangible
- To offer reasons for students to suspend disbelief about God

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, SSBAT:

- Explain how God is in the world using the wind chime
- Construct an argument on why they should suspend disbelief about God for the year

Materials:

- Fan - even small handheld fan
- Per student:
- 6 Jumbo craft sticks (preferably colored)
- Tacky glue or hot glue
- 4 strings/ribbons, all cut the same length, roughly 20" (can add more strings that you tie onto other areas of the wind chime.
- Scissors
- Large plastic beads, enough for each student to have 40-50
- 8 larger beads (or washers) to tie on the bottom of each string, and end about halfway up, so it can rest inside the star and serve as the balance for the mobile. (these can also be other large objects that can be threaded onto string (shells with holes, washers, metal beads)
- Appendix 1C: Wind chime Instructions
- Appendix 1D: Ira Rosenberg Quote
- Appendix 1E: God Traits Chart
- Appendix 1F: Tanach Quotes printed and cut up by quote, in envelopes for each student
- Appendix 1G: Suggested Tanach Quotes-Column Placements
- Appendix 1H: Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks quote

Key terms:

- *B'tzelem Eloheim*

Timeline

00-05 Settle In

05-08 Blessing for Study of Torah

08-30 Wind chimes ("God" chimes)

30-50 God traits (concept attainment)

50-55 Tie-in/Suspended dis-belief (comic book characters - not real but you believe in them?)
55-60 Journaling

Expanded Timeline

00-05 Settle In

Be present in the room with the schedule written on the board. Welcome students into the space and ask them about their week; something exciting or cool. Invite them to help you set up the wind chime activity, so they feel control and management of their classroom. Have fidgets around the room for students if necessary.

05-08 Blessing for Study of Torah

Settle students facing the words of the blessing.

ASK: Last week we learned this blessing and determined that we will say it every week. Why would we say the blessing for the study of Torah while studying God? (*God comes from Torah. Torah comes from God - so all that we learn is Torah. All Jewish learning is Torah. All learning is Torah. Because this is religious school. Torah guides our lives, even guides God.*)

Let's join together in singing the blessing for the study of Torah (Torah Blessing - Appendix 1A)⁵

08-30 Wind chimes ("God" chimes)

Set Induction: Begin by asking the students to describe air. On the board, write down all the characteristics of air: *loud, gusty, makes leaves move, strong/weak, powerful, rattles windows, cools me down, I breathe it in/out, it fills balloons, it's everywhere - even touching me, invisible, part nitrogen/oxygen/hydrogen, invisible.*

ASK:

- Do you ever actually see the air? *NO*
- But you know the air exists, how? *I see the effect it has on other things. It makes things move, and they can't just move on their own. Because I learned it.*

EXPLAIN: We know the air is there, even though we cannot see it. We experience the byproducts of the air, what it does to other things even though we cannot see the air itself. The same is true of God: we cannot see or touch God, but we might be able to feel the effects of God's actions. Therefore, we are each going to make a wind chime, so that we can hear the air as it moves. However, we are going to make this a God chime, instead.

Now, make the wind chime. See Appendix 1C: Wind Chime Instructions for instructions. Once completed, hang up wind chimes in the classroom, or go outside if it's a windy day. Inside, manipulate the strands to hit up against each other (Bring in a fan so you can do this). Remind the students that although they cannot see it, the air is what makes the chimes move.

ASK: It's really hard to hear or feel God, even though God is likely all around or in everything we do. How can the wind chime remind you that God is there even when you cannot see God?

⁵ This can be sung also, using Dan Nichols song, Sweet as Honey. See Appendix 1A for the words.

(By seeing the chimes move, I see that something has to make that happen. God makes things happen. I can hear God in other things in the world. It's the shadow of God-we cannot see God, but can "hear" the shadow. just like the chimes on a wind chime move when the air touches it, so too do we sometimes see or hear the after effects of God in the world (seeing trees bloom, experiencing someone being kind, seeing a beautiful sunset, hearing a beautiful sound etc..))

EXPLAIN: As we learn about this concept called God over the next year, it's okay to not believe. But you have to ask questions, to challenge and promise to think. I will teach with the idea that there is a God, but want to make it a conversation.

Rabbi Ira Eisenstein provided another way of understanding God by explaining electricity (See Appendix 1D for enlarged quote): *"Nobody ever saw electricity. We know that exists. We can see and feel what electricity does. If we have an electric bulb and connect it with an electric wire, we get light. If we have an electric heater and connect it, we get heat...In other words, we get to know what electric is by what it does. In the same way, we get to know what God is by what God makes us do. When a person is, so to speak, connect to God, he does good things..."*⁶

Sometimes like electricity, or the wind, there is an idea or thing that is bigger than you and me that we cannot see or necessarily touch. We cannot fully wrap our heads around. Think about what it means for something that we cannot see or touch to be bigger than ourselves as we go on to the next activity.

30-50 God traits-metaphors (concept attainment)

Main idea: the point is for students to grapple with what fits into the specific categories and what doesn't. They don't need to agree on what the category titles should be, nor do they need to agree on all of the quotes that fit in each category. Rather, this is an opportunity to lay a foundation for understanding a general representation of God.

Teacher instructions:

Concept attainment is a teaching strategy meant to help students explore concepts in a deep and meaningful way, by allowing them to determine the characteristics that unify a concept and therefore take ownership of the concept. Here, students will be given a chart with two categories of quotes from the Tanach: one category that represents human-like traits that God possesses, while the other represents non-human like traits God possesses. The process is scaffolded, so students sharpen their understanding as more information is revealed and they get to test out their hypothesis.

EXPLAIN: In the chart before you (God Traits Chart - Appendix 1E), you see two columns, labeled A and B. Each column contains quotes that represent two different, but related ideas. The task is for each of you to determine the unifying characteristics of each column and come up with a name for them.

Once students have worked and seem to slow down, bring the class together and ask for the characteristics of the two columns.

⁶ Rabbi Ira Eisenstein, What We Mean by Religion, in Kushner, *Children Ask About God*, 41.

- Column A characteristics (physical traits that God possesses) (Possible answers: *human-traits, physical traits, about God, God having specific body parts etc.*)
- Column B characteristics (non-physical traits God possesses) (Possible answers: *not necessarily human, things God does/possesses that no one else does/has, non-visual traits, non-body parts described*)

Now hand out the quotes (cut up and placed in an envelope for each student) from the Appendix 1F entitled Tanach Quotes, so each student gets one. EXPLAIN: Here are more quotes from the Tanach that talk about God and belong in the categories we've started to establish above. These quotes are a little harder, because they are not as specific as the other ones. We will do the first few together and then you will do the rest on your own. Questions may come up about God and different ways to characterize God (e.g. I didn't know that God could talk!)⁷

Have students find the quote from Exodus 33:11:

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה פָּנִים אֶל-פָּנִים כַּאֲשֶׁר יְדַבֵּר אִישׁ אֶל-רֵעֵהוּ...

...Adonai would speak to Moses face to face, as one man speaks to another. -Exodus 33:11

ASK: which category do you think the quote goes in, based on the categories you created, and why? (*Column A because this means God has a face, Column A because God speaks, Column B because speaking isn't a physical trait and that doesn't fit into my categories.*)

Autism Adaptation: Students may struggle with this activity, because the rest of the quotes are less concrete. Some are about God's voice, which are technically not physical human traits. Whichever category students want to put these quotes into is acceptable, depending on the categories they come up with (they just need to remain consistent). Therefore, help them clarify the categories and use that as the deciding factor of which category to place the quotes into.

Students might have different answers, which is acceptable. But for this quote, it fits in Column A because God and Moses speak face to face, meaning God has a face (try not to focus on the voice part). That is something that will come up in a lot of the other quotes and students can really choose for themselves which column they want the quote about God's voice to go in. Either are acceptable.

Next, have students find the quote: וַיָּדֹם הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וַיָּרֶחַ עָמַד עַד יְקָם גֹּי אֲיָבִיו וַיַּעֲמֵד הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ בַּחֲצִי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלֹא-אָצַץ לָבוֹא כִּי יְהוָה נִלְחָם לְיִשְׂרָאֵל
And the sun stood still And the moon halted [because of God], While a nation wreaked judgment on its foes... Thus the sun halted in midheaven, and did not press on to set, for a whole day... for the LORD fought for Israel. -Joshua 10:13-14

ASK: Which column do you think this quote goes in and why? *Column B because God doesn't have physical characteristics, Column B because humans cannot make the sun and moon stand still, Column A because God is fighting for Israel and humans can fight for other humans*

⁷ For more questions or thoughts on different ways to characterize God, see the Soncino and Syme God grid in the Resources Section for other questions that might arise as the activity progresses. In addition, feel free to have a discussion with the students about what these quotes mean about God and whether or not they believe that God acts like that today.

Again, although students might have different answers, I would place the quote in column B because this particular quote talks about God characteristics which humans don't have - we cannot stop the sun and moon in the sky!

Once everyone is finished placing each of their quotes, ASK:

- What quotes did you place in which Columns? [Go through the quotes and make the categories on the board, so everyone can see - students may have different answers, so either have a discussion about it, or place an asterisk next to the quotes that cause extra trouble in the class] (a copy of the quotes with suggested column placements and explanations is in Appendix 1G called: Suggested Tanach Quotes-Column Placements)
- Did the titles you came up with for the Columns still work for you? If not, to what might you change the titles of the columns? (*human traits associated with God/non-human traits associated with God, physical/non-physical traits of God...*)

EXPLAIN: Each of us may have grouped these traits somewhat differently, but all of them describe characteristics of God from the Tanach. Some of these characteristics represent God having a physical body or other human characteristics, and some are about God's being, but do not demonstrate physical and/or human-like characteristics. ASK: Why do you think the Torah gives God physical human traits and non-physical characteristics? (*That's the language God wanted to use, that's the language people understand, because Torah writers were/are smart..., because we are like God but not God*)

ASK/EXPLAIN: We talked earlier about God not having a physical body, therefore not being human, so how can the Tanach describe God like that? The Torah gives us many characteristics of God that seem very human. However, we cannot necessarily assume that those characteristics are actually God. Rather, those are the words or the metaphors that God uses to teach us about God, so that we can understand. These quotes from the Torah are how WE, as HUMANS understand God, not how God is. So basically, the language in the Torah needed to be accessible to US, not necessarily to God. There is a quote from the Talmud: *dibrah haTorah b'lishon b'nai adam*.⁸ This literally means, Torah speaks in the language of humans. The Torah uses the language of humans, even though it discusses God.

50-55 Tie-in/Suspended disbelief

EXPLAIN: Both activities we did discussed the fact that we cannot necessarily see, hear, or understand God perfectly, even though God is often described to us in language that we do understand. That is really frustrating when we want proof of something, especially an idea as big as God. Sometimes, people say that God doesn't exist, because they cannot find proof of God and so they turn away from it completely. Some of you may believe that. (See Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks Quote in Appendix 1H. In fact, the former Chief Rabbi of England, Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks wrote: "*Of course it is possible to live a life without God, just as it is possible to live a life without humor, or music, or love; and one can no more prove that God exists than one*

⁸ The quote comes from the Babylonian Talmud Berachot 31b.

can prove these other things exist to those who lack a sense of humor, or to whom Schubert [a musical conductor] is mere noise, or love a figment of the romantic imagination.”⁹

Rabbi Sacks writes of humor, music or love. We cannot see them, but we know they are there and to some extent need them. But, like the quotes from Jewish texts, we are given glimpses of what God might be like, in our own language.

We are going to learn and work together to discover God, and also ourselves. We will use comic books, Facebook, music, art and more. Just because one way of thinking about God doesn't work for you, don't discount God altogether. Ask questions. Challenge back. But stay with us.

55-60 Journaling

Last week, I explained that we will do some sort of journal each week, to reflect on what we've learned during the session. Each journal will have a prompt to help you. This week, the exit question, which I will write on the board is:

Imagine you have to convince someone to learn about God for the year. What do you say to them? Why should they put aside their possible disbelief of God and engage in a class about God? What do you say when they tell you they cannot see God and therefore cannot understand God?

⁹ Josh Barkin, Ed., *God: Jewish Choices for Struggling with the Ultimate* (Torah Aura Productions: Los Angeles, 2008), 13.

Appendix 1C: Wind chime Instructions¹⁰

1. Write different ways they experience God on the 6 different popsicle sticks. Then, glue the popsicle sticks into two triangles and set it aside to dry (if using hot glue, glue the two triangles together at the same time).
2. Take the three pieces of string and (with them) tie a big bead halfway down each string. *The large bead in the middle will help hold up the star, and the ones on the bottom will clink together to make the chime sound.
3. Thread the beads onto one half of the string and tie another big bead or object on the bottom.
4. Do this for 2 more strands.
5. String the 4th strand completely, leaving 4-5 inches at one end.
6. Thread the three strands, through three evenly spaced holes in the star (see picture)
7. Put the 4th strand up through the middle and gather all 4 strand ends together. The star will sit on the big beads, adjust the strands until it is hanging evenly.
8. Slip all 4 strand ends through a bead and tie it all together. Make a loop at the top, so you can hang it.
9. With extra time, make extra strings with beads to tie onto the star in different places.



¹⁰ <http://howtothisandthat.com/wind-chime-kids-craft/>

Appendix 1D: Ira Eisenstein Quote

“Nobody ever saw electricity. We know that exists. We can see and feel what electricity does. If we have an electric bulb and connect it with an electric wire, we get light. If we have an electric heater and connect it, we get heat...In other words, we get to know what electric is by what it does. In the same way, we get to know what God is by what God makes us do. When a person is, so to speak, connect to God, he does good things...”

Appendix 1E: God Traits Chart

A	B
<p>בְּכָל־מָקוֹם עֵינֵי יְהוָה לְצֹדוֹת רָעִים וְטוֹבִים:</p> <p>The eyes of Adonai are everywhere, Observing the bad and the good. -Proverbs 15:3</p>	<p>כִּי לְכוּ־נָא אֶל־מִקְוַמִּי אֲשֶׁר בְּשִׁילֹו אֲשֶׁר שָׁכַנְתִּי שְׁמִי שָׁם בְּרֹאשׁוֹנָה וְרָאוּ אֶת אֲשֶׁר־עָשִׂיתִי לוֹ מִפְּנֵי רָעַת עַמִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל:</p> <p>Just go to My place at Shiloh, where I had established My name formerly, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel. -Jeremiah 7:12</p>
<p>פֹּה אֶל־פֶּה אֲדַבֵּר־בּוֹ וּמִרְאָהּ וְלֹא בְּחִידָת וּתְמִנַּת יְהוָה יִבִּיט</p> <p>“With him I speak mouth to mouth, plainly and not in riddles, and he witnesses/sees the likeness of God.” -Numbers 12:8</p>	<p>וְאַחַר הָרָעַשׁ אֵשׁ לֹא בָּאֵשׁ יְהוָה וְאַחַר הָאֵשׁ קוֹל דִּמְמָה דַּקָּה:</p> <p>After the earthquake—fire; but Adonai was not in the fire. And after the fire—[God was in] a soft murmuring sound. -I Kings 19:12</p>
<p>וַיֵּרַח יְהוָה אֶת־רִיחַ הַנִּיחֹחַ</p> <p>And Adonai smelled the pleasing odor... -Genesis 8:21</p>	<p>וְשִׂמְחָתְךָ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ... בְּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשָׁכֹן שְׁמוֹ שָׁם:</p> <p>You shall rejoice before Adonai your God ... at the place where Adonai your God will choose to establish [God's] name. -Deuteronomy 16:11</p>

Appendix 1F: Tanach Quotes:

וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶת־קוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מִתְּהַלֵּךְ בַּגֶּן לְנוֹחַ הַיּוֹם וַיִּתְחַבֵּא הָאָדָם וְאִשְׁתּוֹ מִפְּנֵי
יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים בְּתוֹךְ עֵץ הָגֵן:

“They heard the sound of Adonai God moving about in the garden in the cool of the day.” -Genesis 3:8

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם:
“Let us make humans in our image (*tzelem eloheim*), in the image of God [God] created them, male and female [God] created them.” -Genesis 1:27

וַיֵּרָא מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה אֵלָיו בְּלַבַּת־אֵשׁ מִתּוֹךְ הַסֵּנֶה וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה הַסֵּנֶה בֹּעֵר בְּאֵשׁ וְהַסֵּנֶה
אֵינָנו אֹכֵל:

An angel of Adonai appeared to him in a blazing fire out of a bush. He gazed, and there was a bush all aflame, yet the bush was not consumed. -Exodus 3:2

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לוֹ עוֹד הִבֵּא־נָא יָדְךָ בְּחִיקְךָ וַיָּבֵא יָדוֹ בְּחִיקוֹ וַיּוֹצֵאָהּ וְהִנֵּה יָדוֹ מְצֹרֶעֶת
בְּשָׁלֵג:

Adonai said to him further, “Put your hand into your bosom.” He put his hand into his bosom; and when he took it out, his hand was encrusted with snowy scales! - Exodus 4:6

וַיְהִי הַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵיהֶם יוֹמָם בְּעַמּוּד עָנָן לְנַחֲתָם הַדֶּרֶךְ וּלְלֵילָה בְּעַמּוּד אֵשׁ לְהַאֲרִיר לָהֶם
לִלְכֶת יוֹמָם וּלְלֵילָה:

Adonai went before them in a pillar of cloud by day, to guide them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, that they might travel day and night. -Exodus 13:21

וַדַּבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה פָּנִים אֶל־פָּנִים כַּאֲשֶׁר יְדַבֵּר אִישׁ אֶל־רֵעֵהוּ...

...Adonai would speak to Moses face to face, as one man speaks to another. - Exodus 33:11

וְהָעָנָן סָר מֵעַל הָאֹהֶל וְהִנֵּה מִרְיָם מְצֹרֶעֶת בְּשָׁלֵל...

As the cloud [of God] withdrew from the Tent, there was Miriam stricken with snow-white scales... -Numbers 12:10

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֲלֵיכֶם מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ קוֹל דְּבָרִים אֲתֶם שָׁמָעִים וְתַמוּנָה אֵינְכֶם רֹאִים
זוֹלָתִי קוֹל:

(At Sinai) And God spoke to you from inside of the fire: you heard the voice of words but you did not see an image, only a voice. -Deuteronomy 4:12

וְחָרָה אַף־יְהוָה בָּכֶם וְעָצַר אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה מָטָר וְהֶאֱדָמָה לֹא תִתֵּן אֶת־יְבוּלָהּ
וְאֲבִדְתֶּם מִהָרָה מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה נָתַן לָכֶם:

For Adonai's anger will flare up against you, and God will shut up the skies so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its produce. -Deuteronomy 11:17

כִּי אִם־אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם מִכָּל־שְׁבִטֵיכֶם לָשׂוּם אֶת־שְׁמוֹ שָׁם
לִשְׁכְּנֹו תִדְרָשׁוּ וּבֵאתָ שָׁמָּה:

but look only to the site that Adonai your God will choose amidst all your tribes as [God's] habitation, to establish [God's] name there. There you are to go -
Deuteronomy 12:5

וַיִּדְּם הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וַיָּרַח עָמַד עַד־יָקָם גּוֹי אֵינְיוֹ וַיַּעֲמֵד הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ בַּחֲצִי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלֹא־אָץ לָבוֹא
בַּיּוֹם תָּמִים... כִּי יְהוָה נִלְחָם לְיִשְׂרָאֵל

And the sun stood still And the moon halted [because of God], While a nation wreaked judgment on its foes... Thus the sun halted in midheaven, and did not press on to set, for a whole day... for the LORD fought for Israel. -Joshua 10:13-14

Appendix 1G: Suggested Tanach Quotes-Column Placements:

וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶת־קוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מְתַהַלֵּךְ בַּגֶּן לַיּוֹם וַיִּתְחַבֵּא הָאָדָם וְאִשְׁתּוֹ מִפְּנֵי
יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים בְּתוֹךְ עֵץ הָדָר:

“They heard the sound of Adonai God moving about in the garden in the cool of the day.” -Genesis 3:8

Column A - God is moving around and making sound

Column B - God can “move” and “make sound” but not have a physical body (if students decide that column A is about a physical body)

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם:
“Let us make humans in our image (*tzelem eloheim*), in the image of God [God] created them, male and female [God] created them.” -Genesis 1:27

Column A - God has an image

וַיֵּרָא מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה אֵלָיו בְּלַבַּת־אֵשׁ מִתּוֹךְ הַסִּיָּה וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה הַסִּיָּה בֹעֵר בְּאֵשׁ וְהַסִּיָּה
אֵינָנו אֹכֵל:

An angel of Adonai appeared to him in a blazing fire out of a bush. He gazed, and there was a bush all aflame, yet the bush was not consumed. -Exodus 3:2

Column B - God created a bush that was on fire but didn't burn. Humans can't do miracles.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לוֹ עוֹד הִבֵּאתָ יָדְךָ בְּחִיקְךָ וַיָּבֵא יָדוֹ בְּחִיקוֹ וַיִּוצֵאֶהָ וְהִנֵּה יָדוֹ מְצֻרֶת
בְּשָׁלֵג:

Adonai said to him further, “Put your hand into your bosom.” He put his hand into his bosom; and when he took it out, his hand was encrusted with snowy scales! - Exodus 4:6

Column B - again, humans can't do miracles

וַיְהִי הַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵיהֶם יוֹמָם בְּעַמּוּד עָנָן לַנֶּחֱתָם הַדֶּרֶךְ וּלְלֵילָה בְּעַמּוּד אֵשׁ לְהָאִיר לָהֶם
לָלֶכֶת יוֹמָם וּלְלֵילָה:

Adonai went before them in a pillar of cloud by day, to guide them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, that they might travel day and night. -Exodus 13:21

Column B - God is a pillar of cloud/fire. Humans can't do that

וַדַּבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה פְּנִים אֶל־פְּנִים כַּאֲשֶׁר יְדַבֵּר אִישׁ אֶל־רֵעֵהוּ...

...Adonai would speak to Moses face to face, as one man speaks to another. -

Exodus 33:11

Column A - God is face to face with Moses.

וְהָעָנָן סָר מֵעַל הָאֹהֶל וְהָנָה מַרְיָם מִצִּרְעַת בַּשָּׁלֶ. ...

As the cloud [of God] withdrew from the Tent, there was Miriam stricken with snow-white scales... -Numbers 12:10

Column B - God performing miracles, which is a non-human ability.

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֲלֵיכֶם מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ קוֹל דְּבָרִים אֲתֶם שָׁמָעִים וְתִמוּנָה אֵינְכֶם רֹאִים
זוֹלָתִי קוֹל:

(At Sinai) And God spoke to you from inside of the fire: you heard the voice of words but you did not see an image, only a voice. -Deuteronomy 4:12

Column A - humans have a voice

Column B - God doesn't have an image, only a voice. And a voice is not a physical characteristic.

וְחָרָה אַף־יְהוָה בָּכֶם וְעָצָר אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה מָטָר וְהִצַּדְמָה לֹא תִתֵּן אֶת־יְבוּלָהּ
וְאֲבִדְתֶּם מִהָרָה מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה נָתַן לָכֶם:

For Adonai's anger will flare up against you, and God will shut up the skies so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its produce. -Deuteronomy 11:17

Column A - humans get angry

Column B - God's anger is not a physical trait. Also, humans can't stop rain from falling or fields from producing.

**Students may split this quote in half - suggest that as you make the columns on the board

כִּי אִם־אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־יִבְחָר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם מִכָּל־שְׁבִטֵיכֶם לָשׂוּם אֶת־שְׁמוֹ שָׁם
לִשְׁכְּנוֹ תִּדְרָשׁוּ וּבֵאתָ שָׁמָּה:

But look only to the site that Adonai your God will choose amidst all your tribes as [God's] habitation, to establish [God's] name there. There you are to go -

Deuteronomy 12:5

Column B - God's name is not a physical trait. God establishes God's name because God doesn't have a body.

וַיָּדֹם הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וַיָּרֶחַ עָמַד עַד־יָקָם גּוֹי אֲיִבָּיו וַיַּעֲמֵד הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ בַּחֲצֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלֹא־אָץ לָבוֹא
בְּיוֹם תָּמִים... כִּי יִהְיֶה נֶלְחָם לְיִשְׂרָאֵל

And the sun stood still And the moon halted [because of God], While a nation
wreaked judgment on its foes... Thus the sun halted in midheaven, and did not
press on to set, for a whole day... for the LORD fought for Israel. -Joshua

10:13-14

Column B - humans cannot stop the sun and moon in the sky.

Appendix 1H: Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks Quote

“Of course it is possible to live a life without God, just as it is possible to live a life without humor, or music, or love; and one can no more prove that God exists than one can prove these other things exist to those who lack a sense of humor, or to whom Schubert [a musical conductor] is mere noise, or love a figment of the romantic imagination.”

Lesson 3: Describing God's Self

He cannot be spoken of, but he can be spoken to; he cannot be seen, but he can be listened to. The only possible relationship with God is to address him and to be addressed by him, here and now. — Walter Kaufmann¹¹

Goals:

- To explore what it means for God to be without a gender
- To provide ways of thinking about God's "identity" characteristics: including names and gender
- To share different names/identities for God (so students can discover what helps them connect with God)

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, SSBAT

- Analyze the different genders
- Depict how God does not fit squarely into one gender or another
- Choose names for God that resonate with them

Materials:

- 2 Bins/baskets/boxes and paper to cover them (tape to tape it down)
- Markers - preferably blue and pink, also markers/pens/pencils
- Big post-it/piece of butcher paper
- Siddurim: One for each student
- Appendix 1I: Names Midrash print out - 1 per student
- Appendix 1J: Names of God print out (not necessary but helpful to have for the teacher)
- Journals

Timeline

00-05 Settle In

05-07 Blessing for study of Torah

07-25 Gender Bins

25-32 Names Midrash

32-50 Identify names for self and God's names

49-55 Name plaques

55-60 Journaling wrap-up

Expanded Timeline

00-05 Settle In

Be present in the room with the schedule written on the board. Welcome students into the space and ask them about their week; something exciting or cool. Or, invite them to tell you about

¹¹ Walter Kaufmann, translator's note in Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (A Touchstone Book: New York, 1970), 25-26.

something they're interested in: help them open up. Have fidgets around the room for students if necessary.

05-07 Blessing for study of Torah

ASK: Why do we say the blessing for the study of Torah? (*we learn about God in the Torah, all Jewish learning is Torah, because the rabbis said to do it every day*).

Invite students to look to the blessing posted in the room in and say it with you. Sing it if you can, using Appendix A, to create a richer experience of learning.

07-25 Gender Bins

In order to set this up, have two students take the two boxes/baskets and label one MALE and one FEMALE (possibly with blue and pink markers, respectively). Then, separate the class into two groups and have each group write on the boxes as many stereotypes of males for the MALE box and females for the FEMALE box. They can write physical characteristics, expectations based on gender, colors, names, anything.

Possible answers

Male: *tall, strong, handsome, smart, gets angry, physical, burly, hairy, protecting, fathers, marry a woman, sexual, blue, Bob, can't show weakness, gets pissed off, doesn't want to talk about feelings, kind, nice, dad, ties and suits, pants, patriarchy, works hard, earns money*

Female: *petite, open, honest, feeling, vulnerable, smart, high heels, skirts, dresses, pink, cute, good shape, nurturer, mother, feminist, not opinionated, opinionated, passionate, earns money, shouldn't talk too much.*

Next INSTRUCT students to create a list of characteristics that describe themselves, taking from either of the lists. (This can be done as a group-by placing the basket on a student's head and having them say what fits for them, or how they might describe themselves.)

Once they finish, ASK: Do any of these words fit for both categories? Which ones and why?

THEN ASK: Do any of these words not describe your idea of this gender? Or you? Which ones and why?¹²

Hopefully, the students see that these characteristics don't necessarily describe a real person, but they describe how we think about the different genders. Also, students should see that each of them is not described by all these characteristics...

Next, ASK: Does God fit specifically into one of these categories more than the other? Why or why not? (*no, God fits some of our ideas about these genders, but not really.*)

¹² If a question on gender expression arises, that conversation is wholly appropriate, it does not necessarily further the point of this lesson. Consider your students and their mental capacity and engage in the conversation from there, if appropriate

Have a student take two markers, a pink and blue one, and place it between the two baskets. Say that some people think that God is a mix of male and female, with some “male” qualities and some “female” qualities. Then, have someone take the markers to a different part of the room.

EXPLAIN: Many people believe that either God doesn’t have a gender or that God cannot be placed on the spectrum of gender like people are. This is because God is intangible — not invisible — but intangible, meaning we cannot touch God (like with the air from the previous lesson). And if we cannot touch God, or God does not have a form, God cannot have a gender.

Also, some people don’t think about God outside of the realm of gender. Therefore, they often call God by the pronoun He. Although we now know that Jews don’t think of God like that, we may have to listen to other people when they do it. Another reason some people use the word He to describe God is that Hebrew is a gendered language, meaning all words, even for things like table and kitchen, have a gender assigned to them. The language the Torah uses for God is mostly male centered, so people translate the words as He centered, even when they aren’t.¹³

That said, we don’t have to speak like that. He is a name some people use for God. Others use God or Adonai. Others use Allah, in Islam. Next, let’s look at the idea of names and see what Judaism has to say about them.

25-32 Names Midrash

(Set Induction to second part of the lesson)

See Names Midrash (Appendix 1I) for text from Tanchuma Vayekhel 1. Read the midrash together.

Questions for the conversation and possible answers:

1. What are the three names described here? (*The name we are given by our parents - both Hebrew and English; pet names/nicknames/names other people call us; the name that comes from our actions - our reputation*)
2. What is the difference between them? (*The names themselves, who gives it to us (our parents, other people, us, respectively), when in life we acquire them. The middle one is earned from our friends from a specific point in time, but the last one is earned by how we live.*)
3. How do you earn your name? (*By how you live, what you do, what mitzvot you keep.*) What makes the name that comes from your reputation the best? (*it’s not just given to you, you have to earn it.*) When is it not the best? (*when you don’t do good things and therefore get a not so nice name.*)

EXPLAIN: We each have many different names we call ourselves or that other people call us. Some have meaning and some don’t. Throughout life, we eventually get to decide what name we want to be called.

32-49 Identify names for self and God’s names

Introductions

¹³ Barkin, *God: Jewish Choices*, 8-9.

ASK: We just learned about the importance of names. Names are the first things we often use when introducing ourselves to people. So, what is the benefit of introducing ourselves in different ways? Why would we do it? (*we get to choose which part of ourselves we share, we get to change how others see us, we are in control, we can change how we want to be represented.*)

Have the students practice different ways of introducing themselves to people. Pair up students to introduce themselves if they struggle to randomly pair themselves with another student.

If they do well with introductions, suggest that they use different adjectives or characteristics of themselves, for example: Hi, my name is Elana and I really like to cook. OR Hi, my name is Elana, but the nickname my friends use is Iguana. It is a joke from when I was in High School.

Autism Adaptation: You may have to demonstrate the best way to introduce yourself to someone (with a social story). Have a student come to the front of the class and demonstrate with you. Introduce yourself first, with your name: “Hi, my name is _____. What’s your name?” and then have them reciprocate. Also, students may struggle with eye contact. Explain/discuss that in America, eye contact is a way to show respect, as well as to demonstrate that one is listening.

Once everyone’s introduced themselves to 1-2 students, gather the students together and ASK: What is the benefit of introducing ourselves in different ways? Why do people do it? (*Different people call us different names. Different names mean different things to us or others. Sometimes we want to get across different ideas. Names are a way we relate to people.*)

God’s “Introductions”

Have students look in prayerbooks to find as many names of God as they can find. Have one of the *madrichim* (if you have one) write down all the words on a big post it note/piece of butcher paper. (p. 76 of *Mishkan Tefilah* - almost all are different ideas of God) Explain that these names show up many times throughout the prayerbook, so there may be some overlap. Maybe suggest that some kids look in different places in the Siddur as well (There are page numbers for the names in Appendix F, so you can reference students to those pages if necessary). There are also more names than what is written.

See Names of God (Appendix 1J)

They should find as many names of God as they can, which will show that God has many names by which we call God. We all may think of God differently.

For the tetragrammaton, EXPLAIN: We do not know how to pronounce this name. It is one of the names God uses in the Torah. The word can have three different meanings, depending on which vowels we use with it: I was, I will be, or I am. But since the Torah was written without vowels, we don’t know if one of those is correct. Therefore, we say Adonai for it.

Note to teacher: These words show up many places in *Mishkan Tefilah*. The students may find them in other places, but these are some suggestions. Also, there are words found in the Torah, if you want to help the learners look in a Tanach.

At conclusion ASK:

- Why does God have different names? (*different people address God differently. Different words for different things God did/does. Different characteristics. God wanted to be represented differently to different groups. People related to God differently.*)
- How does each one give us an idea of what some Jews think of as God?

EXPLAIN: One thought suggests that these names helped the people in the Torah connect to the ways that God individually interacted with or related to them. In our terms, a term like *tzur* or *melech* is like saying “my cousin” or “my smart friend who lives down the street.”

God’s proper name, though, is יהוה. In Exodus 6:3, God introduces God’s self to Moses: “I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as *El Shaddai* (God Almighty), but I did not make Myself known to them by my name יהוה.” Meaning, Moses is now receiving this proper name, that we as Jews continue to use now as that proper name of God.

ASK: How do we get introduced to God? (*God’s names. They each explain a different attribute about God. Through prayer. Through Torah. Our parents and teachers tell them to us. People tell us God doesn’t exist. Through angry comments about God not helping people.*) (If this comes up, it may prove beneficial to talk about how God interacts with people and whether or not God does these things. See the section on theodicy in resources for more information.)

49-55 Name plaques

EXPLAIN: Even though there is a “proper” name for God, we can each choose to use different names for God. Because there are so many names for God, and for each of you, we want to make sure that we use the right names when talking to each other. Therefore, each of you will create their own name plaque, for yourself and for God. This will be how you want to be called, and also include the name of God that you want to use - what name best demonstrates your relationship to God. You can decorate it however you want, but it has to have both your name and the name of God on it.

Have the students take a moment to look at the names of God we found in the last activity. Instruct them to pick one or two names that make the most sense for how they think about God/want to use to address God. Tell them to think for a moment about why they want to use that particular name of God: (e.g. *do you like how it sounds, what it represents, the people who use it, where it shows up in prayer or in the Torah etc.*). Some may create their own names for God. As long as they provide a rationale for why and use a name from the Torah as well, go with it!

Once they have both of their names, let them make their name plaques. If time permits (or while they are working), have students explain why they chose which name they chose. If not, include this question in the journaling for the day.

55-60 Journaling wrap-up

Provide the students with their journals, and give them the following exit questions for the day:

- Why do you think God’s “gender” isn’t important?
- What name did you choose to call God, and why?

Appendix 1I: Names Midrash

Tanchuma Vayekhel 1

כל זמן שאדם מרבה במצות הוא קונה שם טוב לעצמו, את מוצא שלשה שמות נקראו לו לאדם, אחד מה שקוראים לו אביו ואמו, ואחד מה שקוראין לו בני אדם ואחד מה שקונה הוא לעצמו, טוב מכולן מה שקונה הוא לעצמו

Every time a person increases their good deeds, they earn themselves a new name. There are three names by which a person is called: one which their parents call them, one which people call them, and one which they earn for themselves. The last is the best one of all. [Translation by Hillel and Panim. Edited for gender neutrality]¹⁴

¹⁴ <http://www.on1foot.org/text/midrash-tanhuma-parshat-vayakhel-1>

Appendix 1J: Names of God

- אל/אלוהים *El/Elohim* (God) (p. 362)
- ____ אלוהי *Elohei* ____ (God of) (p. 76)
- אלוהינו *Eloheinu* (Our God) (p. 76)
- אל שדי *El Shaddai* (Almighty) (p. 588)
- אדון *Adon* (Lord) (p. 586)
- יי *Adonai* (God) (p. 76, 72)
- צור *Tzur* (Rock) (p. 72)
- אב *Av* (father) (p. 362)
- עוזר *Ozeir* (helper) (p. 76)
- מלך *Melech* (king) (p. 76)
 - מלך מלכי המלכים *Melech Malchei HaM'lachim* (the one who is Sovereign over all) (p. 586)
- *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* (The Holy and Blessed One)
- יהוה Tetragrammaton, pronounced *Adonai* (God) (p. 64)
- מקום *Makom* (not in *Mishkan Tefilah*, but an important name for God meaning place, often used with a *hey* to indicate “The place”)

Lesson 4: Shema: Oneness and Listening

An exploration of God's oneness and God's place in the world

Hear O' Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai is One! -Deuteronomy 6:4

Goals:

- To experience how God's oneness comes from the diversity of the world
- To share different ways of experiencing God

Objectives:

At the end of the lesson, SSBAT:

- List the places where they experience God and how
- Demonstrate their experience of God in the world and describe it
- Describe what it means for God to be one, for them/for Jewish thought

Materials:

- 1 round puzzle with pre-created puzzle pieces - pulled apart prior to class
- Markers
- Appendix 1K: Abraham and the Idols
- Appendix 1L: Abraham Heschel Divinity Quote
- Computer with internet connection and access to youtube
- Pens/pencils
- Paper (possible to add to journal)
- Journals

Timeline

00-05 Settle In

05-07 Blessing for Study of Torah

07-18 Shema Set Induction

18-40 God's oneness

40-55 Hearing God Scenarios

55-60 Journaling

Timeline

00-05 Settle In

Be present in the room with the schedule written on the board. Welcome students into the space and ask them about their week; something exciting or cool. Or, invite them to tell you about something they're interested in: help them open up. Have them help you set up for the day: putting out the puzzle pieces, getting the play dough out and on people's desks.

05-07 Blessing for Study of Torah

Invite students to look to the blessing posted in the room and say it with you. Sing it if you can, using Appendix 1A, to create a richer experience of learning.

07-18 Shema Set Induction

Start by writing the Shema on the board (in Hebrew and English, if possible) and then singing a version of it together.

ASK: What is this prayer and what's it about? *Shema, the most important prayer of the Jewish people, prayer from Deuteronomy 6:4, God being one, that we need to listen to God, and for God in the world, that God is one for the Jews.*

After they answer, give each student a few pieces of the puzzle. On their pieces, they need to write the names they use for God and also characteristics of God that they think are important to know about or understand. Once they've each written their piece, have them work together to put together the puzzle.

Once complete, ASK:

- What are some of the words you wrote on the puzzle pieces? (*Adonai, God, Melech, helper, kind, loving, like the wind, unexplainable.*)
- What about God can you understand better after taking the different words you wrote and putting them together? (*God is a combination of all of our answers, God can be each of those things for each of us.*)
- Why do you think the puzzle is round? (*because God is round-God doesn't have an end just like a circle doesn't, God is whole when we all contribute, God is one, all our answers make up God.*)

EXPLAIN: Those are great answers, and there is another answer too. When we looked at the Shema, we talked about the fact that God is one. Another way to think of God is through *shleimut*, meaning wholeness. Just as a round puzzle has no edges, we also call it whole. So God's job in a way, is to bring us all together as *shalem*, whole.

18-40 God's oneness

EXPLAIN: One way to talk about God, as we talked about before, is through bringing individual pieces together into God's wholeness. Another way considers what God does and how that makes *shleimut*, wholeness.

gods of the Past

Make a list with the students answering this question: Think about ancient Greek and Roman mythology, both of which have gods representing and in charge of many aspects of the world. What are all the different things they are in charge of? Ask students to give the different gods...

- sun
- earth
- ocean
- anger
- drama
- internet
- love
- food
- hope
- adventure
- money
- weather
- good grades
- good things happening
- health
- technology

ASK:

- What did the Greeks and Romans think their gods were capable of? (*they could change the situation in the world, they could bring about love or peace or money, they were all powerful in their area of expertise.*)
- Do Jews believe in Gods like that? Why or why not? (*no, we believe in one God, our God can do all of those things, our God controls those gods.*)
- Have Jews ever believed in gods like that?

Ancient Interactions with gods of the past

EXPLAIN: there is a midrash, which is a story used to explain something in the Tanach that doesn't quite make sense or isn't fully explained, about Abraham and idols. Let's read it now and see what Abraham's solution to idols is:¹⁵

Focus on the conversation between Abraham and Terach about Abraham smashing the idols. Abraham says to his father: do you really think the idols make this happen? Terach says no. So Abraham asks if he is really upset about the idols breaking...

See Abraham and the Idols (Appendix 1K) for the midrash. Read the midrash.

ASK:

- What does Abraham think of other gods? (*They don't actually have purpose, we cannot believe in them.*)
- What does the midrash tell us about belief in God? (*we only believe in one God, the God of Israel can do all the things these other gods can do, but better.*)
- How does the God of Israel relate to these idols that Abraham smashed? (*God is the amalgamation of all of them, God is greater than all of them/more capable than all of them.*)

As another way to understand this idea, let's look at this quote from Abraham Joshua Heschel, a Jewish thinker who focused on seeing religion and the world through a God-centered approach, not through community or other people as other thinkers said.¹⁶ (printable quote in Appendix 1L)

¹⁵ Genesis Rabbah 38:13 (on Sefaria)

¹⁶ Sonsino, *Faces of God*, 44

“Divine is a message that discloses unity where we see diversity, that discloses peace when we are involved in discord. God is He who holds our fitful lives together, who reveals to us that what is empirically diverse in color, in interest, in creeds—races, classes, nations—is one in His eyes and one in essence.” — Abraham Joshua Heschel “Man Is Not Alone”¹⁷

ASK:

- What does the quote say? (*that God comes in connection when disconnection exists. God is the connection between us when it’s hard to connect. God is the diversity that makes us unique but also that connects us. God makes the world whole in its differences.*)
- Why/how does this quote represent wholeness and Shema? (*As Jews, we are all different; but when we work together, or believe in God together, or unite over something, we create Judaism and the oneness of it-Shema; By uniting differences, we see God. **God unites our differences. God makes us whole by making us each different** - because we all fit together in our differences.*)

40-55 Hearing God Scenarios

EXPLAIN: As we talked about, we don’t necessarily hear God like Moses or the prophets of the Tanach heard God: we do not hear God speaking to us directly. But, we can hear God in more subtle ways. We talked about Abraham Joshua Heschel above, as a man who believed in a God-centered approach to God and the ultimate questions of the universe. Each of us, according to Heschel, have this sense inside of us called “radical amazement,” which allows us to feel wonder and positive awe at things in the world.¹⁸

To consider radical amazement, we have to be present in ourselves/the present. Although we may not leave the building, we can think about these experiences. I want you to think about times in your life that you have felt awe (ASK: What is awe?

amazement that something exists or that you’re seeing something, incredible beauty and passion, etc) or where you’ve felt a sense of something bigger than yourself. To do that, we’re going to look at a few scenarios and ask a few questions together:

- When you’re on a hike, what makes you feel good? (*moving, seeing the trees above me, watching the sun come through the trees in a cool pattern.*)
- When you do something enjoyable, what is it, and what’s the feeling that it brings up in you? (*when I play video games, I don’t feel uncomfortable in my skin; when I have a heavy blanket on top of me, I breathe more easily; when I run, my head feels clearer;*

Autism Adaptation: Feel out the class - it may work better to take them all down to the gym or a big space and have them walk around and “talk” to God. Also, you may have to scaffold them to the point where they are capable of thinking about this, based on how concrete their thinking is. If they are too concrete, try having each of them name a moment that felt “awesome” to them, or even draw what that moment/connection looked like. Some students may not connect to this activity and do better talking about the way God “acts” - connecting God with actions.

¹⁷ Sonsino, *Faces of God*, 49

¹⁸ Sonsino, *ibid*, 44.

when I have a conversion about something I'm really interested in and someone gets me, my head clears and I get really excited and feel really good.)

- One way people feel super connected to God is when they go to the bathroom. It sounds weird, but many Jews say a prayer after going to the bathroom that thanks God for making the right things open and keeping the right things shut. How do you think that is hearing God? *(It is actually God hearing our body's needs and then us thanking God for it; remembers that God helps us do things in the world; thanking God/feeling grateful is hearing God, because it means we're thinking about God, being amazed that our bodies work like they're supposed to.)*

Invite the students to try it. Tell them to think about places or things or moments where they feel they can best hear God. Is it when seeing a beautiful sunset, or running really fast? Is it when their clothing is really soft or their mom packs just the right thing for lunch? (other options: *being on the beach and hearing the crashing of the waves, jumping on the trampoline, swinging on the swings, playing a video game, praying, holding a new baby, watching old people smile when young kids talk to them*) Suggest that they come up with a few options. OR, have them sit quietly and have a conversation with God like they're talking to a really good friend. See how that feels. What do they "hear" from God? If they feel a need to move to another spot in the room, remind them that they are free to do so.

Once everyone finishes, gather the students and invite volunteers to share what they came up with - either in conversation or in terms of their scenarios. then ASK: What did this feel like? Did you feel connected to God? Why or why not?

ASK: What do you think creates the scenario where you can do that? *being quieter inside than normal, seeing something so powerful that it quiets my head, feeling really connected to something/someone, feeling loved,*

EXPLAIN: Hearing God means opening ourselves up to the world around us. Sometimes it is in an amazing experience that is incredibly beautiful and profound. And sometimes, it is in the most ordinary of moments. Regardless, we often hear God in those "awesome" moments.

55-60 Journaling

Give out the students' journals and invite them to reflect on the following exit question:

- What does it mean for God to be one? How do you listen to/hear God?

Appendix 1K: Abraham and the idols¹⁹

Abraham's father Terah, was a manufacturer of idols. As in most family businesses, everyone helped complete the work and bring in money. For the most part, Abraham was responsible for delivering the idols and helping set them up. When he delivered them, each family lovingly put up the idol with the respect and devotion that idols deserve.

Typically, Abraham would shake his head and leave without uttering a word. He could not understand why people purchased idols – and he was dumbfounded by the reverence they demonstrated towards the sculptures. Abraham knew how the idols were made – in fact he had helped. For him, the idols were simply stone...with eyes that could not see, ears that could not hear, mouths that could not speak, feet that could not move. But, still people would come to his father's shop – respectfully exploring the idols and choosing the one which most moved them.

Terah always avoided leaving Abraham alone in the shop, because he knew of Abraham's disdain for both idols and those who would purchase them. But Terah needed to attend to pressing business, so he left Abraham to run the shop.

Returning to the shop, a sense of dread fell over Terah – he knew something was wrong. As he entered his shop, he could not believe his eyes. It had been destroyed – displays were overturned, walls had holes in them, counters were on their sides, and all the idols were broken. Idols that had once been magnificent were now shattered pieces of stone. As Abraham stepped out from the back room, Terah asked, “who did this horrible thing? Who hated me and my family so much that they would destroy our shop and thus our livelihood?”

Abraham hesitated before answering, “the largest idol did it – he took a hammer and destroyed the others before I could stop and destroy him.” “Son, do you take me for a fool?” Terah shouted. “These are nothing but stone creations – you destroyed our shop – you destroyed our family's future!”

“If you know that they are but stone,” asked Abraham, “why do you sell them – why do you allow people to believe that they are more than just sculpted rock?”

“It is not my place to take from people what they hold dear,” answered Terah. “I am here to give them what they ask for even though I myself do not believe that what they want is of value.”

“That is a sham-deceitful and dishonest” declared Abraham, “I refuse to remain part of such a charade. I will leave this place and not return.”

With that said, Abraham left his home, his family, and his past. He began his journey – vowing never to allow the idols of the past to be his security for the future.

¹⁹ Reworking of Modern interpretation of midrash by Rabbi Robert B Barr from <http://www.ourjewishcommunity.org/learn/midrashim-legends/abraham-and-the-idols>.

Appendix 1L: Abraham Heschel Divinity Quote

“Divine is a message that discloses unity where we see diversity, that discloses peace when we are involved in discord. God is He who holds our fitful lives together, who reveals to us that what is empirically diverse in color, in interest, in creeds—races, classes, nations—is one in His eyes and one in essence.”

—Abraham Joshua Heschel²⁰

²⁰ From Abraham Joshua Heschel’s Man Is Not Alone taken from Sonsino, *Faces of God*, 49.

Lesson 5: Where is God?

A Chasidic story: A little child's father found him cowering behind a bush, crying. "Why are you crying?" he asked. "Because," said his son, "we were playing hide-and-seek, and no one came to look for me."

His father looked sad. "You know," he told his son, "God makes the same complaint of human beings. God hides from us, and we do not care enough to search."²¹

Goals:

- To provide students a space to demonstrate what they've learned about God
- To explain the God spark inside each of us, and that it doesn't get depleted

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, SSBAT:

- Choose and use language to describe God
- Explain the Godspark to someone
- Interpret how the Godspark manifests in them

Materials:

- Play dough (small container for each kid)
- Computer with internet connection and access to youtube (to watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BAPmZB87nbs>)
- Candles, one per student and 1 for the teacher
- Tinfoil (to wrap around the candle)
- Matches (in box)
- Facebook page templates (Appendix M/N)

Key Terms

- *B'tzelem Elohim*

Timeline

00-05 Settle In

05-07 Blessing for Study of Torah

07-12 Set Induction: "God is in"

12-16 Discussion

16-35 Candle Activity

35-55 Wrap up Unit and Looking forward

55-60 Journaling

Expanded Timeline

00-05 Settle In

Be present in the room with the schedule written on the board. Welcome students into the space and ask them about their week; something exciting or cool. Or, invite them to tell you about

²¹ David J Wolpe, *Teaching Your Children About God* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1993), 86.

something they're interested in: help them open up. Or, have them help you set up for the day: getting materials, putting them in place, etc.

05-07 Blessing for Study of Torah

Invite students to look to the blessing posted in the room and say it with you. Sing it if you can, using the Torah Blessing (Appendix 1A), to create a richer experience of learning.

07-12 Set Induction: "God is in"

INSTRUCT: Think about the following quote as we continue through class. [read it aloud and/or hand it out to the students]:

A Chasidic story: A little child's father found him cowering behind a bush, crying. "Why are you crying?" he asked. "Because," said his son, "we were playing hide-and-seek, and no one came to look for me."

His father looked sad. "You know," he told his son, "God makes the same complaint of human beings. God hides from us, and we do not care enough to search."

Ask: Where else might we find God? Maybe inside of us? (*take answers but also use as transition question*).

EXPLAIN: In your journals, write/draw about how you experienced God in the past week. Or, use play dough. Remember: we are instructed in the Torah not to make false images of God, because we don't want to create idols. Therefore, in your representation, depict the experience, not God.

For the teacher: While the students are creating, play the following song, "God is in" by Billy Jonas underneath it all: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BApmZB87nbs>.

EXPLAIN: If you feel stuck and don't know how to do this, listen to the words of this song or read them on the screen and see if you find inspiration.

12-16 Discussion

Ask:

- What did you do during the song? What did you come up with?
- Why does that thing represent your experience of God, or do you think God exists there? (*God can be anywhere I feel or believe God is. But also, God is everywhere. God is in the things I can see or touch or understand. God is not touchable, but God creates things I can touch.*)

Did you notice the song playing underneath? What is the song about? (*That God is everywhere, in everything, we just have to see and experience it. God may even be inside of me.*)

16-35 Individual Candles

EXPLAIN: We just heard a song that talks about different places where we find or experience God. We might even be able to experience God inside each of us. There is this idea that we are made in the image of God, *B'tzelem Eloheim*.

ASK: What does it mean to be *b'tzelem Elohim* to you? (*that I am holy because God is holy. God made me to look like God. I have to do good things because God does good things. I am like God.*)

Although it may mean we are made to look like God, it may actually be something different entirely. We are going to do an activity that represents this other idea of what being made *b'tzelem eloheim* means.

Take all of the students to a place where you can actually light a match/candles but also where it can be dark. Have them sit in a circle around you and put a candle behind you so that the students cannot see it. Light the candle (keeping it behind your back). Ask if they can see the candle. They won't be able to, but ask what they can see? *the light from the candle.*²²

EXPLAIN: Just like we cannot see God, we can see the light of God as it comes into the world, kind of like we talked about with the song, "God is in," and like last week with the different ways we hear God and also with the wind chime activity. Also, we can think of this light inside of us, as something called our Godspark. We cannot necessarily see that spark, nor can we touch it, but we each have that aspect of God inside of us.

ASK: But, how does the Godspark work? And what part of God goes into us? [**This is rhetorical, but take their suggestions if they have ideas.]

Now, give each student a candle wrapped in tin foil so they do not burn themselves. EXPLAIN: I am going to take my lit candle, and light one of your candles. The first student with a candle lit will then light the next student's candle and so on, until everyone's candles are lit.

Once everyone's candle is lit, EXPLAIN: the God spark is like the individual candle in each of us. God lights it when we are born and we have an aspect of God inside of us. This is the aspect that makes us unique and also makes us like God. And even though we each have a candle, all of our candles burn a little differently and at different speeds. It doesn't mean they aren't all burning, just that they all do it differently.

ASK: How is there enough of God to be inside each of us? [take possible answers, but again, rhetorical]

EXPLAIN: When our parents make us, each of them gives us some of their chromosomes, some of their genetic makeup. That together forms the foundation of who we are. By giving us that, they didn't really lose any of themselves: they stayed whole and helped make us whole. So too with the Godspark. Each of us have this unique spark inside of us, in many different forms. For some, it comes in how they care about little kids. In others, the Godspark shows up in their ability to be organized. For some, it is how funny they are. And for others, the Godspark shows up in their huge wealth of knowledge about one particular subject.

²² Taken from Wolpe, *Teaching Your Children*.

ASK: How do you think the Godspark in you shows up? (*through music, dance, my knowledge of comic books, how I pick up trash, how I clean up my room, how I make people laugh, how I play with my little sister.*)

EXPLAIN: The Godspark can also manifest in how we interact with others. There is a saying that God is in the moment when the Godspark in me touches the Godspark in someone else. So when I see someone else hurting and I reach out to them, that is the piece of God in me touching the piece of God in someone else. At that moment, it is as if our two candles come together to make one, even bigger flame. And sometimes, it's easier to notice God in those moments than in the smaller moments.

Ask for any more questions or comments and then head back to the classroom. EXPLAIN: To wrap-up this concept, I want you to pretend you are on God's twitter account and tweeting about God's actions. Your task is to explain the Godspark in 140 characters or less. (Here are some examples if the students get stuck "God lights each of our candles, so we are part of God #continualcreation" "Our parents bring light into the world by creating us, and God adds God's spark too #everyonesuniqueandsimilar")

35-55 Wrap up Unit and Looking forward (AA)

We have reached the conclusion of our first unit on God. ASK: What have you learned about God? (*names of God, how to talk about God, language to use to talk about God, God's gender, Godspark, b'tzelem Eloheim, that even though we cannot see God, God can still be real, God is difficult to understand/talk about.*)

EXPLAIN: All of these aspects of God are important to learn about, but it doesn't help us if we don't do anything about it. Many people today have a Facebook page that describes them and use it as a way to connect to other people, both old and new friends. Today, we are going to begin to create a Facebook page for God, but we're only going to do the About Me section. There are many areas that ask for concrete things, like God's birthday or home. As we've discussed, God may not have a birthday like you and me. But consider when in the history of the world God "was born" and answer that way. [Facebook Temple (Appendix 1M/1N)]

Here are some questions to think about (which I will write on the board):

- How would God's About Me section on Facebook read?
- What would God include or leave out?
- What would God say about creating people?
- What are God's interests?
- Would God specify God's gender? What about the names that God prefers to go by?
- What would God say about where God is from? What would God say about when God was born?
- Who are God's family members?

For some of these questions, you will not know the answer, but for some, you will. Answer what you can and leave blank what you

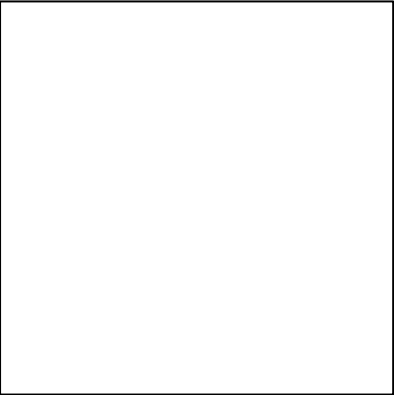
Autism Adaptation: The concrete nature of these questions, with the abstract God, may confuse some students. Help them look at God in a more expansive way, or discuss as a class how God's birthday might be pre-earth's formation, or God's home might be the entire world.

can't. But make a note, so we can come back to them throughout the year. We will edit and adapt our page based on what we learn in the coming months. And by the end of the year, we will each have a full Facebook page for God.

55-60 Journaling

Give the students their journals and invite them to write/reflect/draw about the exit question for the day: How can you be like God in the world? What do you need to do?

Appendix 1M: (facebook page About me)



Picture Here

Name: _____

Job: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Home: _____

All About Me

Gender:
Nicknames:
Interests:
Family members:

Details about you

Provide a short explanation of who you are.

My Friends

Appendix 1N: Facebook front page template)

MyPage (edit me)

FriendsApplicationsInbox (1)HomeSearch

WallInfoPhotos+

Update StatusWrite NoteAdd PhotosVideo

What are you doing?

Post

Heading

All PostsWall Posts

Heading

Heading

Heading

Heading

Freeology.com

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Unit II: Interactions Between Us and the World

Through God's Torah Commandments

The physical embodiment of God's expectations of us, i.e. mitzvot

An in-depth study of 5 commandments from Leviticus

Overarching EUS:

- Each person's conception of God develops from a continual discovery of personal and historical representations of God
- Experiencing God necessitates openness/action
- Jewish texts express God through feelings, sensations, and experiences

Unit EUs:

- Holiness is created through the enactment of mitzvot
- Holiness is the intersection of God, mitzvot and actions

Unit EQs:

- Does God care about the mitzvot that I do?
- Are Jews the embodiment of God's holiness on earth?

Unit Goals:

- To uncover for each individual their connection to God, mitzvot and holiness
- To investigate God's expectation(s) of Jewish behavior
- To explore mitzvot as a way of connecting to God

Unit Objectives:

- To show how a selection of mitzvot connect to God and holiness
- To compare and contrast the mitzvot and how they express different forms of holiness
- To determine how to enact a selection of these mitzvot in their own lives

Key terms:

- *Kodesh* - literally means holy
- *Chol* - not holy, regular
- *Tzedakah* (assumed pre-knowledge)
- *Leket* (Leviticus 19:9) - the edges of your field that one is told to leave when harvesting the crop of the field
- *Pe'ah* (Leviticus 19:10) - the fallen fruit in your vineyard or field that falls as you are gathering your harvest

Unit arc:

These lessons all explore different mitzvot from the holiness code of Leviticus 19.

Leviticus provides the Jewish people with the continuation of the laws from the Ten

Commandments, offering a way to live in community and sanctify God. This unit takes 4 of

those mitzvot and offers those actionable items as ways to enact God's holiness in the world. By exploring tzedakah with the land, Shabbat, the command to honor one's father and mother as well as the command to not place a stumbling block before the blind, this unit exemplifies how one might embody God through everyday action. The concrete examples offer one way to connect to God, especially for these learners who need tangible and concrete ways to think about God. The point of the unit is to help learners connect the mitzvot to God and then to demonstrate that by enacting the mitzvot, we (as Jews) are being like God. We channel God through the mitzvot, and are therefore being holy.

Lesson 1: What is Holy?

Goals:

- To expand upon the (assumed knowledge of the) concepts of *kodesh* and *chol* as it relates to God and holy action
- To explore why holy action connects us to God
- To lay the field for a conversation about individual holiness

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, SSBAT:

- Describe the relationship between God, mitzvot and holiness
- Define *kodesh* and *chol* (or expand upon previous definition)
- Imagine and/or map out how they can act in holy ways

Materials:

- Appendix 2A: Concept Attainment

Key Terms:

- *Kodesh* - literally means holy
- *Chol* - not holy, regular

Text:

Leviticus 19:2

דַּבֵּר אֶל-כָּל-עַדְת בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם קְדוֹשִׁים תִּהְיוּ כִּי קָדוֹשׁ אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

Dabeir el-kol-b'nei Yisrael v'amarta aleyhem, k'doshim t'he-u, ki kadosh Ani Adonai Eloheichem.

You shall be holy, for I, Adonai your God, am holy.

Set Induction: Self-defining *kodesh* and *chol*

Provide learners with two columns, one marked *kodesh* and the other *chol* (See Appendix 2A: Concept Attainment). Assume that the students know these words to some extent, but if they need the definitions, have other students help the unsure students reach an understand. Tell them that you will give them different words that could be considered *kodesh* and *chol*; they have to put the words in one of the two categories, depending on what they think fits the definition.

Possible words for the categories:

- | | | |
|---------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| • Juice | • Kitchen Table | • Shabbat |
| • Wine | • Sanctuary | • Family dinner |
| • Kiddish cup | • Torah | • God |
| • Tallit | • Tanach | • Prayer |
| • Scarf | • Picture of you with a | • Eating |
| • Hat | loved one | • Saying Motzi before |
| • Kippah | • Spending time with | eating |
| • Mezuzah | friends | • Eating Kosher food |

Then have a conversation about the definition of *kodesh* and *chol*.

Possible questions include:

- Why did you put the words where they did?
- Which things did not fit into one category, or else could fit in both depending on the situation?
 - What makes those particular things holy?
- What is the difference between *kodesh* and *chol* for you? Why is it important to maintain the distinction between the two?
- What is the connection between God and *kodesh*? What is the connection between God and *chol*? How are they different?

Holy Actions

Holy Actions Part I - *Chol* Actions

Have students do certain actions in the classroom:

- Run across the room
- Draw on the board
- Flip the lights on and off
- Do a cartwheel
- Dance a little
- Listen to music
- Yell across the room at someone else

Holy Actions Part II - *Kodesh* Places

Then, go into the sanctuary or a prayer space and have the students do the same actions. Students will hopefully feel reticent to do some of the actions, or else refuse to do them in that space. If they do feel comfortable in the space and do something like cartwheeling or yelling loudly, allow them to do it, but make sure you bring it up in the conversation in Part IV, and discuss why the students did it and to what end.

Holy Actions Part III- *Kodesh* Actions

Have students come up with 3-5 actions that are “holy” for them, either done in the sanctuary space, or in other spaces. They need to name their actions and why they are *kodesh*, holy. (Hopefully, students will name a mitzvot. If they don’t explicitly say that what they are talking about is a mitzvah, tell them so they associate the name with the action). Based on your learners, it may benefit them to write these actions on the board.

Holy Actions Part IV - Kedusha Conversation

Discuss:

- What were you not comfortable doing in the sanctuary that you were comfortable doing in the classroom? Why?
- What makes the sanctuary more special/*kodesh* and why? Can you do things that are less “*kodesh*” in those spaces? Why or why not?
- How does a space become *kodesh*, holy?
- What are specific actions that are imbued with *kedusha*, holiness?
- How do we act when doing holy actions or in holy spaces?
 - Why do we act differently in those holy spaces?
 - Why do we act differently when doing holy action?
- How is God related to holy action or holy spaces?

Holy Action Part V - Text Immersion: Holy because God is Holy!

Write the text of Leviticus 19:2 on the board. Explain that this verse begins something called the Holiness Code, which outlines the things that Torah/God believe are really important. Ask students what it means to “*be holy because God is holy*”. Have them draw their understanding of this text/question.

Once complete, have them share their answers and discuss.

Possible questions for discussion include:

- What does it mean to be holy because God is holy?
 - How was your answer similar to or different from your classmates?
 - Why is that alright?
- Why is it important for us to be holy because God is holy?
 - What does it look like?
- What makes people holy?
- What makes God holy?

Exit Questions

- What does it mean to be holy because God is holy?
- What is the difference between *kodesh* and *chol*? In general? In actions? With regard to our words? With regard to places?

Appendix 2A: Concept Attainment

<i>Kodesh</i>	<i>Chol</i>

Lesson 2: Honor Your Mother and Father

Goals:

- To examine God's expectation of Jewish behavior through honoring one's father and mother
- To explore honoring parents/elders as a way of connecting to God

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, SSBAT:

- Explain the mitzvah of honoring one's parents and how it connects to God
- Analyze why honoring one's parents is important to God
- Teach why honoring one's parents is important to God
- Determine which aspects of honor they will add to their life

Materials:

- Computer with internet and youtube capacity
- Paper and pens/pencils for students
- Possibly: video cameras or phones for skits

Text:

Leviticus 19:3

אִישׁ אָמוֹ וְאָבִיו תִּירָאוּ וְאֶת־שַׁבָּתִּי תִשְׁמְרוּ אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

Ish imo v'aviv tira-o; v'et Shabbotai tishmoru. Ani Adonai Eloheichem.

[Each person] shall revere her/his mother and father; and My Shabbatot you shall keep. I am Adonai your God.

Set Induction: Word Association

Write up the words honor and revere/fear on different parts of the board. Have students make a list for each demonstrating the differences between the two. If they get stuck, have them write examples of how to do this with regard to father and mother.

Honor vs. Fear/Revere

Exodus 20:12 tells us "honor your father and mother" and Leviticus 19:3 tells us to revere/fear your father and mother." Compare and contrast these two words. If not already done, write up ways to honor and revere/fear one's parents under the two categories from the set induction.

Have a discussion:

- What is the difference between honor and revere/fear? What about with regard to honoring/fearing one's parents?
- Based on the ways you described honor and fear/revere before, which do you think is more important with regards to parents? Why?
- How can you do both of these with regard to parents? And should you?
- Why is it so important to God that we honor/revere our parents, that this is the first Mitzvah of the holiness code after the introduction?

- How do we honor God by honoring and/or revering/fearing our parents? To teacher: this is the point - *God tells us to do this in order to remind us that there is some hierarchy in the world and we must remember where we come from: we come from our parents and must show them the respect they deserve. We also come from God and must show God respect. Also, we were once completely dependent on our parents, and as we get older, become more independent - but we still need God! Therefore, by honoring and revering/fearing our father and mother, we also honor and revere/fear God.*
- Why should *you* honor and revere/fear your parents?

Action Modeling²³ (AA)

Autism Adaptation: these students often need modeling on how to do things appropriately/ what it means to do certain, more abstract things. Also, we often present honoring in terms of: we honor someone by NOT doing X. For these learners, it is easier to present the material as positive behavior that demonstrates how one honors. Because of the age group, it is easier for them to create a video for others, so they feel empowered to share their own learning and therefore take more control over it. Due to time constraints, it may make more sense to have students act out/teach their lesson in person, if they are comfortable with it.

Main idea: for students to learn that God tells us to revere/fear and honor our father and mother because God is God and God tells us to do this in order to remind us that there is some hierarchy in the world and we must remember where we come from: we come from our parents and must show them the respect they deserve. We also come from God and must show God respect. Also, we were once completely dependent on our parents, and as we get older, become more independent - but we still need God! Therefore, by honoring and revering/fearing our father and mother, we also honor and revere/fear God.

Have students create a video/short play modeling how to both honor and revere/fear their parents, and also demonstrating/articulating the differences. They need to articulate how honoring and revering/fearing our father and mother means that they are also honor and revere/fear God.

You may need to look at different videos of people interacting with their parents and discuss whether or not those involve honoring and/or revering/fearing one's parents.²⁴

Have students each pick a way to honor their parents for them to put on the video/play. They then "direct" that part of the video/play and need to write the script for how to act it out. The student

²³ Video modeling is a form of teaching that works well for kids with ASD. For an explanation and resources, go to: <http://www.watchmelearn.com/video-modeling/video-modeling-in-practice>.

²⁴ Video of what it sounds like to NOT honor parents: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MljmbTyF3xs>. Video on WHY our parents ask us to do things: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xyoyzmEU7CY>.

also needs to write an explanation of how doing this version of honor/revere/fearing one's parents is also demonstrating that towards God. Once each student writes his/her script, read them over and make sure it actually demonstrates honor and/or revering/fearing one's parents. THEN, they work in groups to practice each other's scripts.

Once prepared, go to another class and perform it for a group of younger kids (if there isn't a younger class in the building, make the video and post it on vimeo/youtube/send it to friends and family). Possibly discuss with the little kids why we should honor our parents.

Reflect on the teaching experience afterwards, especially if the students feel like they better learned the information.

Exit question:

- Why is it important to God for Jews to honor and revere/fear their parents? How does it make you more holy? How does God expect people to enact it?

Lesson 3: Tzedakah with the land: Leket and Pe'ah

There is a direct connection between agricultural production, social justice and our relationship with God in the Torah. We no longer live in the agrarian world of the biblical land of Israel; yet the underlying issues remain with us today. -Hazon, Food for Thought Curriculum²⁵

Autism Adaptation: You may need to script the phone conversation for the students and/or have a discussion beforehand about what the conversation sounds like, or work with students to write the script. Depending on the students, practice the conversation before actually calling anywhere.

Goals:

- To experience doing tzedakah through interacting with the produce of the land
- To connect God to tzedakah through the land, and then to personal actionable steps
- To discover multiple ways of doing tzedakah by utilizing mitzvot connected to the land

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, SSBAT:

- Explain the concepts of *leket* and *pe'ah*, and where they come from in the Torah
- Create a plan for how they can do tzedakah of the land in today's world
- Describe why it's important to help others with the land

Materials:

- Computer with internet access and youtube capabilities
- Appendix 2B: Leviticus 19:9-10
- Phone to place calls to food pantries

Lesson Pre-Prep:

- Prepare for the kitchen analysis ahead of time
 - Check out the kitchen at the synagogue to see what you notice based on the checklist in case the students get stuck.
 - Speak with the rabbi/educator in order to ensure that s/he is on board and willing to at least consider what the students bring

Key terms:

- *Leket* (Leviticus 19:9) - the edges of your field that one is told to leave when harvesting the crop of the field
- *Pe'ah* (Leviticus 19:10) - the fallen fruit in your vineyard or field that falls as you are gathering your harvest

Text:

Leviticus 19:9-10

וּבְקִצְרוֹכֶם אֶת־קְצִיר אֲרָצְכֶם לֹא תִכְלֶה פֶּאֶת שְׂדֶךְ לִקְצֹר וּלְקַט קְצִירְךָ לֹא תִלְקֹט:

²⁵ Hazon *Food For Thought* Curriculum, p. 94 (Lesson 8.1)

וְכַרְמְךָ לֹא תַעֲזוֹל וּפְרִי כַרְמְךָ לֹא תִלְקֹט לְעַנִּי וְלִגֵּר תַּעֲזֹב אֹתָם אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

Uvkutz'r'chem et k'tzir artze'chem, lo t'chaleh pe'at a'decha likzor v'leket k'zircha lo t'laket. v'charmecha lo tolail u'feret karmecha lo t'laket l'oni v'lagair ta'akov otam; ani Adonai Eloheichem.

(9) When you reap (gather) the harvest of your land, you shall not reap (gather crop) all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings (produce) of your harvest. (10) You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am Adonai your God.

Set Induction:

Draw enough squares on the board (a little ways apart from each other) so that there is one for every student and tell the students that each square represents a different field. Have each student come up, one student to each square, and draw diagonal lines to mark the “corners” of their field.

You will likely get many different interpretations of what the corners mean. Tell the students that these squares represent their fields, and the outside corners of the field represent the *pe'ot* or corners of their fields. Ask them if they've ever heard of something like this, and if so where? Hopefully it starts a conversation and will continue nicely into the text.

Textual analysis²⁶

Give the students the text from Leviticus 19:9-10, in Appendix 2B. Have them analyze the text by themselves, looking for what the words *leket* and *pe'ah* mean as well as what stands out as interesting to them. Once they are finished, bring the class together and discuss.

Possible questions for discussion:

- What do you think the Torah is talking about in these two verses?
- What is *leket* and *pe'ah*? How do you do it?
- For whom do you do *leket* and *pe'ah*?
- What is the difference between gathering all of your harvest and donating some of your harvest afterwards and leaving the corners of your field as you harvest?
- At the end of verse 10 we are told that God is Adonai our God. Why is that part included/important to the verse? (*Clearly these mitzvot are important to God - taking care of others, especially those who cannot take care of themselves*)
- Why does God include this in the holiness code? What makes it that important?
- How can someone do *leket* and *pe'ah* today?

Food Pantry

²⁶ Another way to look at *pe'ah* and *leket* is through the story of the Book of Ruth. In Chapter 2, Ruth goes to the field of Boaz, a relative of her mother-in-law Naomi, and gleans in his field. Both types of agricultural justice are represented. If the students want to hear a biblical example of how this worked, Ruth 2:1-18 demonstrates this well.

Have students bring cans of food or dried food from their pantry at home, based on a percentage of their own food/what their parents will let them bring. With the food they bring in as their donation, help the students contact a food pantry and determine how to get the food to the food pantry. Depending on the place, they cannot pick up from your location with such a small donation, so you may need to bring it to the food pantry. If possible, go to the food pantry as an entire class and deliver the food (this may take multiple class sessions).

Students may not bring things from home. While looking for places to donate food, also look at other ways to give donations (time, money) and discuss whether or not those donations are equivalent. Have students choose another way to donate if they did not bring in anything.

While researching, ask questions of the differences between biblical times and now in terms of leaving one's gleanings and leaving the corners of the field.

Afterwards, discuss the process of trying to donate food.

Possible questions:

- How was this process easy or difficult?
- Why do you think it was easy or hard to leave the corners of your field in biblical times?
 - How does that compare to today?
- Why were you specifically told to look at food pantries? (hint: who were you trying to help based on the Torah verse?)
- What would you recommend to someone who wanted to leave the corners of their field today?
- Why God asks us to specifically do things related to food justice, i.e. *leket* and *pe'ah*?

Kitchen Analysis (AA)

Based on the Mitzvah of *pe'ah* and *leket*, do an "analysis" of the kitchen at the synagogue.

First, explain that Leket does not just refer to the corners of the field, it can also apply in your own kitchen and then show the video from leket.org: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rdc7xTsvNdw>.

Next, either as a class or individually, read through the following instructions on how to reduce waste in the kitchen. (<https://www.leket.org/en/tips-and-recipes-for-a-smart-kitchen>.)

Go into the kitchen at the synagogue and using the instructions from leket.org, determine where waste might occur and how to curtail that. Have students write up a recommendation (as a class or individually) to the rabbi or educator outlining your plan for ceasing waste in the kitchen. As a class, deliver/present it in person to the rabbi/educator and present your case! With the rabbi/educator's permission, enact the steps that you outlined.

Afterwards, debrief the experience, specifically how God tells us these two commandments, that they are for the stranger and the poor, and then that God is our God.

Exit questions:

- What can you do in the next week to do *leket* and *pe'ah*?
- Why are *leket* and *pe'ah* important to God? Why does doing *leket* and *pe'ah* make you more holy?

Appendix 2B: Leviticus 19:9-10

וּבְקִצְרְכֶם אֶת־קִצִּיר אֲרָצְכֶם לֹא תִבְלֶה פֶּאֶת שְׂדֵךְ לִקְצֹר וּלְקַט קִצִּירְךָ לֹא
 תִּלְקֹט:
 וּבִרְמֹךְ לֹא תַעֲוִלֵּל וּפְרֹט בִּרְמֹךְ לֹא תִלְקֹט לְעַנִּי וְלִגֵּר תַּעֲזֹב אֹתָם אֲנִי יְהוָה
 אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

(9) *Uvkutz'r'chem et k'tzir artze'chem, lo t'chaleh pe'at a'decha likzor
 v'leket k'zircha lo t'laket.*

(10) *v'charmecha lo tolail u'feret karmecha lo t'laket l'oni v'lagair
 ta'akov otam; ani Adonai Eloheichem.*

(9) When you reap (gather) the harvest of your land, you shall not reap (gather crop) all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings (produce) of your harvest. (10) You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am Adonai your God.

Lesson 4: Stumbling Block Before the Blind

Goals:

- To create an experience of a stumbling block
- To discover different ways to remove stumbling blocks
- To explore the power of language as a stumbling block and how to remove it
- To connect the mitzvah of not placing a stumbling block before the blind to God and to human action

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, SSBAT:

- Interpret the meaning of placing a stumbling block before the blind
- Illustrate the connection between the mitzvah of not placing a stumbling block before the blind, God and human action.
- Create a plan for how to remove a stumbling block from someone and explain why that is important

Materials:

- Drunk goggles
- 3-4 Blindfolds
- Noise cancelling headphones
- Crutches
- Wheelchair
- Oven Mitts
- Mirror
- Ties of some sort
- Bag of snack (for student to open as a part of a task)
- Baggie and a few M&Ms
- Computer with internet and youtube capabilities
- Pens and paper for each student
- Markers/colored pencils

Text:

Leviticus 19:14

לֹא־תִקְלֹל חֵרֶשׁ וְלִפְנֵי עֹרֵר לֹא תִתֵּן מִכְשָׁל וַיִּרְאֵתָ מֵאֲלֵהֶיךָ אֲנִי יְהוָה:

Lo t'kalael harsh v'lifnei ivied lo titian michshol; v'yareita may-Eloheicha, ani Adonai.

You shall not insult the deaf or place a stumbling block before the blind. You shall fear Your God. I am Adonai.

Set Induction: Disability Simulation

“Give” each student a different physical disability to take on and assign them a task that they must complete. Whatever the physical disability, actually help them experience that challenge (i.e. blindfold someone who is blind). Once students do one of the disabilities, have them do a few more.

Autism Adaptation: While students are trying to do their tasks, you/*madrachim* shouldn't help them. They should experience the frustration of trying to do the task. That said, you may need to explain that although this activity will be difficult, it is just an activity and meant to teach something. The only caveat is if students place themselves in physical danger - at that point you should help them. The students will get frustrated, so when the frustration gets too high, stop the exercise.

Possible disabilities include:

- Blindness (blindfold)
- Lost an arm (tie an arm behind back)
- In a wheelchair - paralyzed (use a wheelchair)
- Deaf (noise cancelling headphones)
- Mute (own hand over mouth)
- Broken foot (crutches)
- Broken hand (sling and ball for hand - because cannot write)
- Dyslexia (have to read something through a mirror)
- Loss of fine motor control (put oven mitts over a kids mouth)

Possible tasks (given based on the challenge) include:

- Write a letter telling your teacher that you cannot do the assignment
- Go from one side of the room to the other turn on the light
- Find a specific friend and ask them a question
- Open a bag of skittles or some other snack
- Fold a pair of pants
- Write a poem or song lyrics
- Open a baggie and place 5 M & Ms inside

Disabilities and text discussion²⁷

Explain that we just experienced having a disability. Discuss how difficult that was and why.

- What was it like to have a physical disability?
- How did the physical disability get in the way of you performing your task?
- Imagine that you needed help with those tasks and couldn't ask someone for help or they clearly were not helping you. How much harder would that make it?
- How is it wrong for someone to not help you or make it harder for you?

²⁷ (If students enjoy the text study, have them look at the Rashi on either “do not insult the deaf” or “before the blind place not a stumbling block” and discuss what Rashi adds to the verse (Rashi enhances it by telling us, for the former, that this actually applies to everyone - if we do not curse the deaf, who cannot hear us yet is a living person, also for all people we shall not curse. And for the latter, Rashi explains that when someone lacks all the resources to properly understand something, do not either mislead them or else take advantage of them). To find the Rashi in English (or Hebrew), follow this link: <https://www.sefaria.org/Leviticus.19.14?lang=bi&with=Rashi&lang2=en>.

Next, explain that the Torah tells us in Leviticus 19:14 not to place a stumbling block before the blind and not to curse the deaf (if students respond well to text, possibly provide the text or just write it on the board).

Possible Discussion questions:

- What does it mean to not insult the deaf? To place a stumbling block before the blind?
- Why are we told not to do these things, specifically in the holiness code?
- The verse starts with something we should not do, then tells us to fear God? Why do you think it's formatted that way?
- Why might fearing God make you more likely to follow this commandment? If not, why not?
- Although the disabilities we took on above may not actually apply to you or people you know, people always have challenges, that we can or cannot see. How can you make sure not to put a stumbling block before the blind or to curse the deaf (or something that like) in your real life? (*when you see someone struggling, help them, give someone who is hungry your lunch, help someone open the door if they cannot do it themselves, explain something to someone who does not understand, etc.*)

Disability Simulation Part II

Again, assign students to a disability and a task, but only assign half the students to tasks. Assign the other half of the students to help the others with tasks to complete their tasks. Then have the students switch, so everyone has an opportunity to complete a task (but re-assign tasks so each student gets a new task).

Pies!

Main idea: Each student is unique, and has their own things that fills their pie. God tells us not to put a stumbling block before the blind or curse the deaf because these are specific things that these people can do nothing about. But even more so, God wants to make sure people are treated appropriately for the challenges that they face.

Draw a circle on the board. Explain that this is a pie. Each person on earth has a pie, representing what they are capable of doing and are good at, but not everyone starts with the same pie, or believing that they have all the pieces to their pie - but everyone has a full pie. And as each person goes through life, they have to figure out what their pieces are and how to use those pieces in their life.

Not everyone thinks of themselves as missing pieces of the pie, because they adapt to their situation or else they are confident in how they can function.

(BACKGROUND FOR TEACHER - Read and adapt for learners) One way to look at the pieces of our pie is through Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences:²⁸ we each have different ways of relating to the world. Some people are really good at math while some people are really good at music or just understand music better than math. Some people are really good at visual-spatial skills and others are really good at verbal reasoning. Write down the different kinds of intelligences on the board and have each student write down on a piece of paper which intelligences they feel they have.

Multiple Intelligence areas:²⁹

- Spatial: ability to use and manipulate large scale and fine-grained spatial images
- Bodily-kinesthetic: using one's own body to create products or solve problems:
- Musical: ability to produce, remember and make meaning of different sounds
- Linguistic: ability to analyze and create using oral and written language
- Logical-mathematical: ability to develop equations and proofs, make calculations, and solve abstract problems
- Interpersonal: ability to interact effectively/well with others
- Intrapersonal: sensitivity to one's own feelings, goals and challenges and ability to act/plan both using and in spite of them
- Naturalistic (sometimes called natural intelligence): ability to distinguish between different parts of the natural world (plants, animals, clouds, stars, etc.)

Next, have them write other things they are good at or that they really like to do (even things like: I clean up trash when I walk, or I love to run, or I love comic books, or I'm really good at video games).

Now, they get to create their own pie. Have them make a slice of their pie for each thing they are good at. They should fill up the inside of their pie so that their pie is whole. Once everyone completes their pie, they should share with the class! Each student should feel proud of what s/he creates!

Afterwards, have a discussion about what it feels like to know one has a full pie.

Possible questions include:

- What does it feel like to have a full pie?
- How do you think of yourself as having a full pie even if you are missing the pie?
- How can you, as a person, help someone else see that their own pie is full?
- How is helping someone else see their pie as full the antidote to placing a stumbling block before the blind or cursing the deaf? (*because it highlights the positives and allows*

²⁸ For more information on multiple intelligences, visit: <http://multipleintelligencesoasis.org/about/the-components-of-mi/>.

²⁹ Taken from page 6-7 of one of the original articles on the theory of multiple intelligences, by Howard Gardner. For the PDF, go to: <https://howardgardner01.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/443-davis-christodoulou-seider-mi-article.pdf>.

students to see all the things they can do, to help themselves and see the specific things they can do to help or talk to others!)

- Why should we help others see their pie as full?

Note to Teacher/Autism Adaptation: Any part of this lesson could lead to a discussion of the students' own autism/experience with autism. Please engage in that conversation as appropriate for the learners. The goal of the conversation, and the lesson, is to normalize differences and help learners figure out how they do have a full pie and are worthwhile. A great resource is brainhighways.org, which has kids talking about their own learning challenges and it allows the conversation to open up in a nonjudgmental way. Remind students that they are each unique: they take different medications, eat different foods, have different preferences for clothing, and need different kinds of help and adjustments. But everyone is different and unique. **God tells us not to put a stumbling block before the blind or curse the deaf because these are specific things that these people can do nothing about. But even more so, God wants to make sure people are treated appropriately for the challenges that they face.**

Possible questions to ask include:

- What do you see as your stumbling blocks?
- How do you overcome them?
- What tools do you have for overcoming your stumbling blocks?
- How does your own experience with challenges help you think about and respond to others' challenges?

Exit questions

- How can you remove a stumbling block from before someone?
- How does removing a stumbling block from before someone make you more holy?

Lesson 5: Shabbat

More than the Jews have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jewish people. -Ahad Ha'am

Goals:

- To demonstrate the connection between Shabbat, God, holiness, and human enactment of Shabbat
- To explore God's expectations of Jews on Shabbat and what Jews actually do
- To examine the differences between Torah observance of Shabbat and contemporary Shabbat observance

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, SSBAT:

- Explain how Shabbat connects to God and holiness, and why God wants us to do it
- Discuss God's expectations of Jews on Shabbat and how that compares to what we - as Jews - actually do/want to do on Shabbat
- Compare and contrast the differences between Torah observance of Shabbat and contemporary Shabbat observance

Materials:

- Appendix 2C: Shabbat in the Torah
- Tanachim OR handouts with the verses specified in Appendix 2C
- Paper
- Pens/pencils
- Appendix 2D: The Why of Shabbat

Text:

Leviticus 19:3

אִישׁ אִמּוֹ וְאָבִיו תִּירָאוּ וְאֶת־שַׁבָּתִי תִשְׁמְרוּ אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

Ish imo v'aviv tira-o; v'et Shabtotai tishmoru. Ani Adonai Eloheichem.

[Each person] shall revere her/his mother and father; and My Shabbatot you shall keep. I am Adonai your God.

Set Induction

Invite students to share an example of a memorable Shabbat that they experienced. Ask them what made it so?

Shabbat Scavenger Hunt

Main idea: The Torah tells us many times that we should observe Shabbat. We are told in Leviticus 19:3 to keep God's Shabbatot, because God is our God. Yet, other places in Torah tell us how to keep Shabbat and why. This activity is meant to help students explore the Torah's rationale as well as their personal reasons for observing Shabbat.

Give students the Torah Verses (verses and questions to answer in Appendix 2C: Shabbat in the Torah) and a Tanach, and have them examine them to determine how Shabbat is observed according to the Torah.

Based on what the students find, have them compare and contrast (individually or as a whole class) their current observance with what the Torah mentions for how to observe Shabbat.

Possible questions for discussion:

- What reasons does the Torah give for observing Shabbat?
- Why do you think God wants Jews to keep Shabbat?
- Why is Shabbat important to God?
- How and why do you observe Shabbat?

Shabbat Importance

Provide students with the reasons for keeping Shabbat in Appendix 2D: The Why of Shabbat.³⁰ Have them rank, with one being the most important reason for them, #2 being the next most important, etc.

Possible questions for discussion:

- Why is Shabbat important to you?
- How are your reasons for observing Shabbat and the Torah reasons different?
- Leviticus 19:3 tells us to keep the Shabbat. Yet it doesn't tell us how. Why is it alright for you to observe Shabbat the way you do, even if the Torah reasons are different? *Although other parts of the Torah tell us how to keep Shabbat, the important thing is that we do observe Shabbat. Ahad Ha'am, a famous writer in Israel, once said that "more than the Jews have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jews," meaning that Shabbat is one of the things that continually connects Jews to each other, and to God.*
- If you had to add one way of observing Shabbat to your life, what would it be and why?

Invention Tension³¹

Have students invent something: a machine, a technique, or another kind of innovation that helps people "keep" Shabbat, or that would make their own Shabbat observance more meaningful. Remind them that according to the Torah, people are not allowed to light fire on Shabbat. What would be most useful to the Jews of today to aid in how they keep Shabbat? The students have to make a model (even just a drawing) and a description of their machine, technique or innovation and present it to the class. In their presentation, students have to explain why this helps people keep Shabbat today.

³⁰ Largely based off of activity number 26 on p. 153-154 of Sorel Goldberg Loeb and Barbara Binder Kadden, *Teaching Torah* (Springfield: ARE Publishing, 1997).

³¹ From Loeb and Kadden, *Teaching Torah*, p. 217.

Exit Questions

- How does keeping Shabbat make us as Jews more holy?
- This Mitzvah is attached to the Mitzvah of honoring one's parents, which we already addressed earlier in this unit. Why do you think honoring one's parents and Shabbat are in the same verse? (*We as children are meant to honor our parents through small actions that we do everyday. We as Jews are meant to honor God because we are made b'tzelem elohim, in God's image. We do that by honoring God's rest and resting on Shabbat.*)

Appendix 2C: Shabbat in the Torah

	How is Shabbat observed?	What is the penalty for not observing?	Why is Shabbat important?	Anything else important?
Exodus 15:21-30				
Exodus 20:8-11				
Exodus 23:12				
Exodus 31:13-17				
Exodus 34:21				
Exodus 35:2-3				
Leviticus 19:3				

	How is Shabbat observed?	What is the penalty for not observing?	Why is Shabbat important?	Anything else important?
Deuteronomy 5:12-15				

Appendix 2D: The Why of Shabbat

- ___ To make a distinction between Shabbat and the days of the week.
- ___ To reflect the fact that God rested on the 7th day of creation, after working so hard on the other 6 days.
- ___ To appreciate the rest of the week more.
- ___ To remind us that we are a separate people.
- ___ To remind us to spend time with the people that we love.
- ___ To provide us with the rest that we need.
- ___ To give us an idea of what a perfect world could look like.
- ___ To remind us that God alone is the Creator and Master of the world.
- ___ To relax from the rest of the week.

Lesson 6: God's Mitzvot - Wrap-Up

Goals:

- To represent the connection between mitzvot, God and holiness
- To create the field for individual investigation of mitzvot observance and why

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, SSBAT:

- Explain the connection between God, holiness, the commandment of the mitzvot and the action of the mitzvah.
- Compare and contrast the different mitzvot from this unit and others the students know and which ones bring them personally closer to God
- Determine which mitzvot they want to enact in their lives

Materials:

- Appendix 2E: Mitzvah Day Today
- Appendix 2F: Mitzvah Madness Chart
- Pens and/or pencils
- Paper

Set Induction

Using Appendix 2E: Mitzvah Day Today, have students imagine that today is Mitzvah day. Have them use the mitzvah from this unit and write or draw a comparable way that someone might perform the mitzvah today. Once everyone finishes, share with the class and see what everyone comes up with.

Mitzvah Madness

Have students name all the mitzvot discussed this unit and write them on the board. Also invite them to share (and explain a few more mitzvot that they know about). Next, hand out a chart with all the mitzvot (Appendix 2F) from this unit and have them fill it out (either individually or in pairs/as a class).

Mitzvah letter

After they complete the chart, invite them to think about which mitzvot they can reasonably do and which ones would be harder to do. Have students write themselves a letter, that they will receive in a year, reminding them about these mitzvot and how important they are. Ask students to be kind to their future selves, but also ask themselves if they are still doing the important mitzvot and if not, why not? Or suggest a mitzvah that they might add if they aren't doing it.

Mitzvah Map

Either in pairs or individually, have students create a map showing the connection between God, the commandment of an individual mitzvah, the action associated with a individual mitzvah, and holiness. The students should demonstrate how these 4 things are related to each other and in what order (if any). Once they are finished, have them share their charts and then discuss.

Possible questions for discussion:

- Why did you put these four things in the order you did?
- If you left one of these things out, why? How can you bring it back in?
- How does God relate to the commandment itself, the action of the Mitzvah, and holiness?
- How can you increase your holiness?
- Why should you do more mitzvot?
- Each Mitzvah we've talked about says "I am Adonai" after it. Why?

Exit Question

- How does adding mitzvot to your life increase your holiness and relationship to God?

Appendix 2E: Mitzvah Day Today

Leket

Pe'ah

Shabbat

Not putting a stumbling block before the blind

Honor your father and mother

Appendix 2F: Mitzvah Madness Chart compare and contrast

	What does it require?	What is it similar to and why?	How is God related to the Mitzvah?	Why is this Mitzvah holy?
Honoring and revering/ fearing one's parents				
Leket/ Pe'ah				
Don't place a stumbling block before the blind				
Shabbat				
Other:				
Other:				

	What does it require?	What is it similar to and why?	How is God related to the Mitzvah?	Why is this Mitzvah holy?
Other:				
Other:				
Other:				

Unit III: Experiencing God in the World: Prayer and Ritual as Points of Connection with God

Expressing ourselves and our expectations of God utilizing God language

Prayer is a way of sensitizing ourselves to the wonder of life, of expressing gratitude, and of praising and acknowledge the reality of God. One need not believe that God will interfere with the ongoing process of nature to feel that prayer is worthwhile. We may have different understandings of what God is. No definition we have is sufficient or answers all doubts and questions. To be aware that God exists—that there is more in the universe than physical matter, that a moral order is inherent in creation, that humans are responsible for their conduct and can help to bring about the perfection, or at least the improvement, of the world and of life—that is sufficient reason for prayer. —Reuven Hammer³²

Note to teacher: due to the emotional state of these students, they may not necessarily feel a personal, emotional connection to these prayers or rituals. Descriptions of the ritual or prayer, coupled with exploration of it, may help elicit individual students thoughts.

Overarching EUs:

- Each person's conception of God develops from a continual discovery of personal and historical representations of God
- Everyone deserves the opportunity to experience God
- Experiencing God necessitates openness/action
- Jewish texts express God through feelings, sensations, and experiences

Unit EUs:

- Jewish prayer and ceremony offer Jews many ways to connect to God and community
- Everyone may connect to God through ritual/prayer; the how is an individual endeavor
- Regardless of belief in God, Jewish prayer and ritual elicit certain ends: connection, consideration, calming

Unit EQs:

- To whom do we pray and enact ritual?
- What is God's connection to prayer/ritual? Why does God want me to pray?
- Does God care if I pray or engage in ritual?
- What aspects of my relationship with God is enacted through prayer and/or ritual?
- Do I need to believe in God to pray and/or engage in ritual?
- What does God expect of me in prayer/ritual?

Unit Goals:

- To investigate how different prayers and rituals connect the self to God
- To demonstrate the connection between prayer/ritual, God, and the self

³² In: Rabbi Edward Feld, Ed., *Siddur Lev Shalem* (The Rabbinical Assembly: New York, 2016).

- To experience and explore the communal aspect of prayer (and how that relates to God's expectations)?

Unit Objectives:

By the end of the unit, students should be able to:

- To evaluate a prayer/ritual for its personal connective effectiveness
- To analyze the connection between prayer/ritual, God, and the self
- To create a personal prayer/ritual that demonstrates connection to "God"

Key Terms:

- Ritual: Ritual, like prayer, has a certain format we use. We have special blessings we say, or customs that we do, certain things that make it a Jewish ritual (like the line we say that officially makes people married, El Maleh Rahamim or Mourners Kaddish for a funeral, taking off the foreskin at a Brit Milah for a baby boy).
- Prayer: An experience of sharing with God, either through words, actions, or thoughts, often using the prayerbook as a vehicle for doing so.

Unit Arc:

The entirety of this unit focuses on prayer and ritual as a way of connecting to God. In particular, the lessons center around helping the students discover and articulate their own connections to God through prayer and ritual. The lessons do not tell them that they must connect to God in a particular way, but rather provide avenues through which they can encounter and experience God. Each of the prayers and rituals explored in the lessons include both specific rituals that traditional Jews might do as well as offer options of contemporary ways that students can engage in them. More than anything, this unit is meant to serve as a springboard for students to learn what engages and excites them about Jewish prayer and ritual, in particular when using prayer/ritual as a connection to God.

Lesson 1: Does God listen to and/or respond to prayer/ritual?

Pray as if everything depends on God, act as if everything depends on you. —Ferdinand Isserman

Goals:

- To explore God's connection to prayer/ritual
- To expose students to different conceptions of God's relationship to prayer/ritual
- To discuss the communal aspect of prayer/ritual

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, SSBAT

- Describe their own budding reason(s) for engaging in prayer/ritual.
- Compare and contrast diverse reasons for engaging in prayer/ritual
- Explain Jewish reasons for prayer

Materials:

- Appendix 3A: Prayer Exploration

Background information:

Why we ritualized prayer in the first place?

Brachot 17b-18a insinuates that the Rabbis prayers were too powerful and they became frightened of the impact they might have on the world. So, by ritualizing it, prayer became less powerful, but also less life threatening.

Set Induction:

Create a 4 quadrant graph on the board (see table on this page). In each quadrant, write the words oops, please, thanks and wow. These words represent different thoughts on what prayer is about. Ask students to write their name on the place that best defines prayer for them (or what prayers are about).

Oops	Wow
Please	Thanks

Once all students have done so, invite a few students to explain why they placed themselves where they did and discuss.

Possible discussion questions:

- Why did you put your name where you did?
- Can a specific prayer only be in one category or can one fit in all the categories?
- How else might you think about prayer besides these four categories? *sorry, God tells me so.*

Note to teacher: This is a check for understanding to use throughout this unit to see what students believe about different prayers. Feel free to use it as much as necessary to help ground the learning and check for the students understanding of the particular prayer. Also, this may serve as a helpful conclusion to the unit.

- We are going to think about this from God’s perspective. Where would God place God-self on the spectrum in terms of why people should pray?
- How can different people have different understandings of what prayers should be about?
- Based on this conversation, how, if at all, has your understanding of the purpose of prayer changed?

Prayer Exploration

Main idea: a prayer has many different formats based on the pray-er, the intention, the setting and the function of the prayer. But for this unit, prayer is a way of connecting to God, either out of awe, fear, thanks, or another emotion.³³ Prayer also has ritualized form for those who do not feel as emotionally connected to God. The rabbis define prayer as the service of the heart.³⁴ The intention of this activity is to demonstrate that there are multiple ways to think about prayer, but also to give the students a common language of what they believe prayer is.

Hang up the various prayers in Appendix 3A around the room and have the students go around the room and use post-it notes to write what makes each of these a prayer for them. Have them write short answers, as many as they have for each of these prayers. Once they are finished, compile a list (as a class) of all the words and discuss how these ideas inform the students’ opinions on prayer.

The prayers include:

- “Good grub, good God, lets eat”
- The serenity prayer
- Shema
- Prayer for an A on a test
- El Na R’fah Na La
- Mi Shebeirach
- Hashkiveinu

Prayer on a spectrum

Main idea: each student believes something unique about God’s relationship to prayer and themselves, although may never have thought about or articulated it. This activity is meant to help them do so, and consider other people’s perspectives.

Provide the students a spectrum and have them place themselves on it. Place “God listens to/ responds to prayer” at one end of the spectrum and then place “God doesn’t listen to/doesn’t

³³ Abraham Millgram defines prayer as the product of man’s yearning for the most intimate of all human communication, for the opportunity to open his heart and his mind in adoration and supplication to the divine presence. For more, see Abraham Millgram, *Jewish Worship* (The Jewish Publication Society of America: Philadelphia, 1971), 9-11.

³⁴ Millgram, *Jewish Worship*, 10.

respond to prayer” at the other end of the spectrum. Tell students to go to the place on the spectrum where they feel they fit and why...

Some students may write that they feel that God sometimes listens to prayer and sometimes doesn't, but that doesn't really say why they believe that. Encourage them to think a little harder about why they believe what they believe.

Have students do a museum walk, and read the explanations that everyone wrote. Next, have them see if they agree with what other people wrote or didn't write.

- For both of these, provide options of what this might look like:
 - God responds to prayer: You pray for an A on a test and you get an A on the test; you pray for your grandma to get healthy and she does, you pray for more patience and work with someone later that day/week who tries your patience (meaning you work on developing patience because of them).
 - God doesn't respond to prayer: You pray for an A and you get a B, you pray for your grandma to get healthy and she does not.
- NOTE: Some students may think that listening to and responding to are the same thing. Each student's opinion is valid. For this lesson, help students ascertain what the difference is for them, if it exists and make sure everyone at least hears the other explanations before moving on. For some, listening to prayer may just entail that *God receives our prayer*, like receiving a letter. For others, listening to prayer may *require an action or response of reciprocity* (I pray for an A and I get an A).

If you do a second round, ask the students to determine, based on a spectrum like you used before, whether or not God responds to/doesn't respond to prayer.

Possible questions to ask different students:

- Do you believe God always listens to prayer?
- What does it mean for God to listen to/respond to prayers? (*what you pray for happens, you get a reward for being God, God cares about you, we actually respond to our own prayer - by asking for something, it means we then enact it, it's a coincidence*)
- What does it mean when God doesn't listen to/respond to prayer? (*you didn't ask for the right thing, God doesn't care, God doesn't act in that way - God can only receive prayer not respond to it, we're asking God for the wrong things (God doesn't change the world, we do) - so we didn't do the thing we wanted*)
- How are listening to and responding to prayer different? (NOTE: This may come up, as addressed above. If not, it may be an important question to raise, based on the students.)
- Ritual is a ceremony that uses prayer, objects, and space in a particular space in a particular way for a certain group of people. We use ritual to help people through transitional moments. But ritual is a collection of prayers. In this case, does ritual have the same effect as prayer?

Possible conclusion: Even when we pray by ourselves, the language of prayer remains communal. Therefore, when we pray, we don't need to worry about finding the right words for God or saying the right thing. We do have an opportunity for silent prayer, where we differentiate our prayers, but generally, we get to address God.

Exit question(s)

- A. Consider the 4 quadrants from the beginning of the class. How did your idea of the quadrants change, if at all? If you would put yourself somewhere else on the spectrum, where would you place yourself and why?
- B. What is God's relationship to prayer/ritual?

Appendix 3A: Prayer Exploration

From For Richer or Poorer

Good food, good meat, good God, let's eat!

Serenity Prayer:

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the
difference.

Shema:

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד

Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Echad

Hear O'Israel, Adonai is Our God, Adonai is One

A on a test

God, please help me get an A on my math test tomorrow. I
promise I will make my bed everyday for a week like my mom
asks and I will eat all my vegetables if I get the A!

El na r'fah na la

אֵל נָא רַפָּא נָא לָהּ

El Na R'fah Na La

Please God, heal her now!

Mi Shebeirach (Debbie Friedman's lyrics):

Mi shebeirach avoteinu

M'kor hab'racha l'imoteinu

May the source of strength,

Who blessed the ones before us,

Help us find the courage to make our lives a blessing,

and let us say, Amen.

Mi shebeirach imoteinu
 M'kor habrachah l'avoteinu
 Bless those in need of healing with r'fuah sh'leimah,
 The renewal of body, the renewal of spirit,
 And let us say, Amen

Hashkiveinu:

הַשְׁכִּיבֵנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְשָׁלוֹם וְהַעֲמִידֵנוּ מִלְּפָנֶיךָ לְחַיִּים. וּפְרוֹשׁ עָלֵינוּ
 סֶכֶת שְׁלוֹמְךָ וְתִקְנֵנוּ בְּעֶצֶה טוֹבָה מִלְּפָנֶיךָ וְהוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ לְמַעַן שְׁמֶךָ
 וְהַגּוֹ בְּעַדָּנוּ. וְהַסֵּר מֵעָלֵינוּ אוֹיֵב דָּבָר וְחָרָב וְרָעָב וְיָגוֹן וְהַסֵּר שָׁטָן
 מִלְּפָנֵינוּ וּמֵאַחֲרֵינוּ וּבְצֵל כְּנָפֶיךָ תִּסְתִּירֵנוּ כִּי אֵל שׁוֹמְרָנוּ וּלְשָׁלוֹם
 מַעֲתָה וְעַד עוֹלָם. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ הַפּוֹרֵשׁ סֶכֶת שְׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל
 עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל יְרוּשָׁלַיִם.

Grant that we may lie down in peace, Adonai our God, and
 awaken us to life. Shelter us with Your tent of peace and guide
 us with Your good counsel. Shield us from hatred, plague and
 destruction. Keep us from warm famine and anguish. Help us to
 deny our inclination to evil. God of peace, may we always feel
 protected because You are our Guardian and Helper. Give us
 refuge in the shadow of Your wings. Guard our going forth and
 our coming in and bless us with life and peace. Blessed are You,
 Adonai our God, whose shelter of peace is spread over us, over
 all Your people Israel, and over Jerusalem.

Lesson 2: Yotzer Or

“Blessed are You, God...who forms light and creates darkness, who makes peace and creates all.” - Yotzer Or

Goals:

- To explore how prayer expresses appreciation for God and God’s creation(s)
- To demonstrate that there are multiple ways to pray and therefore connect to God
- To provide an opportunity for individual connection to prayer

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, SSBAT:

- Compare and contrast the different versions of Yotzer Or
- Explain the version of Yotzer Or that works for them and why
- Demonstrate their understanding of the prayer

Materials:

- Enough copies for each student of Appendix 3B: 4 Versions of Yotzer Or
- Appendix 3C: 4 Versions of Yotzer Or Comparison Chart
- Markers/pens/pencils/watercolors
- Paper (regular printer paper and heavier art quality paper)

Set Induction: Tweeting Creation

In their journals, invite the students to create a 140 character or less tweet thanking God for the daily miracle of creation/the universe/nature/light. They must use at least one hashtag. Share your tweets once everyone is finished.

Chevruta Prayers

Part 1: Pair

Separate the students into 3 or 4 groups, depending on the size of the class.

Provide each group with a different text of Yotzer Or (In Appendix 3B). Explain that each text takes the main idea of Yotzer Or, about God creating light and nature in the world, and makes a unique prayer about it. Yet, each prayer is a version of Yotzer Or. Have the students analyze their particular prayer and answer the questions about their prayer, but tell them they will have to work with others/the whole class to compare and contrast all four of the

Note to teacher: For these particular students, they may need to work individually or have a teacher/*madrich* work with each group. If that is the case, look at one text at a time, as a group or have each student individually look at one of the four prayers and then they can “collaborate” in the second part of this activity. Alternatively, if the group work elicits positive results, have the students jigsaw into different groups where each group can do the comparison (in which case, provide some sort of chart for the students to fill in, either the one in this lesson or one you create).

prayers afterwards. You can also give the students Appendix 3C as a graphic organizer if it would prove helpful. The following are possible questions for the students to consider:

- What words resonate from this prayer? Are there words used in all of them?
- Who is the creator of these things?
- What are we saying thank you for and why?
- Does it matter who the creator is, in order for you to appreciate the words?

Part 2: Share

Come back together and have each group share what they found. Make a table on the board to compare and contrast each prayer (Also available as a handout in Appendix 3C). Either use the elements on the table below, or create your own based on the points that the students raise.

Encourage discussion about the different words or ideas that jumped out at the students and a comparison of what is alike/similar. In addition, remind the students that each of these prayers is still a prayer, even though it may not follow a particular format (which may be difficult for them), so they can also discuss whether God needs the particular language of the Hebrew, or simply the big idea.

Autism Adaptation: In order to scaffold this for the students (if they need it), have them write why the specific text is the most meaningful to them. Then have them share with the people in their group (if productive). If not, students can read what the other students wrote or even share with a teacher/*madrich*.

	Hebrew	Mishkan Tefillah	Siddur Lev Shalem	Rav Nachman's Prayer
Language				
Who is the creator?				
Saying thank you for...				
Other elements				

Part 3: You and the prayer

Four Corners Exercise. Make each corner of the room a different one of the prayers and invite the students to stand next to the text that helps them best connect to the main point of Yotzer Or (and ask them to articulate that main point), or speaks most to them. Have them discuss with the other students who went to that prayer why they chose that particular text and see where they agree and disagree. Provide them with the texts if they want to read the other three and encourage discussion between the students if they are willing. Explain to the students that they need to support why they picked their particular text, with a more substantial answer than: it feels right.

Big Idea: At the end, students should be able to articulate why a particular version of Yotzer Or is most meaningful to them and how that rendition of God/creation speaks to them. They should be able to describe the language they like and why, as well as why some of the other language doesn't work for them.

Yotzer Or Through Art

Invite students to use whatever art supplies available and create their expression of Yotzer Or. They can write a song, poetry, draw a picture, watercolor or anything else based on the art supplies. This artistic representation must still communicate the main idea of the prayer and help the student feel personally connected to the prayer, and by tautology, God.

Exit Question(s)

- A. What new insights do you have now about creation and God's role in it. What would you tweet about Yotzer Or after this lesson? Do that now.
- B. What resonated with you from the version of Yotzer Or that you choose?
- C. Why can we use different versions of prayers to express the same point?

Appendix 3B: 4 Versions of Yotzer OrClassic text

*Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu,
Melech ha-olam, yotzeir or uvorei
choshech, oseh shalom uvorei et
hakol. Hamlei-ir la-aretz
v'ladarim aleha b'rachamim,
uvtuvo m'chadeish b'chol yom
tamid ma-asei v'reishit. Mah rabu
ma-asecha Adonai, kulam
b'chochmah asita, mal-ah ha-
aretz kinyanecha. Titbarach
Adonai Eloheinu al shevach ma-
asei yadecha, v'al m'orei or she-
asita y'fa-arucha selah. Or
chadash al Tzion ta-ir, v'nizkeh chulanu m'heirah I'oro. Baruch Atah Adonai, yotzer ham'orot.*

ברוך אתה יי, אלהינו מלך העולם, יוצר אור ובורא חשך,
עשה שלום ובורא את הכל.
המאיר לארץ ולדירים עליה ברחמים, ובטובו מחדש
בכל יום תמיד מעשה בראשית. מה רבו מעשיו יי, בכלם
בחכמה עשית, מלאה הארץ קניינה. תתברך יי אלהינו על
שבח מעשה ידיו, ועל מאורי אור שעשית יפארוך סלה.
אור חדש על ציון תאיר, ונזכה כלנו מהרה לאורו. ברוך
אתה יי, יוצר המאורות.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe,
Creator of light and darkness, who makes peace and fashions all things.
In mercy, You illumine the world and those who live upon it.
In Your goodness You daily renew creation.
How numerous are Your works, Adonai!
In wisdom, You formed them all, filling the earth with Your creatures.
Be praised, Adonai our God, for the excellent work of Your hands,
and for the lights You created, may they glorify You.
Shine a new light upon Zion, that we all may swiftly merit its radiance.
Praised are You, Adonai, Creator of all heavenly lights.

Mishkan Tefilah³⁵

You are Praised
who rolls out the rough, raw clay of the universe
into delicate vessels of light;
and from nothing at all
we could perceive in a world that has turned old
a shimmering new Creation right before our eyes
made this moment
just for us.
How much of life reveals Your presence?
How much Torah unfolds from each new flower,
from each new wave that breaks upon the sea!
You are Praised, who forms from the clay that cloaks our lives, the delicate vessels which contain
our light.

³⁵ written by Richard Levy in Rabbi Elyse D. Frishman, Ed., *Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur* (Central Conference of American Rabbis: New York, 2007), 229.

Baruch atah Adonai, yotzeir haMeorot.

*Siddur Lev Shalem: A Prayer for the World*³⁶

Let the rain come and wash away
the ancient grudges, the bitter hatreds
held and nurtured over generations.
Let the rain wash away the memory
of the hurt, the neglect.
Then let the sun come out and
fill the sky with rainbows.
Let the warmth of the sun heal us
wherever we are broken.
Let it burn away the fog so that
we can see each other clearly.
Let the warmth and brightness
of the sun melt our selfishness.
So that we can share the joys and
feel the sorrows of our neighbors.
And let the light of the sun
be so strong that we will see all
people as our neighbors.
Let the earth, nourished by rain,
bring forth flowers
to surround us with beauty.
And let the mountains teach our hearts
to reach upward to heaven. *Amen.*

*Reb Nachman's Prayer*³⁷

Grant me the ability to be alone;
may it be my custom to go outdoors each day
among the trees and grass - among all growing things
and there may I be alone, and enter into prayer,
to talk with the One to whom I belong.
May I express there everything in my heart,
and may all the foliage of the field -
all grasses, trees, and plants -
awake at my coming,
to send the powers of their life into the words of my prayer
so that my prayer and speech are made whole
through the life and spirit of all growing things,

³⁶ By Harold Kushner. From Rabbi Edward Feld, Ed., *Siddur Lev Shalem* (The Rabbinical Assembly: New York, 2016), 151.

³⁷ Reb Nachman's Prayer, actually written by his follower Rabbi Natan Sternhartz or Natan of Nemirov in Likkutei Tfillot, accessible through google.

which are made as one by their transcendent Source.
May I then pour out the words of my heart
before your Presence like water, O Adonai,
and lift up my hands to You in worship,
on my behalf, and that of my children!

Appendix 3C: 4 Versions of Yotzer Or Comparison Chart

	Hebrew	Mishkan Tefilah	Siddur Lev Shalem	Rav Nachman's Prayer
Language				
Who is the creator?				
Saying thank you for...				
Other elements				

Lesson 3: Blessings in Everyday - How to give thanks!

"Who is rich?" [the Mishna asks, and then answers:] "Those who rejoice in their own lot." (Avot 4:1)

Goals:

- To provide the basic blessing formula
- To connect blessings with saying thank you
- To explore how God relates to gratitude

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, SSBAT:

- Explain the importance of blessings in Jewish life and how God relates to blessings
- Examine the differences and similarities between a blessing and a thank you note
- Create their own blessing

Materials:

- Post-it notes
- Pens/pencils
- Journals
- Appendix 3D: Blessings/Thank you notes - graphic organizer of blessings/thank you note formula
- Copies of blessings from both *Nisim B'chol Yom* and *Mishkan T'filah*

Background Information:

Why we developed a blessing formula in the first place?

Millgram explains that the blessing formula is an opportunity to express gratitude to God, among other things. Basically, life is a partnership with God and the rabbis wanted to encourage that.³⁸ The actual blessing itself comes from the Torah (I Chronicles 29:10), where David says this blessing, although the rabbis discussed and concluded in the Talmud why the blessings we say for experiences of enjoyment or for ritual observance require the entire formula (*Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe*).³⁹

Set induction: Blessing list

Give students post-it notes and have them write at least 4 post-it notes with different things and/or people they are thankful for and then post them on a wall. Using affinity grouping (grouping the words based on how they connect to each other), create categories of things that the class is thankful for. This may begin conversation/disagreement. Allow space for the discussion, should

³⁸ For more on different kinds of prayer, including how the prayer formulas work, see Millgram, *Jewish Worship*, 92-94.

³⁹ To learn more, read the section entitled The Origin and Development of the Benediction, in Millgram, *Jewish Worship*, 94-95.

it occur, for the students to talk about what they believe goes in which category and why (especially because there are no right or wrong answers). The more they discuss, the better!

If students don't write anything about themselves, ask them what about themselves they are thankful for (*being alive, what they can do each day, intelligence, their unique qualities etc*).

Once you've made the list as a class, ask how God relates to the things they're thankful for. (Possible answers might include: *God made all the things on the list, God created us with a brain to be thankful, God tells us to be thankful for these blessings, etc.*) If using the next activity, a great transition is to ask whether we need to say thank you to God for these blessings in a particular way?

Thank you Notes and Blessings

Big Idea: A thank you note and a blessing are very similar in their formulaic nature. As these students are more concrete, the concrete nature of the thank you note may enhance their understanding of the blessing formula.

See Appendix 3D: Blessings/Thank you notes for a graphic organizer to compare and contrast blessings (best to handout once the students at least articulate the three different parts of a thank you note).

Part A: Thank you note:

Ask students how we say thank you for things in our lives? Generally, we just say thank you, but with big things, we often must write thank you notes. In considering a thank you note, there is a general format we use. Together, discover what that is and write it on the board, with room to add the correlating aspects of a blessing.

Introduction: Dear _____,

Content: Thank you for _____...

Conclusion or seal: Love/sincerely/with thanks etc, _____.

Have students pick one of the things from the list of blessings and write a thank you note to God, using this format.

Part B: Blessings

Once they've written their thank you note, connect that the Jewish way to write a thank you note to God is through blessings. Explain that a blessing, like a thank you note, has a specific formula/format that it follows, so that Jews know when they are saying a blessing.

A blessing has the same three parts as a thank you note, with different things inserted in each:

Blessing

Introduction: ברוך אתה יי אלוהינו מלך העולם
Blessed are You, Adonai our God, ruler of the universe

Content: for providing me with _____, for giving me _____,
 for allowing me to _____, for doing _____, for
 _____.

Conclusion/seal: *Amen*

Have a discussion about what each part does and how it relates to a thank you note:

- The introduction “reminds” us of who God is and tells us the person to whom we address our prayers. Just like in a thank you note, which we address to someone, here we address God. In Judaism, we often use a special 6 word formula for that, but it is the same as addressing the letter to God. (Make sure the students know these words and can read them.)
- The content is the part that changes based on the blessing and the purpose. We can thank God for specific things or thank God for our ability to do things. Therefore, the middle, content part can be more specific to our purpose of saying the blessing (we will look at that more in the next activity).
- The conclusion or seal on a thank you note usually says sincerely, love, or something else and then we sign our name. For a blessing, that conclusion is our *Amen* at the end of the blessing. By saying amen, we are saying that we agree to the blessing. Therefore, we are signing our name with our voice.

Part C: Jewish Blessings

Big Idea: A Jewish morning service has a litany of blessing that allows us to say thank you for miracles of daily life, called *nisim b'chol yom*, and also blessings for certain situations we find ourselves in - like in smelling something beautiful or seeing a rainbow, doing something for the first time or on going to the bathroom.

Give students the pages of blessings from *Siddur Sim Shalom*,⁴⁰ as well as *nisim b'chol yom* in *Mishkan Tefilah*⁴¹ and have them discuss why these particular things here are written into blessings? (Possible answers: *we need to acknowledge these particular things, these are special*

⁴⁰ Rabbi Jules Harlow, Ed., *Siddur Sim Shalom* (The Rabbinical Assembly: New York, 1985), 708-715.

⁴¹ Frishman, *Mishkan T'filah*, 36-40.

moments/things that we get to experience, it's so easy to not notice what things are happening around us that we have to remember to do so.)

Next, have them determine which blessings they think are exciting, strange, or different, and which they'd want to add to their life. In particular, have them find the blessings that stand out to them and determine why those particular blessings seem meaningful. Discuss, if time permits.

Part D: Writing Blessings (Authentic Assessment)

Now have students write their own blessing - either based on the thank you note they wrote before, or acknowledging a special moment they would like to make more special. They can do it in Hebrew or English.

Blessings in Services (Memorable Moment)

Arrange with one of the rabbis to have the students present the blessings they wrote as part of *nisim b'chol yom* in a morning service at one of the synagogues. This way, they realize that these blessings are both part of a larger liturgy and gain more familiarity with it. Debrief at the beginning of the next class session.

Exit Questions

- A. Why is it important to notice blessings and say thank you for them?
- B. What is the relationship between the blessings we offer and God? How is it important?

Appendix 3D: Blessings/Thank you notes

	Thank you note	Blessing
Introduction		
Content		
Conclusion/ Seal		

Lesson 4: Havdallah

Havdallah means: separate yourself from the unholy; strive for holiness.../ May God who separates the holy from the program inspire us to perform these acts of Havdallah. - A. Stanley Dreyfus and Chaim Stern⁴²

Goals:

- To experience Havdallah
- To explain how separation actually leads us to connection
- To explore how Havdallah connects to God

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, SSBAT:

- Summarize the Havdallah ritual
- Explain how Havdallah works to connect people to God
- Appraise Havdallah as a ritual that connects while it separates (for Jews and for them)

Materials:

- Havdallah set:
 - Braided Havdallah candle
 - Matches
 - Kiddush Cup
 - Juice
 - Spice box
 - Spices
- Appendix 3E: Havdallah service

Set Induction: Havdallah

Do Havdallah with your students. Try to find a dark room in the building and do it there, or if it is evening time, find a quiet space outside. Hand out the prayers for Havdallah (Appendix 3E: Havdallah service) to the students so they can follow along and do the ritual. Give them opportunities to sing, to hold the different ritual objects.

This lesson assumes that the students know about both Havdallah and its purpose. If they don't, give them a short explanation (basically, that Havdallah declares that God distinguished between the holy and the profane, between Shabbat (or other holidays) and the weekdays).⁴³

⁴² From Frishman, *Mishkan Tefilah*, 615.

⁴³ Havdallah originated in Talmudic times, but the language is ascribed to the rabbis of the Great Assembly, between the 6th and 4th centuries BCE. For more on this and generally on the origins of Havdallah and the traditions surrounding it, check out Millgram's *Jewish Worship*, 297, 299-301.

Explain that Havdallah is traditionally done on Saturday night when there are three stars in the sky, but can be done up until Tuesday night.

As you do Havdallah, either explain the four parts or engage the students by asking questions about each part:

- Juice/wine: Just as we start all Jewish holidays with Kiddish over juice or wine, we also end holidays in that way. By drinking wine, we remind ourselves of the sweetness and joy of that time and provide a good bookend to Shabbat. Just like we bless the wine at the beginning of Shabbat, so too must we bless the wine at the end, to both recall the Shabbat and make the week to come more holy.⁴⁴ In addition, juice is sweet, and we want to carry the sweetness of Shabbat with us into the rest of the week.
- Spices: Spices are both sweet and spicy. Shabbat too, is sweet, and adds a different spice to our life than the rest of the week. We want to recall that as we say goodbye to Shabbat, so we can carry it with us into the rest of the week, or alternatively, to awaken our senses to the beauty we may experience in the coming week.⁴⁵ In addition, we supposedly receive an additional soul on Shabbat and the spices represent the spiritual “feast” that we provide for that soul as it departs.⁴⁶
- Braided Candle: One idea says that we get an extra soul on Shabbat, so the braided candle represents the braiding together of our two souls. Another idea is that Shabbat allows us to have a greater connection with ourselves and the world, especially when we disconnect from technology or simply get to spend more quality time with family and friends. Therefore, the braid represents the interwoven-ness of our lives. Alternatively, we begin Shabbat with separate candles and by the end have an interwoven one to represent the unity that Shabbat brings about in our lives.⁴⁷ Also, the braided candle represents light, God’s first creation.⁴⁸
- Extinguishing candle: Extinguishing the candle represents the mixing of sweetnesses with the fire of creation, guiding us toward more sweetness and beauty, mixed with light, in the week to come. Also, it marks the actual conclusion of Shabbat, by bookending - we drink the juice and immediately extinguish the candle as the last act of Shabbat (with the act to mark the beginning of Shabbat being lighting the Shabbat candles). In addition, this provides a clear visual image of separation for us. God made a distinction, so we must as well.

⁴⁴ Feld, *Siddur Lev Shalem*, 283.

⁴⁵ Feld, *ibid*, *ibid*.

⁴⁶ Millgram, *Jewish Worship*, 300.

⁴⁷ Feld, *Siddur Lev Shalem*, 283.

⁴⁸ Millgram, *Jewish Worship*, 300.

Havdallah Discussion

Big Idea: To help students see that Havdallah, although a separation between Shabbat and the rest of the week, actually helps us connect to God through the Jewish calendar cycle, through ritual, and connection to others.

Possible questions:

- What did we just do?
- What is the main purpose of Havdallah as a ritual? *separates between Shabbat and the rest of the week, marks the end of Shabbat.*
- How does Havdallah create that separation/ending? *Through the ritual objects, by extinguishing the candle in the wine, by the prayers which say it, etc.*
- Why do you think we do Havdallah?
- Where in the Havdallah service can you see/feel connected to God? *Based on the fact that Havdallah means I have an actual transition instead of an abrupt change from Shabbat to the week, that I use my senses to experience God and God gave me my senses, that the fire helps me see inside my skin and reminds me that I'm alive, etc.*
- How does Havdallah as a ritual help connect to God? *It gives us a way to transition from holy time to less holy time, it allows me to connect to myself, and therefore to God, it connects me to other Jews etc.*
- What would you add to the ritual or change about it to make it easier for you to connect to God?
- Stretch question: How does distinguishing between things (between Shabbat and the rest of the week) help you connect to something else (helping you feel connected to the rest of the week, or to God)?

Create your own ritual (Authentic Assessment)

Instruction to students: What ritual would you make to separate between a special time in your life? How would you bring God into it? Design the ritual and include an explanation of the different ritual objects you might use. Also, write the blessings/prayers you might include based on the blessing formula from the previous lesson.

Have students work either in two big groups or as a whole class, based on developmental needs. You may need to scaffold this by using the ideas below.

First, brainstorm with the students what kinds of separations they make on a regular basis (between homework and play time; saying goodnight to parents at the end of the day; waking up in the morning; between classes; or between school and not school). Discuss what they do currently to mark those times and how that works for them. What elements might work better for them, to mark it more distinctly. Also, how is God a part of the ritual as it currently stands? How might God be a part of the ritual they create and why?

Also, help the students discuss what elements went into the Havdallah ritual, as well as other rituals they know of, and how each part is successful or not successful for them. Why might those elements be useful for creating the student's own ritual?

Exit Question:

- How can you use Havdallah in its traditional form, or in a different way, to help you connect to God?

Appendix 3E: Havdallah Service

Part 1: Lo yisa goy el goy cherev, lo yilmedu od milchama. (x 2)

Part 2: Don't walk in front of me I may not follow. Don't walk behind me I may not lead.
Just walk beside me and be my friend, together we will walk in the land of Hashem.

Part 3: Ay, oh, oh, ay

LaiLaiLai

Blessing over the Wine:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפֶן.

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, borei p'ri hagafen

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

Blessing over the Spices:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא מִיְּנֵי בְשָׁמִים.

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, borei minei v'samim.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, who creates fragrant spices.

Blessing over the Candle:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא מְאוּרֵי הָאֵשׁ.

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, borei m'orei ha-eish.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, who creates the light of fire.

Blessing over the Candle in the Wine:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַמְּבַדִּיל בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ לְחֹל, בֵּין אֹר לְחֹשֶׁךְ, בֵּין יִשְׂרָאֵל

לְעַמִּים, בֵּין יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי לְשִׁשֶּׁת יְמֵי הַמַּעֲשֶׂה. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, הַמְּבַדִּיל בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ לְחֹל.

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, hamav'dil bein kodesh l'chol. Bein or l'choshech. Bein yisrael l'amim, bein yom ha-shvei'i l'sheishet ya-mei ha-ma'aseh.

Baruch atah Adonai, hamav'dil bein kodesh l'chol.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, who separates between holy and profane; between light and darkness, Israel and the peoples of the earth, the seventh day and the six work days. Blessed are You God, who separates between holy and profane.

Shavuah Tov, Shavuah Tov, Shavuah tov, Shavuah tov. A good week, a week of peace, may gladness reign and joy increase.

Eliyahu HaNavi, Eliyahu haTishbi, Eliyahu, Eliyahu, Eliyahu HaGiladi. Bimheirav b'yameinu, ya-avo Aleinu. Im Mashiach Ben David, Im Mashiach Ben David.

Eliyahu the prophet, Eliyahu the Tishabite; Eliyahu, Eliyahu, Eliyahu from Gilead. Come speedily in our days, with the Messiah descended from David.

Lesson 5: Bar/Bat Mitzvah

*God is always
becoming something new
and so am I.*

-B'nai Mitzvah's prayer⁴⁹

Goals:

- To explore Bar/Bat Mitzvah as a process of connection to God
- To provide rationales for Bar/Bat Mitzvah (including God's commandments, connection to community, coming of age/adulthood, taking on responsibility, demonstration of learning)
- To address Bar/Bat Mitzvah as a Jewish ritual

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, SSBAT:

- Articulate the purpose of Bar/Bat Mitzvah in Judaism, and God's relationship to it
- Analyze a text and come to their own conclusions about how they connect to it, and how God connects, and whether or not the two elements can work together.
- Produce their own rationale for Bar/Bat Mitzvah that fits their understanding of God and community.

Materials:

- Torah
- Torah commentaries (for each student)
- Pencils/pens
- Paper

Pre lesson homework:

- Each student needs to determine his or her B'nai Mitzvah Torah portion and bring the text (definitely in English, but also in Hebrew if possible) with them to class.
- For a student not planning on marking his or her Bar/Bat Mitzvah, I suggest they find a parsha either close to their birthday, or one that resonates with them.
- For a student who already celebrated Bar/Bat Mitzvah, suggest that they look at their text again or find another parsha they find interesting and use that for the day.

B'nai Mitzvah background:

- At the age of 13 (12 for girls), a child becomes Bar or Bat Mitzvah automatically, regardless of whether or not they celebrate the occasion. The ceremony is an official way to mark the moment.

⁴⁹ Rabbi Rachel Barenblat's "Blessings for B'nai Mitzvah," from <https://ritualwell.org/ritual/blessings-bnai-mitzvah>.

Note to teacher: this is a parent - student learning day, where the parents get to learn with their children. Also, although the first part of the lesson could easily proceed without the parents, it would provide a great opportunity for parents and students to work together. You get to determine if you want all parts of the lesson to be collective, or just the second part. If a child is missing a parent, have them double up with parents or else work with someone else (maybe bring in other clergy in the building).

Set Induction

Pick one side of the family and make a family tree reaching back as far as you can go. Then bring in Pirkei Avot 1:1. Our Jewish tradition provides a reverse family tree in terms of Torah and how Torah was handed down to the people. It says that God gave the Torah to Moses, and Moses to Joshua, Joshua to the elders etc. All the way to us. Somewhere in the middle, our family trees and God's family tree meets.

Main idea: to connect us as Jews today, to God through Torah.

B'nai Mitzvah text - Finding You AND God in the Text

The goal is for each student to explain where s/he is with God as a Jew, at this time.

Explain that each student, when they become Bar or Bat Mitzvah, will read from the Torah. Not only that, they will be teaching about some element of their parsha. All of the *parshiot* mention God. But none of them mention you, the individual. Explain that the students should read through their own *parshah* and find two things. First, they should find where the parsha talks about God. And then find out where they connect into the text - where do they feel that their Torah portion is about themselves. In their journals, they should write down these different pieces. Next, they should make notes on the connection between the two.

Have students talk with their parents about this and see where they connect or differ from their parents.

As students take notes for themselves, have the parents also read the parsha and see where they think their child fits in. Once parents and the student finish, they should compare what they have written about the connection between themselves and God, with each other and discuss.

Encourage families to take notes, as this might provide good fodder for a *d'var Torah* later on.

Once everyone finds their connections, have a few of the students, if not all of them, explain the two different connections. Now, ask students to consider where the place with God in the text and the place where you are in the text meet? If they don't seem to connect naturally, why don't they connect, or how?

Letter to God

Write a letter to God, as a family, for the blessings they hope for during the B'nai Mitzvah process or ceremony themselves. For families who don't all believe in God, have them still write about the blessings they hope to experience in the process or during the ceremony.

Torah Through the Generations (Memorable Moment)

Invite parents in for this part of the lesson, if not already participating. Go into the sanctuary and have families stand in a semi-circle around the ark (with parents standing first and their child afterwards). You will hand the Torah around the circle, with each set of parents handing off the Torah to their child. Explain that this represents the responsibility God commands of Jews to pass Torah through the generations, that each generation must receive Torah. Bar/Bat Mitzvah is the ritual ceremony that demonstrates that to both the child him/herself and also to the community. Just as God passed the Torah on to Moses and then Moses continued to pass on the Torah, we too must include ourselves as part of the chain and pass it down. Many places in Torah remind us of God's command to pass Torah to our children, including both V'ahavta and the 10 Commandments. God, then, is in both the physical act of passing Torah along the generations, and also in the commemorative act of how we do so - through teaching values, the importance of connection, text, Jewish tradition.

As we pass the Torah between parents and children, and then from each family to the next, consider what Torah you pass along to your child at this sacred moment. Invite parents to speak a blessing to their child about how they wish their child's continued relationship with God will look. Students: think about God's relationship to Torah and what it means for you to take possession of God's Torah. What of God's Torah do you believe and want to take in? Why or why not?

Discuss with the students (and parents) afterwards where God was in that moment.

Possible questions for discussion:

- Where was God in the experience of handing Torah from you to your child?
- How might God be part of the B'nai Mitzvah process?
- How does the relationship between parents and children help bring God into the interaction?
- This entire unit talks about rituals as ways to connect to God. How do rituals help us as Jews connect to God?
- What does God expect of us during the ceremony of B'nai Mitzvah. What about when we become B'nai Mitzvah at the age of 13 (12 for girls)?

Exit Questions

- How does God connect into the ritual of Bar or Bat Mitzvah?
- How do you see God as connected to your Bar or Bat Mitzvah?

Unit IV: Questions about God in the World

(Interactions)

How God interacts in the world, with the world, and with those in the world

Note to Teacher: The questions contained in this unit do not necessarily have a definitive set of answers. Rather, different theologians hold varying positions and ideas that they believe best articulates their individual ideology. Your task is not to present the “right” answer, but rather to give options so that the learners may determine for themselves what they believe/what fits for them. Since these learners are more receptive to black & white concepts, rather than abstract ones, they may struggle with these ideas. Where possible, I’ve tried to make activities as concrete as possible, to demonstrate these concepts. Depending on your specific learners, you may need to change the structure of some of the activities, substituting a whole group conversation or telling them possible answers in places, or providing concretizations of material. In addition, these learners tend to like depth over breadth. Therefore, it might be beneficial to spend 2-3 weeks on one of these topics, delving deeply into it to allow full uncoverage. There is a wealthy of options in this unit for you to choose from. Select the lessons that are most interesting or relevant to your particular learners.

Curricular EUs:

- Each person’s conception of God develops from a continual discovery of personal and historical representations of God
- Experiencing God necessitates openness/action
- Jewish texts express God through feelings, sensations, and experiences

Unit EUs:

- God may interact in the world, yet the options for how are many
- Theology provides individual answers to God’s unanswered questions
- Progressive Judaism does not provide a singular answer to theological questions, but does expect the pursuit of an answer
- Progressive Judaism supports each individual person creating their own theology on God

Unit EQs:

- How does God interact with or in the world?
- What place does God have in suffering, in my life, in my mistakes?

Unit Goals:

- To provide examples of answers to the difficult questions about God’s interactions in the world
- To ask difficult questions about God in a safe space
- To create a fertile field from which learners may discover their *own* perspective on at least one of these questions

Unit Objectives:

By the end of the unit, SSBAT:

- Articulate their own developing/emerging belief about God with regard to one of these big questions
- Discuss and differentiate between different perspectives on God with regard to these questions
- Explore different answers to hard questions about God

Unit Arc:

All of the lessons in this unit explore big questions often asked about God. These questions include: Why did God write the Torah? Did God create the world? Suffering: why do bad things happen to good people? Who's in control: God or me? And oops, I messed up: do I fix it for God, for me, or for a combination of the two? These questions revolve around God's relationship to different concepts or big ideas in the world, or Judaism in particular, and none of them automatically assume that God is the key factor. In addition, each question concerns how we relate to God or that question. The intention is to allow learners to explore for themselves their own beliefs about these big questions, because these particular questions arise often when teaching about or thinking about God.

Lesson 1: Did God write the Torah?

This is the Teaching that Moses set before the Israelites: these are the decrees, laws, and rules that Moses addressed to the people of Israel, after they had left Egypt...⁵⁰ - Deuteronomy 4:43-44

Rabbi Ben Bag Bag taught: "Turn the Torah, and turn it again, for everything you want to know is found within it." - Avot 5:25

Note to teacher: Some teachers might choose to spread this lesson out over the course of two class periods, so learners have space to adequately explore these concepts.

Goals:

- To explain different beliefs about the authorship of the Torah
- To provide a framework through which to analyze Torah authorship
- To question for themselves diverse beliefs about the authorship of the Torah
- To demonstrate that contemporary Judaism holds the space for multiple views of Torah authorship

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, SSBAT:

- Summarize different perspectives on God's relationship to the authorship of the Torah
- Analyze different beliefs on God's relationship to the authorship of the Torah
- Produce their own explanation on God's relationship to Torah authorship

Materials:

- Multiple Computers with internet access
- Appendix 4A: Text of Genesis 6:11-6:22
- Appendix 4B: Text of Genesis 7:1-7:16

Key Terms:

- Divinely given/written: Written by God and given to Moses on mount Sinai.
- Divinely inspired: Not written directly by God at Sinai, but rather inspired by God.

Set induction

Here is a set of questions to ask the learners:

- Where is the original copy of Harry Potter and the Sorcerers Stone? (*JK Rowling's desk or something like that*)
- Where is the original copy of The Hobbit? (*J.R.R. Tolkien's desk or something*)
- Where is original copy of Romeo and Juliet? (*Shakespeare's family's house or something - but we may not know, because there is debate over who wrote the plays we attribute to Shakespeare*)
- Where is the original copy of the 10 commandments? (*we don't know*)
- Where is the original copy of the Torah? (*we really don't know*)

⁵⁰ The Torah is used by God as blueprint for the world - and to create good, but we do not always see the good. For more, see: Leonard S. Kravitz and Kerry M. Olitzky, ed. The Journey of the Soul: Traditional Sources on Teshuvah, (Northvale: Jason Aronson Inc., 1995).

Main idea: With contemporary books, we can trace their origins to know where they came from. Once we find the original, we can analyze the writing style, the way someone forms their letters, and also compare it to other works they've done. With the Torah, we cannot do that. We have an ancient document, whose origin is unknown. Some say it was divinely written (God wrote it and gave it to Moses on Mount Sinai). Some say it is divinely inspired (God encouraged/helped the people who wrote it and gave them the ideas). Some say that humans wrote it.

Torah Authorship: Who Did It?

Traditional Jewish ideas hold that the Torah was written by God and given to Moses at Mount Sinai. However, many Jews believe that Torah wasn't written by God. We are going to read the story of Noah's ark. (present the beginning of Noah's ark, just Appendix 4A: Text of Genesis 6:11-22) where animals are told to go onto the ark in pairs of 2).

Then, introduce and provide Appendix 4B: Text of Genesis 7:1-7:16 (without saying it is the rest of the Noah story). Suggest that the stories sound very similar. Ask: What are the similarities and differences you notice as we read? *of Kosher animals entering the ark 7x7, and non-Kosher 2x2*. This version does not have numbering, because the learners need to determine similarities and differences without biases).

Again ask the question: what is similar and what is different between these two stories? Compile answers from the learners. Also ask learners where they think the second story came from.

Explain that the second story comes right after the first in the Torah and ask why the students think there are two different ways of telling the same story in the Torah. Have students come up with answers to the questions: how do we reconcile both of these stories as part of the Torah? Have half of the class write about how to reconcile these stories if God wrote both of them and all of the Torah. Have the other half of the class write about what to do with these two conflicting stories if the Torah is divinely inspired, but not divinely written (and written by people).

Once each group/the individual students prepare their answers, have them share with the class. Discuss which argument is more compelling to the learners.⁵¹

Mythbusters

Just like with the television show, we are going to attempt to Mythbust the Torah. (nota bene: the point of Mythbusters is that the show does not necessarily need to disprove all the issues that come up. Sometimes an idea is busted and sometimes it is proven.) This activity does not necessarily need to re-enact these experiences, but it can if it helps the learners understand (for example, they can try to figure out how scientifically they might re-create the splitting of the sea).

Main idea: for the learners to experience how difficult it is to prove that these events did or did not happen. Rather, what is important is that we learn from these stories and take lessons away from them. Therefore, the wrap-up should remind the students that their objective is to find meaning in the story they looked at, even if they cannot prove that it happened. So, even though God may not have written these stories (because if God wrote them, wouldn't we be able to find real evidence, because it would be true?), they have value for us.

⁵¹ To enhance your discussion on human v. divine authorship, here are both traditional answers to Noah's ark as well as liberal answers.

Traditional Judaism's answer to Noah's ark: Rashi, an 11th century medieval commentator, explains each part differently: 2 of each kind in 6:19 means two, male and female, of each kind of the least numerous of the animals. In Genesis 7:2-3, where Torah says to bring 7 pairs, male and female, of each kind of the clean animals, Rashi reads it to mean that Noah clearly knew the Torah, so he knew what animals were clean and what were not (before Torah was revealed - more traditional Jews believed that everyone after Abraham had the laws and practiced "Judaism"). And Noah needed 7 pairs in order to offer sacrifices after the flood. (Rashi commentary, accessed from [chased.org](http://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/8170/jewish/Chapter-7.htm#showrashi=true) (http://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/8170/jewish/Chapter-7.htm#showrashi=true)).

Human authorship answer to Noah's ark: Liberal Judaism often talks about the Documentary hypothesis - which claims that there are four different styles of writing, indicative of at least four different authors for the Torah (and most of the Tanach), which were woven together into one text. Some places do a better job of weaving than others, and clearly the Noah story was not spliced together well (see Genesis 1 and 2 as another example of double stories).

The four sources are as follows

- J (Yawist source) uses the Tetragrammaton as God's name. Responsible for almost all of Genesis.
- E (Elohist) uses Elohim to refer to God until Exodus 3:15, when the tetragrammaton is revealed to the Israelites. Some parts of Genesis (binding of Isaac) seem to be in this voice, as are most of Exodus and Numbers.
- P (Priestly code) is the priestly source, credited with much of the book of Leviticus. P often refers to God as Elohim as well
- D (Deuteronomist) is the source of Deuteronomy (often cited as writing much of Deuteronomy and the first books of prophets, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings) (For more on the Documentary hypothesis: a) <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2010/09/24/The-Documentary-Hypothesis.aspx#Article> b) <http://www.cs.umd.edu/~mvz/bible/doc-hyp.pdf>)

Either break the learners into groups or have them work individually and give them one of the texts listed below. Tell them that their task is to determine whether or not this particular “event” actually happened. If they determine that the event actually occurred, the students must come up with a scientifically plausible explanation. However, if the student determines that the event mentioned in the text did not occur, they should “bust the myth” and explain why it didn’t happen. Encourage them to use the internet or the library (if your location has a library), or even talk to rabbis/educators in the building to do research. However, the students must find credible sources (at the teacher’s discretion).

Possible stories to myth bust:

- Noah's ark (a flood lasting for 40 days and nights and then receding) (Genesis 7:6-8:6)
- The burning bush (how could a bush burn but not be consumed, and God speak out of it?) (Exodus 3:2-4)
- The Splitting of the sea Exodus 16:13-29⁵²
- The Golden calf - (condensing jewelry into a calf, and then making it into powder and drinking it) Exodus 32:1-20 (focus on 32:1-4, 20)
- Korach’s rebellion - the earth swallowing people up. (Number 16:1-40)

Ten Commandments Challenge

Read the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-14) together as a class. Discuss where they came from and who wrote them, according to the Torah.

Then, split the room in half, with one wall being Godly (divine) authorship and the other being non-divine authorship of the Ten Commandments. Have students go to one side of the room or the other and then support their reason for being on their particular side of the room.

Either on the sides of the room, or individually, use the following questions as starting guides for the conversation:

- Did God write the Ten Commandments?
 - If God wrote the Ten Commandments, why do we need to follow them? And if we don’t need to follow them, why not?
- If God didn’t write the Ten Commandments, who did?
 - If God didn’t write the Ten Commandments, what does that mean about how we practice Judaism? Do we no longer need to follow them? What should we follow and why, if not the Ten Commandments?

Exit question

Jewish tradition doesn’t necessarily tell us whether or not God wrote the Torah. Traditional Judaism does tell us that. Liberal Judaism instead offers us many options.

- How do you think the Torah was written? Why?

⁵² Explanations: Type into google: “parting of the red sea evidence” <http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/story?id=99580&page=1>

Appendix 4A: Genesis 6:11-6:22

This is the line of Noah.—Noah was a righteous man; he was blameless in his age; Noah walked with God.—

Noah begot three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The earth became corrupt before God; the earth was filled with lawlessness. When God saw how corrupt the earth was, for all flesh had corrupted its ways on earth,

God said to Noah, “I have decided to put an end to all flesh, for the earth is filled with lawlessness because of them: I am about to destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make it an ark with compartments, and cover it inside and out with pitch. This is how you shall make it: the length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. Make an opening for daylight in the ark, and terminate it within a cubit of the top. Put the entrance to the ark in its side; make it with bottom, second, and third decks.

“For My part, I am about to bring the Flood—waters upon the earth—to destroy all flesh under the sky in which there is breath of life; everything on earth shall perish. But I will establish My covenant with you, and you shall enter the ark, with your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives. And of all that lives, of all flesh, you shall take two of each into the ark to keep alive with you; they shall be male and female. From birds of every kind, cattle of every kind, every kind of creeping thing on earth, two of each shall come to you to stay alive. For your part, take of everything that is eaten and store it away, to serve as food for you and for them.”

Noah did so; just as God commanded him, so he did.

Appendix 4B: Genesis 7:1-16

Then Adonai said to Noah, “Go into the ark, with all your household, for you alone have I found righteous before Me in this generation. Of every clean animal you shall take seven pairs, males and their mates, and of every animal that is not clean, two, a male and its mate; of the birds of the sky also, seven pairs, male and female, to keep seed alive upon all the earth. For in seven days’ time I will make it rain upon the earth, forty days and forty nights, and I will blot out from the earth all existence that I created.”

And Noah did just as Adonai commanded him. Noah was six hundred years old when the Flood came, waters upon the earth. Noah, with his sons, his wife, and his sons’ wives, went into the ark because of the waters of the Flood. Of the clean animals, of the animals that are not clean, of the birds, and of everything that creeps on the ground, two of each, male and female, came to Noah into the ark, as God had commanded Noah. And on the seventh day the waters of the Flood came upon the earth.

In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day All the fountains of the great deep burst apart, And the floodgates of the sky broke open. (The rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights.) That same day Noah and Noah’s sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, went into the ark, with Noah’s wife and the three wives of his sons— they and all beasts of every kind, all cattle of every kind, all creatures of every kind that creep on the earth, and all birds of every kind, every bird, every winged thing. They came to Noah into the ark, two each of all flesh in which there was breath of life. Thus they that entered comprised male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded him. And Adonai shut him in.

Lesson 2: Did God create the world?

A Close reading of Genesis 1-2:4a

“Rabbi Tanhuma said: In its due time was when the universe was created. it was not proper to be created before then; it was created at the right moment.” —Ecclesiastes Rabbah 3:13

Note to teacher:

These activities tend to build on each other. You can do them out of order, but it may be helpful to follow this order.

Goals:

- To explore different beliefs about the creation of the world
- To provide a framework through which to analyze the creation of the world
- To challenge diverse beliefs about the ways the world was created

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, SSBAT:

- Explain the theories of Genesis creation and the Big Bang, and how God relates to each
- Defend theories of Genesis creation and the Big Bang
- Design their theory of the creation of the world, and how God relates to it

Materials:

- Appendix 4C: Chart of Creation
- Appendix 4D: Text of Genesis I Creation
- Appendix 4E: Text of Genesis II Creation
- Appendix 4F: Text of Big Bang theory

Key Terms:

- Truth/fact: in accordance with fact or reality. Being in accordance with the actual state of affairs; veracity⁵³
- truth: subjective for a group or person or idea. It can shift and change

Set induction: differentiate between truth and fact

Write the words truth and fact on the board (in columns, or on separate large sticky notes) and have the learners add words or phrases to each. Either have students create a “definition” of these words, or create a brainstorming cloud so that they have ideas of what each are.

- Difference between truth and Truth
 - (Capital T) Truth is what we call fact. Also known as valid (like validation on a parking meter)
 - (lower case t) truth is subjective for a group or person or idea. It can shift and change
- Why do we need to talk about truth and fact? Especially with creation of the world?
 - What is God’s connection to the creation of the world?

⁵³ Definition from Merriam-Webster.com (true)

Discussion question

Because the learners may have already created their own idea about where the Torah came from, this might be helpful to determine what they believe and where you want to take the lesson.

Did God create the world? If so, how? If not, how was it created? Take thoughts from the learners in order to hear where they are and what they believe.

Order centered creation verse Human centered creation

- Read through 1st text (Appendix 4D: Genesis I Creation) and describe what was created on each day. (or write it out on the board) (See Appendix 4C: Chart of Creation)
- Read through 2nd text (Appendix 4E: Genesis II Creation) and describe in what order things were created.
 - Alternative: Instead of having learners read, split the class into two groups and have each group act out their story for the other group. As each group is acting, have the other group write out when particular things were created.
 - Do it in the order, and include God in the script.
 - 15 min to plan, 3 min to “perform”
- Ask: Do these two line up? Where? Where do they not?
 - See that these two do not line up.
 - Talk about what that entails (One explanation is that the first creation story is teaching order and God’s plan for the world. The other is teaching God’s special relationship to humans.)
- Explain: These do not teach truth, but rather something larger
 - Scientific truth is taught to us with something like the Big Bang theory

Science creation verse Torah creation

Background about the big bang

- The Big bang theory holds that the moment space-time “exploded into existence,” 14 billion years ago, this singular moment created the cosmos in which we live.
- We can’t explain it by physics or regular science, but can only be amazed by the specificity by which it all worked out.

With your students, depending on the depth of their interest, possibly address that there are other creation stories from which Torah creation based... Also, a point of interest: the theory of multiple universes is unsubstantiated by experience or scientific research, rather it exists in the realm of philosophy/logic - especially Ecclesiastes Rabbah 3:13 substantiates that claim - but also allows for a God constantly creating

Have students do a comparison between the Big Bang Theory and first day of creation using the appendices:

- Instruct students to read through Appendix 4D: Text of Genesis I Creation and describe what was created on each day (or write it out on the board) (See Appendix 4C: Comparison chart)
- Then have students read through the Appendix 4F: Text of Big Bang Theory and describe in what order things were created.

- Alternative: Instead of having learners read, split the class into two groups and have each group act out their story for the other group. As each group is acting, have the other group write out when particular things were created.
- Give students these questions as important for consideration as they read:
 - What does this text say about the theory of the creation of the world
 - How is God involved in this creation story? (*tzimtzum on God's part in that God had to "step" aside to create the world, vs. God not necessarily involved*)
 - Does this story seem logical?

Compare and contrast the two creation stories and determine the points of intersection.

Debate

Have learners be on either side of the argument: can one believe the story of creation in Genesis 1 AND believe in the big bang? Why or why not?

Here are some possible questions that might be helpful in framing the debate for the learners.

- Describe the story and God's connection.
- How is God involved in each story?
- Which story makes more sense to you? Why?
- How can you use this story to understand creation for you?

Give learners time to prepare their arguments and then have them debate each other.⁵⁴

Exit question

- Which story of creation resonates more with you? Why?

⁵⁴ Another option for this lesson: Another way to look at creation is through process theology (see Artson, below, for more on process theology). Where we say that God is the organizing force for the external elements/reality

- Medieval thought sees creation as happening *ex nihilo*, out of nothing (Saadia Gaon etc.) - meaning God created the world from nothing.
- Process acknowledges the concept of this *tohu v'vohu* that exists previous to creation (in Genesis 1:2)
 - So instead of creation being something from nothing, it is something from a continuous self-creative potential in the universe that Rav Kook posits continually renews itself (like in Yotzer Or/Tractate Haggish 12b)
 - God speaks creation into an ordered symphony of becoming (loosely taken from Brad Artson, *God of Becoming and Relationship* (The Rabbinical Assembly: Woodstock, 2013), 24.)

Appendix 4C: Chart of Creation

Day	What was created (Gen 1)	What was created (Gen 2)	What was created (Big Bang)
Day 1			
Day 2			
Day 3			
Day 4			
Day 5			
Day 6			
Day 7			

Appendix 4D: Text of Genesis I CreationGenesis 1:1-2a⁵⁵

1:1 When God began to create heaven and earth— 2 the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water—

3 God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. 4 God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light Day, and the darkness [God] called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, a first day.

6 God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the water, that it may separate water from water.” 7 God made the expanse, and it separated the water which was below the expanse from the water which was above the expanse. And it was so. 8 God called the expanse Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

9 God said, “Let the water below the sky be gathered into one area, that the dry land may appear.” And it was so. 10 God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering of waters He called Seas. And God saw that this was good. 11 And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation: seed-bearing plants, fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so. 12 The earth brought forth vegetation: seed-bearing plants of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that this was good. 13 And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.

14 God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate day from night; they shall serve as signs for the set times—the days and the years; 15 and they serve as lights in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth.” And it was so. 16 God made the two great lights, the greater light to dominate the day and the lesser light to dominate the night, and the stars. 17 And God set them in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth, 18 to dominate the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that this was good. 19 And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

20 God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and birds that fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.” 21 God created the great sea monsters, and all the living creatures of every kind that creep, which the waters brought forth in swarms, and all the winged birds of every kind. And God saw that this was good. 22 God blessed them, saying, “Be fertile and increase, fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.” 23 And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

24 God said, “Let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature: cattle, creeping things, and wild beasts of every kind.” And it was so. 25 God made wild beasts of every kind and cattle of every kind, and all kinds of creeping things of the earth. And God saw that this was good. 26 And God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth.” 27 And God created man in [God’s] image, in the image of God [God] created him; male and female [God] created them.

28 God blessed them and God said to them, “Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.” 29 God said, “See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food. 30 And to all the animals on land, to all the birds of the sky, and to everything that creeps on earth, in which there is the breath of life, [I give] all the green plants for food.” And it was so. 31 And God saw all that

⁵⁵ Translation from sefaria.org

[God] had made, and found it very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

2:1 The heaven and the earth were finished, and all their array. 2 On the seventh day God finished the work that [God] had been doing, and [God] ceased on the seventh day from all the work that [God} had done. 3 And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation that [God] had done. 4 Such is the story of heaven and earth when they were created.

Appendix 4E: Text of Genesis II Creation

Genesis 2:4b-25

When Adonai God made earth and heaven— 5 when no shrub of the field was yet on earth and no grasses of the field had yet sprouted, because Adonai God had not sent rain upon the earth and there was no man to till the soil, 6 but a flow would well up from the ground and water the whole surface of the earth— 7 Adonai God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being. 8 Adonai God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom He had formed. 9 And from the ground Adonai God caused to grow every tree that was pleasing to the sight and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and bad.

10 A river issues from Eden to water the garden, and it then divides and becomes four branches. 11 The name of the first is Pishon, the one that winds through the whole land of Havilah, where the gold is. 12 The gold of that land is good; bdellium is there, and lapis lazuli.) 13 The name of the second river is Gihon, the one that winds through the whole land of Cush. 14 The name of the third river is Tigris, the one that flows east of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

15 Adonai God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it.

16 And Adonai God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat; 17 but as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die.”

18 Adonai God said, “It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him.” 19 And Adonai God formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that would be its name. 20 And the man gave names to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to all the wild beasts; but for Adam no fitting helper was found.

21 So Adonai God cast a deep sleep upon the man; and, while he slept, God took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot. 22 And Adonai God fashioned the rib that God had taken from the man into a woman; and God brought her to the man. 23 Then the man said, “This one at last Is bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called Woman, For from man was she taken.” 24 Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh.

25 The two of them were naked, the man and his wife, yet they felt no shame.

Appendix 4F: The Big Bang Theory⁵⁶

The universe was born as a single, dense, super hot point. Almost immediately, the earth went through inflation where space itself expanded faster than the speed of light, growing in size over 90 times, from infinitesimally small, to gold-ball sized. After that point, inflation continued but much slower (relatively). The universe cooled down and matter itself formed. There were neutrons, protons, electrons, photons.

During the first three minutes, the light elements came into existence, and the first few elements came about. For about the first 380,000 years, the universe was too hot for light to actually shine, and instead there was simply a dense fog everywhere, like plasma. Matter was cool enough for atoms to form, but it was all darkness, because there were no stars yet. 10-17 million years post the Big Bang, the temperature of the earth continued to fall and allow for the possibility of liquid water.

400 million years after the Big Bang happened, the next age hit, which lasted half a billion years. During this time, clumps of gas decayed enough to form the first stars and galaxies. With the creation of stars, came their byproduct, carbon and oxygen, which makes up the foundational building blocks of living things on earth.

Our solar system was created 9 billion years after the Big Bang.

Life began to form with abiogenesis (the creation of life from non-life). However, once the first, tiniest living organisms began to form, other living organisms formed from that, terms biogenesis. From there, all life forms on earth evolved from one to another. From single-celled organisms, to plants, to animals, and eventually, to people.

AND/OR

Big Bang Theory theme song - Barenaked Ladies

Our whole universe was in a hot, dense state
Then nearly fourteen billion years ago expansion started, wait
The earth began to cool, the autotrophs began to drool
Neanderthals developed tools
We built a wall (we built the pyramids)
Math, science, history, unraveling the mysteries
That all started with the big bang! Hey!

Since the dawn of man is really not that long
As every galaxy was formed in less time than it takes to sing this song
A fraction of a second and the elements were made
The bipeds stood up straight, the dinosaurs all met their fate
They tried to leap but they were late
And they all died (they froze their asses off)
The oceans and Pangea, see ya wouldn't wanna be ya
Set in motion by the same big bang!
It all started with the big bang!

⁵⁶ Resources on the Big Bang Theory: <http://www.space.com/52-the-expanding-universe-from-the-big-bang-to-today.html> b) https://map.gsfc.nasa.gov/universe/uni_life.html c) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biogenesis>

It's expanding ever outward but one day
It will cause the stars to go the other way
Collapsing ever inward, we won't be here, it won't be hurt
Our best and brightest figure that it'll make an even bigger bang!

Australopithecus would really have been sick of us
Debating how we're here, they're catching deer (we're catching viruses)
Religion or astronomy (Descartes or Deuteronomy)
It all started with the big bang!

Lesson 3: Suffering

Discovering when bad things happen to good people, why does it happen?

“God inspires people to help other people who have been hurt by life, and by helping them, they protect them from the danger of feeling alone, abandoned, or judged.” —Harold Kushner⁵⁷

Note to teacher: The topic of theodicy/suffering still baffles theologians and is still written about today. The following lesson attempts to begin to unearth what theodicy is about, while trying to help the students understand God’s relationship with suffering. Some of these answers will be unsatisfactory and some may not make sense to these learners or frankly many people - and that is alright (although frustrating). There is no concrete answer to this question. Recognize this and use careful discretion in how you proceed. Depending on the empathy levels and awareness of your learners, this lesson may not be appropriate for them.

Goals:

- To explore the concept of suffering within Judaism.
- To examine different ways Jews conceive of suffering

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, SSBAT:

- Articulate their own response to what Judaism says about suffering
- Compare and contrast different ways of conceiving suffering in Jewish tradition

Materials::

- Appendix 4G: Shabbat Poem

Set induction

Give each learner a blank sheet of paper and tell them to write their answer to the question of “Why bad things happen to good people”

Once they’ve done that, ask a few people to share.

Then hold up a blank sheet of paper and say: “Mine is blank, clearly. That’s because I don’t have an answer to the question. Unfortunately, the rabbis don’t necessarily have one single answer either. A few people have posited possible options, but most aren’t even able to engage with the question and therefore tweak it in order to offer some suggestion. Today, we will discuss a few different options, to see what they have to say, knowing it is just one option.

Brainstorming

Main idea: this brainstorming session is intended to discover what the students believe about why bad things happen to people. Although students may not create an exhaustive list, they probably can come up with a large number of reasons bad things happen to people.)

⁵⁷ Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (Anchor Books: New York, 2004), 153.

As a class, have the students fill in a graphic organizer of why bad things happen to establish cause and effect.⁵⁸

Reason people do bad things	“Consequences” of doing bad things	“Actors” that can “cause” the evil

Once cause and effect is established, the next question is the most important for the learners to understand for themselves before moving forward:

Does God make it happen? If so, how? If not, why not?

- *(God makes good and bad.*
- *God is the good and bad choices inside us.*
- *God is just the good.)*

All of these are theological answers given by our rabbis for why suffering exists in the world.

Play the game Perfection

Have the learners take turns playing the game normally, with the timer. They should be able to easily complete the board before the time is up. Once a few students have mastered the board, have another student or two try it with increasing levels distraction. Play loud music or have other students running around the classroom. Blindfold one student and see if they can do it with verbal explanations from their classmates. Then, have another student try to do it blindfolded with multiple learners telling him/her what to do.

Concluding questions:

⁵⁸ Resource for filling in the graphic organizer. Part I: Why do people do bad things? *People are careless, people hurt themselves, by accident, people do bad things and by a direct consequence bad things happen to them, people talk to much and are being “punished,” people have bad influences, people are angry, people want to impress others. (Some learners may say that people have no control over their actions, and therefore)*

Part II: What are the “consequences”/bad things that can happen to people? *disease, natural disasters, car accidents, accidents, pain, violence, murder, driving.*

Part III: Who are the “actors” that can “cause” the evil/suffering? *God, people, universe/nature, chaos.*

- Was it easier or harder with the distractions? Why or why not?
- How do you think the game of perfection relates to suffering?

Explain: we played the game of perfection to simulate an example of how evil and as a result suffering, happen in our world. Often times, we can go about our lives and fulfill the tasks we need to without worry or pain. Sometimes though, there are distractions that get in the way. Those distractions are painful, or difficult to understand, or unexpected, or a combination of all of these things. We may say God causes the distractions. We may say that God is actually in our response to the distractions.

(Either right after an explanation or at the end of the lesson (as an exit question), bring it back to perfection: Bring the learners back to the game of perfection. Have them explain how suffering works, according to their own idea, based on the game, including the distractions and any other elements that make sense in their explanation.

Poem analysis:

Have learners read the Appendix 4G: Shabbat Poem and discuss what this poem says about God's interaction in the world with regard to theodicy? This poem is about prayer, as well as suffering and questioning why it's happening. As you read this poem together, focus on the latter aspects of it.

Possibly include the following questions:

- How does the poem say we should interact with God with regard to bad things in terms of prayer?
- What should we do instead?
- Why do you think the alternative is better than the initial ideas?
 - *Prayer brings people together/out of isolation. Prayer reminds us to find the positive aspects of things, to look for the good. Prayer is a way for us to express our frustration, so even if it isn't fixable, it is at least out there.*
- Some might say that God's relationship with suffering/evil is supporting people and being the good inside each person. How do you think this poem exemplifies this idea or not?

Exit Question:

- Why do bad things happen to people? How is God involved in the process of bad things happening?

Appendix 4G: Shabbat poem

We cannot merely pray to you, O God, to end war;
For we know that You have made the world in a way
That man must find his own path to peace.
Within himself and with his neighbor.
We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end starvation;
For You have already given us the resources
With which to feed the entire world,
If we would only use them wisely.
We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to root out prejudice;
For You have already given us eyes
With which to see the good in all men,
If we would only use them rightly.
We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end despair,
For You have already given us the power
To clear away slums and to give hope,
If we would only use our power justly.
We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end disease;
For You have already given us great minds
With which to search out cures and healing,
If we would only use them constructively.
Therefore we pray to You instead, O God,
For strength, determination and will power,
To do instead of just pray,
To become instead of merely to wish.

—Jack Reimer, Likrat Shabbat⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Taken from Kushner, *Bad Things*, 130-131.

Lesson 4: Who's in Control: God or me?

Does God control me, do I have free will, or is it some combination of the two?

O God, I know that a person's way is not his own; it is not for each person to walk and direct his steps -Jeremiah 10:23

Goals:

- To explain different concepts of God's power in relationship to me (i.e. free will)
- To provide a framework through which to explore God's power in relationship with me (i.e. free will)
- To challenge diverse thoughts on God's power in relationship with me (i.e. free will)

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, SSBAT:

- Summarize different perspectives on God's power in relationship with me (i.e. free will)
- Analyze different perspectives on God's power in relationship with me (i.e. free will)
- Produce their own explanation on God's power in relationship with me (i.e. free will)

Materials:

- Appendix 4H: Isaac Asimov's 3 laws of Robotics

Terms:⁶⁰

- Free will: we are in control of our own actions and what happens to us.
- Determinism: we don't have a choice of what happens to us

Textual Examples:

- God hardens the heart of Pharaoh (Exodus 10:1), of Sihon, king of Amorites (Deuteronomy 2:30), and also God hardened the hearts of the Canaanite soldiers (Joshua 11:20)⁶¹
- Deuteronomist, in Deuteronomy 30:29-30 emphasizes that humans have free choice (and should chose life).
- Jewish thought seems to hold both contradictory ideas simultaneously that God is the divine arbiter of human action AND that humans have the complete capacity to determine

⁶⁰ To learn more about what Judaism says about free will and determinism, visit the following websites:
<http://www.computerworld.com/article/2922442/robotics/stephen-hawking-fears-robots-could-take-over-in-100-years.html>
<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/free-will-problem-in-judaism/2/>
<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/hardened-hearts-removing-free-will/>
<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/divine-providence/>

⁶¹ Conversely, God does not permit Abimelech, king of Gerar, to sin with Abraham's wife Sarah (Genesis 20:6). In an encounter with Saul, David suggests that it may have been the Lord who has incited Saul against him (I Samuel 26:19), and when the Lord's anger is kindled against Israel, we are told that he incites David to number Israel and Judah (II Samuel 24:1). (<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-free-will-problem-early-solutions/>)

their moral will.⁶² (But then there is a perspective that when we think we have free will, it's just because we don't have an understanding of what the cause-r would be.

- Golem: pre-determinism v. free will: we determine how the golem will come alive, but once enlivened, the golem is in control

Set induction

Play a game of Simon Says.

The point is for the learners to play a game where they are told what to do and basically “controlled.” The moments when the facilitator tells learners what to do but does something differently are moments that represent glimmers of free will, in contrast the full control exercised when actions and words match. Interestingly, when they don't follow the directions, they are exercising their own free will.

Debrief it. Ask students about free will vs. our actions being controlled by someone/something. Possible questions for discussion:

- What do you believe we have: are our actions controlled, or do we have free will? Why or why not?
- What is the difference between the two?
- How is God related to whether or not we have free will? (Another way to ask this: Are you in control, is someone else in control, or is it a combination of the two?)

Robots

Robots are humanly created, but have the ability to do their own thing. As concrete entities, they can demonstrate a deterministic relationship more easily than trying to explain a relationship between God and humans. In the syllogism between human/robot and God/human, the robots draw a parallel to humans and humans to God. The analogy does not mean to imply that humans are God, but rather to demonstrate the parallel.⁶³

Provide the learners the 3 principles of robots (that prevent robots from going rogue), as written by Isaac Asimov (See Appendix 4H: called Isaac Asimov's 3 laws of Robotics).⁶⁴ Instruct them

⁶² The Apocryphal writer Ben Sira thus asserts that God has predetermined human character from birth and has divided humanity into two antithetical groups, the godly and the sinners (Ecclesiasticus 1:14–15, 33:10–15). Yet at the same time he teaches that we are free to choose our individual life paths and must not blame God for our transgressions (Ecclesiasticus 15:11–17)

⁶³ Consider showing a clip from Big Hero 6, showing the robot having intense emotions and eventually dying for his master. Or us West World, or a clip from Wall-E.

⁶⁴ Asimov wrote these three principles into a short story, named *Runaround*, in 1942. Eventually it was published with other stories in a book called *I, Robot*. Although these theories are tested throughout many science fiction books about robots, for our purposes, they demonstrate the point of determinism verses free will. These theories are tested throughout many science fiction books about robots <http://www.singularitysymposium.com/laws-of-robotics.html>

to read the principles and discuss with a partner (you may need to have a whole group discussion if the learners struggle to interact with each other). Provide the learners with these questions, also in the same appendix.

- What do these laws protect?
- Why are these laws necessary?/ What happens when these laws are broken?
- Would you add any other laws?
- Do these robots have free will or is their fate determined for them? Which is better?

Humans control robots in terms of what they think or feel or do. This is an example of determinism. But, were the robots to go rogue, then all of a sudden they would develop free will. Does this mean they didn't have it beforehand, or just that they developed the capacity to use it?

Big group questions:

- How is this an example of determinism?
- Where are there examples in here of free will?

To think about as teacher, if students are ready for the conversation: Could we look at God doing the same thing with humans. What do those rules look like for us? God created the man who created the thing who created God. (are they directly applicable to us and God)

4 Corners exercise

Have 4 sheets of paper hanging up around the room, each labeled: God as the stop watch, God as the clipboard, God as the grandfather clock, God as Conscience/Jiminy Cricket.

Introduction: One approach to looking at the question of free will vs. determinism argues that there are four ways to look at how God interacts with humans in the world. The task here is to share the four angles of looking at God's interactions and help learners determine what they believe.

Explain each of the 4 ideas and then have learners go to the sheet of paper with that idea written on it. Have each student attempt to explain why they chose a particular corner and what it means for them, as well as why they believe that and not another belief. Due to the personal nature of the exercise, push learners to clarify their statements if illogical, and suggest how they might bridge multiple perspectives should they articulate that. Once learners find to their corners, encourage learners to share why they went to particular corners. Offer the suggestion (if learners don't ask to do it organically), that some people may believe in God's interactions in the world as the combination of two different elements. It may be useful for you to participate as well, to show the learners what you believe.

Note to teacher: to know the learners beliefs, it may be helpful to write down what they say. In addition, the learners may want to come back to this at some other point, especially during the "Authentic Assessment" later in the unit.

- God as clockmaker/coach (fixer) - God creates people and then God lets us go. However, just as a grandfather clock needs to go back to the clockmaker every once in awhile to be checked and re-wound, God sometimes has to fix us, redirect us, and point us in the right direction every once in awhile.

- God as a clipboard - God has a clipboard with a checklist. As we go about our lives and fulfill the different things on the checklist, God crosses them off. Maybe we need to do things in a certain order, or maybe we just have to finish all the things - what do you think? When we finish the list, we either write new things or die.
- God as a stopwatch - God starts the stopwatch when we're born, and then we live our lives until God stops the stopwatch when we die. We can do whatever we want between the beginning and the end.
 - God creates people, which is determined. But then we are allowed to make choices. Which feels like free will (we don't ask if God intentionally made someone do something, but rather whether they were under duress.). If you experience yourself as making a choice, you are making a choice.⁶⁵
- God as conscience/Jiminy Cricket - God is like our conscience, telling us when we've done something good and when we've done something bad. God could also encourage us to make good decisions prior to us actually acting.

Exit activity

Explain that another way to hold both perspectives, of free will and determinism, is articulated well by the following quote: *Pray as if everything depends on God, act as if everything depends on you.*

- Draw, write, reflect on the following questions: What does this quote mean to you? How might you enact this concept in your life?

⁶⁵ In short, within the framework of a theory of relative freedom (or "soft determinism," in the phrase of William James), the concepts of determinism and predestination may freely coexist with that of voluntarism. God can be envisaged as predetermining human nature to include the power of deliberative choice, though as human nature's sovereign author he also determines its mode of operation and consequently all that results from it. (<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-free-will-problem-early-solutions/2/>)

The following quote explicates this concept in a Jewish framework: "God can be neither good nor bad. In terms of [God's] own nature [God] is incapable of evil. [God] is the only one who is goodness, But since, because of [God's] very essence, God can do no evil. God can do no good either. God, being incapable of the unethical is not an ethical being. Goodness for God is neither an ideal, nor a value; it is existence, it is absolutely realized being...Man alone can create value. God is Value. But if man alone is the creator of values... then he must have freedom of choice and freedom of decisions. And his freedom must be respected by God Godself...If God did not respect man's freedom to choose his course in personal responsibility, not only would the moral good and evil be abolished from the earth, but man himself would go with them. For freedom and responsibility are the very essence of man. Without them man is not human. If there is to be man, he must be allowed to make his choices in freedom. If he has such freedom, he will use it. Using it, he will often use it wrongly: and he does so for the wrong alternative. As he does so, there will be suffering for the innocent." -Eliezer Berkovits, *Faith After the Holocaust*, 469 (Eliezer Berkovits, 1908-1992; Orthodox Jew born in Transylvania, published works on Bible to modern Jewish thought. Modern theologian)

Appendix 4H: Isaac Asimov's 3 laws of Robotics

1. A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
2. A robot must obey orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.
3. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law.

Questions for Discussion

- What do these laws protect?
- Why are these laws necessary?/ What happens when these laws are broken?
- Would you add any other laws?

Lesson 5: Oops...I messed up - do I fix it for God, for me, or for a combination of the two?

Teshuvah and its relationship to God.

Man may well change himself, otherwise he would not be man. It is a prerogative of being human, and a constituent of human existence, to be capable of shaping and reshaping oneself. In other words, it is a privilege of man to become guilty, and his responsibility to overcome guilt.
— Victor Frankl⁶⁶

Goals:

- To identify individual reasons why learners do teshuvah
- To provide different models of teshuvah, specifically of whether we do teshuvah for God, for us, or a combination of the two
- To explore different models of teshuvah, specifically of whether we do teshuvah for God, for us, or a combination of the two

Objectives: By the end of the lesson, SSBAT

- Define teshuvah and its connection to sin
- Identify diverse rationales for engaging in teshuvah
- Analyze different perspectives on teshuvah and God's relationship to it
- Produce their own explanation of teshuvah and God's relationship to it

Materials:

- Appendix 4I: Sam's Scenarios
- Appendix 4J: Sin and Restitution flow chart
- Appendix 4K: Text Study Texts

Key Terms:

- Teshuvah: (re)turn, or repentance of oneself or towards God, after committing a sin
 - Teshuvah, letting go of one's old self, returning again to one's Source.⁶⁷
- Evil inclination (*yetzer haRa*) (Gen 4:7; Psalm 37:27 - can master this evil inclination)
- Good inclination (*yetzer haTov*) the opposite of the evil inclination.

Key Texts/quotes to explore:

- Ezekiel 18:27
- Psalm 32:1
- Hosea 14:2, Amos 4:6, Jeremiah 4:1; Lamentations 3:40 (repentance brings one closer to God)
- Maimonides Hilchot Teshuvah

⁶⁶ Viktor Frankl, *The Will to Meaning: Foundations and Applications of Logotherapy* (Plume: New York, 2014), 73.

⁶⁷ Lawrence Kushner, *God was in this Place and I, i did not Know* (Jewish Lights Publishing: Woodstock, 1993) 178.

- Mishnah Yoma 8:9 and Talmud Bavli Yoma 86a “One who repents of one’s sin is considered as one who has not sinned at all”
- Pirkei Avot 2:10 “...Rabbi Eliezer says: The honor of your friend should be as dear to you as your own, and do not be easy to anger, and *repent one day before your death...*”
- “Jewish doctrine holds that a person can at any time return and be accepted by God.”
Martin Buber, I and Thou

Set induction: Darts

Have the students play a game of darts (they can create their own dartboard with paper, and markers, and the dart out of a ball of tape). Discuss how dart throwing connects to sin and making reparations after sinning.

Main idea: SSBAT connect the dart throwing to the act of committing sins - to begin the discussion of fixing those sins.

Secondary set induction: Have a student empty out a tube of toothpaste until it is completely empty, into a bowl. Then, ask them to put it back into the tube. When they can't, have a discussion about how this is like sin, and what teshuvah can do to help mitigate the sin (that will be the point of the lesson).

Guided Exploration

Give the learners 3 scenarios (Appendix 4I Sam’s Scenarios) that demonstrate teshuvah in three different circumstances - *bein adam l’tazmo*, *bein adam l’chavero*, *bein adam l’makom*. between oneself and another entity (whether that be self, other, or God, respectively). As a group, walk through the scenarios, and then answer the following questions:

- What did ____ do wrong?
- Why was it wrong?
- Who did ____ wrong?
- What should ____ do to fix it?

Note to teacher: Introduce it to the learners as: “Let me tell you about something that happened...” (because the hypothetical may be too much for these learners)

Flow charted sin and restitution

Objective: for learners to delineate what they think the difference between the three categories of sin are and how to fix them (how God comes into each of them).

Break the learners up into small groups. In each group, they are responsible for filling out the graphic organizer/flow chart, in Appendix 4J: Sin and Restitution flow chart (either on a single sheet of paper, or on large post-it notes, or the board). Remind them to use what they already know about teshuvah to fill in the chart (Yom Kippur as the day of Atonement, anything they've learned from Torah, etc.)

Once each group finishes, they should look at each others answers. This is will be the foundation for the next activity.

Text study

Objective: for students to compare their answers in the flow chart to the rationale Jewish tradition makes for doing teshuvah.

Provide the learners with 2-3 of Appendix 4K: Text study Texts. With a partner (or the whole class, depending on the learners comfort with each other), have the learners read the text and analyze it in relation to their flow chart.

- How does God's place in teshuvah in the Jewish text match up with the flow chart they made?
- Does the Jewish explanation of God's relationship to teshuvah make sense? Why or why not?

Explanation wrap up: In traditional Judaism sinning against self and others is still sinning against God, because God is the unifying factor in all of it. So, no matter how we do teshuvah, the teshuvah ultimately must be for God as well. However, to get to that point, we must first fix the sins we've committed against ourselves and/or others.

Exit Question

- How do you think God is involved in teshuvah?

Appendix 4I: Sam's Scenarios

Sam the 7th grader

Between self and self: not being true to self. Sam really wanted to get in with the “cool” group at school. Sam knew that they all wore ripped jeans and Converse, yet Sam wore crummy sneakers and the khakis that Sam's mom bought for Sam. Also, they never turned in their homework. Sam started dressing like them: ripped jeans and Converse. Sam also stopped turning in Sam's homework. Sam was in! Then, a few weeks later, Sam's math teacher pulled Sam aside after class to say: “I don't understand Sam, you've been my star student all year. I know you understand this - why aren't you turning in your homework and answering questions in class. You're going to fail 7th grade if you don't shape up your act.” That night, Sam's mom also addressed Sam: “Your math teacher called me, Sam...she said you're failing math...want to tell me what that's about?”

Between self and others: Sam really wanted to get in with the “cool” group at school. They talked about other people behind their back, but everyone in school looked up to them. Sam had to join. They agreed to let Sam in, on one condition. Sam also had to make up a rumor about someone, Sam's old best friend Alex. Sam really wanted to join the group, so Sam came up with a rumor that Alex still wet the bed. The next day, after telling a few people about this, Sam came across Alex crying in the bathroom.

Between self and God: Sam became Bar Mitzvah last year and finally gets to fast on Yom Kippur. Sam is so excited to be treated as an adult. Plus, the fast means Sam gets out of school and doesn't have to do any homework. Once Yom Kippur comes, Sam goes to Temple with Sam's parents, but spends the whole day with a friend from school, talking about the other students in their class. When Sam's mom finds Sam, she tells Sam that isn't what the Yom Kippur fast is about...⁶⁸

⁶⁸ See Isaiah 58 for the biblical citation of this example.

Appendix 4J: Sin and Restitution Flow chart

You sin...			
Against whom?	Self	Friend	God
Define the sin			
Why is it wrong to commit a sin like this?			
What steps do you need to take to fix this sin? (consider who, what, when)			

Appendix 4K: Text Study Texts

Ezekiel 18-27-28

וּבָשׁוּב רָשָׁע מִרְשָׁעָתוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיַּעַשׂ מִשְׁפָּט וּצְדָקָה הוּא אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ יַחֲיֶה. וַיֵּרָאָה וַיֵּשׁוּב [וַיָּשָׁב]
מִכָּל־פְּשָׁעָיו אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה חַיּוֹ יַחֲיֶה לֹא יָמוּת.

And if a wicked person turns back [to God] from the wickedness that he practiced and does what is just and right, such a person shall save his [own] life. Because he took heed and turned back from all the transgressions that he committed, he shall live; he shall not die.

Ezekiel 33:11

אֲמַר אֲלֵיהֶם חַי־אֲנִי | נֹאֵם | אֲדַנִּי יְהוָה אִם־אֶחְפֹּץ בְּמוֹת הָרָשָׁע כִּי אִם־בְּשׁוּב רָשָׁע מִדְּרָכּוֹ וַחֲיָה
שׁוּבוּ שׁוּבוּ מִדְּרָכֵיכֶם הָרָעִים וּלְמָה תָּמוּתוּ בְּיַד יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Say to them: As I live—declares Adonai God—it is not My desire that the wicked shall die, but that the wicked turn from his [evil] ways and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways, that you may not die, O House of Israel!

Isaiah 55:6-7

You should seek God while God may be found, call upon God while God is near; Let the wicked forsake his way, and the man of iniquity his thoughts; and let him return unto God, and God will have compassion upon him, and to our God, for God will abundantly pardon.

Psalm 32:5-6

חָטָאתִי אֹדִיעֶךָ וְעֹנִי לֹא־כִסִּיתִי אֶמְרָתִי אֹדָה עָלַי בַּשָּׁעִי לִיהוָה וְאַתָּה נָשֵׂאתָ עֹן חַטָּאתִי סֵלָה:
עַל־זֹאת יִתְפַּלֵּל כָּל־חֹסֵיד | אֱלֹהֶיךָ לַעֲת מַצָּא זֶק לְשֹׁטֵף מִיָּם רַבִּים אֱלֹהִיו לֹא יִגִּיעוּ:

Then I acknowledged my sin to You; I did not cover up my guilt; I resolved, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,” and You forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah. Therefore let every faithful man pray to You upon discovering [his sin], that the rushing mighty waters not overtake him.

Exodus 34:9-10 (we apologize for sin, and God forgives it)

וַיֹּאמֶר אִם־נָא מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֲדַנִּי יְלֹד־נָא אֲדַנִּי בְּקִרְבְּנוּ כִּי עִם־קֶשֶׁה־עֲרֹף הוּא וְסָלַחְתָּ לַעֲוֹנֵנוּ
וּלְחַטָּאתֵנוּ וְנִחַלְתָּנוּ: וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה אֲנִכִּי כְּרַת בְּרִית נֶגֶד כָּל־עַמְּךָ אֶעֱשֶׂה נִפְלְאוֹת אֲשֶׁר לֹא־נִבְרָאוּ
בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל־הַגּוֹיִם וְרָאָה כָּל־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר־אַתָּה בְּקִרְבּוֹ אֶת־מַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה כִּי־נִנְרָא הוּא אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי
עֹשֶׂה עִמָּךְ:

[Moses] said, “If I have gained Your favor, O Adonai, pray, let Adonai go in our midst, even though this is a stiffnecked people. Pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for Your own!” God said: I hereby make a covenant. Before all your people I will work such wonders as have not been wrought on all the earth or in any nation; and all the people who are with you shall see how awesome are Adonai’s deeds which I will perform for you.

Lesson 6: God's Comic Book (Authentic Assessment)

Goals:

- To provide the space for learners to show what they know
- To assess what learners comprehend about God's relationship to the world through these hard questions

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, SSBAT:

- Describe how God responds to a situation of their choosing
- Construct God's relationship to one of the questions outlined in the previous lessons
- Portray God's relationship to a question of their choosing

Materials:

- 11x17 and 8x11 paper
- Markers
- Pens
- Pencils
- Colored pencils
- Computer with graphics capabilities
- Camera
- Printer

Comic book Creation

Learners will create a comic book/superhero wherein the protagonist is God and God faces one of these questions in a situation. How does God respond to the situation at hand? What does God do? How does God answer? How does God get out of it?

The learners need to make a description for God based on their understanding thus far, but also make it theologically sound (to the best of their ability), create the story line, outline how the question arises, how God addresses it, and how it gets resolved.

Next lesson prep

While students are working, take a picture of each student and explain that it is for the next lesson. Print out the pictures by the next lesson (Unit 5.1)

Exit Question

- Why do you think we want God's involvement in so many of these hard questions?

Unit V: God and Me Now

A (re)focusing and consolidation of student's perspectives on God

Curricular EUs:

- Each person's conception of God develops from a continual discovery of personal and historical representations of God
- Everyone deserves the opportunity to experience God
- Experiencing God necessitates openness/action

Unit EUs:

- Each person's conception of God develops from a continual discovery of personal and historical representations of God
- Understanding God comes through wrestling with God
- There are many beliefs about God, united and divided by God
- God learning requires returning again and again to the same questions - hafoch ba v'hafoch ba

Unit EQs:

- What do I believe about God now?
- How have my beliefs about God changed?

Unit Goals:

- To enable each of the learners to apply the concepts learned throughout the course into a unique personal theology
- To examine the evolution of individual learners beliefs of God
- To assess individual learners integration of the God concepts discussed previously
- To explore how individual beliefs about God can coalesce with one another
- To provide space for self reflection on God

Unit Objectives:

By the end of the unit, SSBAT:

- Utilize effective and accurate language for God while sharing one's beliefs
- (stretch) To integrate the topics from the course and articulate them into an emerging theology
- Investigate how their own theology expanded and adapted throughout the curriculum
- Organize and present their work on God
- Outline how they want to continue learning about God

Unit arc:

The lessons in this unit are meant to serve as the conclusion to the entire curriculum, as well as provide the students with a framework through which to continue learning about God once the course ends. Each lesson works to wrap up parts of the curriculum, or else provide big

picture views of God for the learner to pull together the various lessons into a single concept.

The lessons focus on theology as an emergent process, attempting to help the students see how they changed throughout the course.

Lesson 1: Personal Theology as an Arc: How have my beliefs changed?

Ben Bag Bag said: Hafoch ba vehafoch ba dekula ba. Turn the Torah over and over. -Pirkei Avot 5:6

Goals:

- To review the God material from the year
- To examine growth in student's conceptualizations of God
- To begin to close up the year of learning

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, SSBAT:

- Compare and contrast where they have grown as learners and in their conception of God over the year
- Deduce changes in their understanding of God from the beginning of the year to now
- Produce sophisticated answers to God questions utilizing the language and learning from the year

Materials:

- Mirror (for students who weren't at the previous class so they can see themselves)
- Pens/pencils
- Paper
- Appendix 5A: 4 Questions Worksheet

Lesson Pre-Prep (also in Unit 4.6):

- Take a picture of each student at the end of the previous lesson (and explain that it is for this lesson).
- Print out the pictures for each student by this lesson

Set Induction

Give each student the picture taken of them in the last class, as well as the picture from the beginning of the year. Invite students to compare and contrast their pictures, asking the following questions:

- What do you notice about yourself from the beginning of the year?
- What do you notice about yourself now?
- What's different and what has changed the same? *Possible answers: wearing different clothes, longer hair, different style, gained or lost weight etc.*

Then explain that just as we change physically during the year, so too does the abstract self. Invite students to think a little more deeply about how they have changed as a person, as a learner, as a child, etc.

Affinity Grouping, Take II

Main idea: Just like we change, our ideas about God change as well. The focus should be on how student's ideas and conceptual knowledge about God changed throughout the year. In addition, help students see language they now have to discuss God that they did not possess previously.

Just like at the beginning of the year, have students write post-it notes with everything they know about God (have them try to each make at least 7). Once complete, instruct the students to place the notes on a big board space. Have students find related notes and place them together into "affinity groupings," combining identical terms/concepts and placing similar concepts together in distinct categories. Invite students to discuss as they work, especially if they disagree with someone else. Instruct them to make 8 or fewer categories. Once the students agree on the categories, have one student come up with a name for each category.

After everyone completes their category, share the groupings as a class and discuss. The discussion should center around why students grouped the words the way they did and what those groupings include or leave out.

For a review of the words from the beginning of the year, see Lesson I.2

4 Questions revisited

Hand out the same four questions from the beginning of the year and have students answer the questions again. (See Appendix 5A: 4 Questions Worksheet)

Once everyone finishes, hand out the students answers from the beginning of the year, and instruct students to compare and contrast their answers.

Possible questions:

- What about your beliefs changed throughout the year?
- What stayed the same?
- What questions do you still have?
- What did you think would change but didn't?
- What surprised you about your answers, or the comparison between the answers?
- What is something new you've discovered about God made apparent by this activity?
- Did God change throughout the year, or did you? How so? Why not?

After students reflect individually, bring the class together and have a discussion. Encourage students to comment on the other student's perspectives based on what they've seen. Scaffold the conversation if necessary, providing sentence starters.

Examples of sentence starters include:

- I notice that your Facebook page says _____. Why did you write that?
- I liked _____. Can you tell me what that means?

- _____ is interesting. Can you tell me more about it?

Changed Beliefs

Invite students to think for a few minutes and come up with 2-3 sentences explaining what they believe about God at the moment. They need to consider the biggest changes they've experienced in how they understand God, as well as what they learned that they didn't know previously. After everyone thinks (and notates their answers), bring the students together as a class and share.

Exit Question

- Does God change throughout our lives, or do we? Why or why not?

Appendix 5A: 4 Questions Worksheet

1. Where is God?

2. How do you experience God (where, when, why)?

3. What does God look/sound/feel/taste like? (for this question, you can use play dough, or markers or writing or music or a prayer from the prayerbook or anything else that helps you express this)

4. What questions do you have about God?

Lesson 2: How does God exist/act in the world?

God was in this place and I, I did not know. -Genesis 28:6

Goals:

- To explore different ways of expressing connection to God
- To scaffold a conversation about connecting to God through different mediums
- To excite students about connecting to God in diverse, new ways

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, SSBAT:

- Articulate how they perceive God acts in the world
- Analyze art for how it relates to their conceptualization of God
- Defend their interpretation of God

Materials:

- Spin art spinner, paper, and paint
- Table clothes for the tables
- Students Facebook pages
- Markers
- Pens/pencils
- Heavy art paper
- Pastel Chalks⁶⁹
- Baby wipes or Lysol wipes

Set Induction

Ask each student to come up with one word to describe how God acts/interacts in/with the world. Invite everyone to share the word they come up with.

Spin art

Main ideas: Spin art is easily related to God: a. Spin art never turns out exactly how you expect it, and God never turns out exactly how you expect it. b. Nothing is ever perfect, and when God made humans, and the earth and pretty much anything, nothing was perfect. c. Nothing is exactly the same. You can never make the spin art exactly the same. Just like God does not repeat people or make copies of things exactly as they were at another point.

⁶⁹ For example, see the following link: <http://www.unitednow.com/product/5679/prismacolor-premier-nupastel-color-sticks.aspx?item=13881&gclid=Cj0KEQjwxPbHBRCdxJLF3qen3dYBEiQAMRyxS-15XayeUr6-MYBXmA6xMnp3dLIIO36NVEV2oq5r2roaAvY18P8HAQ>.

Instruct the students on how to do spin art.⁷⁰ Tell them that spin art relates to God and as they do it, they should figure out how they think spin art relates to God.

Important things to remember:

- As students do the spin art, remind them to think about how this is related to God, in any way discussed throughout the course, and as they imagine God.
- Remind them that they may have to shake the paint bottle to make it come out, and want to be careful with the amount of paint they use, but also liberal enough that it shows up.
- A good rule of thumb is that if you only see circles on the paper as the spinner is moving, more paint is needed.
- As each student goes, turn the spinner off so the students can see what it looks like part way through.
- Also, provide students the option of running their finger across the page while it is still running. This method creates something ENTIRELY unexpected.

Once finished, discuss using the following questions and possible answers as a guide:

- How does spin art relate to God? (*It spins really quickly and God is everywhere, and God goes everywhere quickly; God creates everything and when God creates a person it is like a puzzle and everything fits into place and putting the paint on it fits everything into place; The spinner is God because it is always creating different things each different and unique, makes different things like God does; The spinner is God and each piece of paper is us and when you're spinning you think it will all come out precise but it all comes out different (we came out like this, all different)*)
- What do the colors and the blur have to do with God? (*The colors, one over the other, teach us more about layers, about the things we see don't always look the way we expect them to be. Also, when we initially see something, we experience it one way, but after time, we see it another way.*)
- Does God always do things exactly as we expect God to? *no!*
- What are some examples of this? (*death; earthquakes/natural disasters, early birth, traffic.*)
- Why do you think this is the case? (*because God has a sense of humor, Because not everything can always go our way, We need to learn to appreciate things, Sometimes there*

⁷⁰ Instructions: Place the paper on the spinner and choose your paints. You can use squirt bottles or paint brushes with varying results. Once the paper is attached, turn on the spinning machine, and when it's spinning put paint on the paper or canvas. You can splash the paint on with your squirt bottles, or apply it with paintbrushes or sponge brushes.

Whichever way you choose, it won't be long before you'll see circles, spirals and arcs forming as you apply the paint. You may also achieve interesting splatter and splash effects, depending on the supplies you're using, how fast your turntable is spinning, and other factors.

For less splashing and splattering, use thicker paint and a lower spinning speed (if possible.) For more splashing and splattering, use waterier paint and faster spinning speeds (again, if possible. Your turntable might or might not allow you to pick the speed at which it spins.)

If you want your painting to be colorful, remember to change colors from time to time.

Be careful when you remove it from the turntable, and put it in a safe place where it can remain undisturbed while drying. (From: <http://freecrafts.info/crafts/painting/spin-art-how-to/>)

is a lesson we need to learn, And if things always go the way we expect them, we cannot learn it, We don't always know what the lesson is right away, but we eventually figure it out. (Story of man in hurricane and lifeboat))

While individual students are doing the spin art, provide the rest of the students with their Facebook pages and allow them to finish up the pages, or to work on their comic books from the previous unit.

The sections included in their Facebook page should be:

- About me
- Friends
- Wall with conversation between God and another individual
- Pictures of God (or Godly actions)
- etc.

God ideas - In Art

Main idea: Although the following description is rather in depth, read it and adapt for your learners. The point is for the students to make a few layers of drawing on top of previous work, each as a response to or enhancement of the previous layer. Hopefully the students will see that the art is like God: as we make more “layers” of our understanding of God, we both deepen our understanding and also change it based on what is added to that knowledge.

The activity involves drawing with pastels in successive layers...

- Invite the students to draw on the paper with pastels. They can draw whatever they like
 - Tell them to choose one small part of your drawing and describe it in writing or to a partner.
- Then have the students draw another layer, but make it as a response or enhancement of the first layer in some way.
 - Now ask students to describe that same part: What do you notice about it? Just descriptions/observations, no evaluation
 - If the activity seems to go well, have them look at someone else's art for 30 seconds, to see another way of doing it, and use that as an inspiration for changing their piece again.
- Then have the students draw a third layer as a response or enhancement to the first (if they can remember it), and the second, particularly focusing on the part described in the beginning.
 - Do it again...describe that specific part you draw. What do you notice?
 - Now describe how it changed using your notes? What changed and how? Did knowing you were focusing on a specific part change how you did the piece of art?

Have a discussion with the students afterwards:⁷¹

- What did you notice about your particular area that you focused on? What about it made you focus?
- How did your art change as you added new layers? If you didn't change that part, how did changes in other parts of the drawing affect that part? If you did change that part, how did it change your perception of the drawing?
- How is the art you did like a Jewish understanding of God? (Possible answers: *God can be different for everyone...there is a similar starting point, but everyone gets to come at God from a different direction; God can't be tied down, so shifts and grows as we do; sometimes our God concept shifts dramatically and sometimes it is solid - inconsistent; we can respond and react to what we understand from other people, not only ourselves*)
- How has your conception/ ideas about God changed as we discussed more or different ways to think about God? How has it grown or even gotten less specific/ concrete as we learned more about God?
- How might your art reflect that – be similar to or different than those changes?
- How did your art represent how your conception of God has changed throughout your learning process, if at all? If not, why not? If so, how?
- How has our learning about God been messy for you? How did that feel?
- Final point: God abounds in our world but we don't always know how to categorize or understand God, just like we don't always know how to describe or explain our art. But we can see that our growing awarenesses of God change and adapt just like art changes as we do it. Both are influenced by many factors. And we don't need to do it in isolation. Just like art with pastels, which is both messy and somewhat unclear as we are doing.

Exit Question

- How is your understanding of God like spin art or drawing with pastels?

⁷¹ As you discuss, possibly consider James Fowler's theory of faith development as a possible resource to see where the students are currently in their religious/theological development (available in the Resources section).

Lesson 3: God “Interactive Museum”

A presentation of individual God concepts to other students and community members

Museums provide places of relaxation and inspiration. And most importantly, they are a place of authenticity. -Thomas P Campbell

Goals:

- To review the material from the year
- To help students create a presentation of their conceptualization of God
- To empower students to speak and teach about their views of God

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, SSBAT:

- Describe their conceptualization of God to another person in a few sentences, using the resources they created throughout the course
- Answer questions about their God concept utilizing the language and concepts from the course

Materials:

- Computer with internet capabilities
- Student work from the year
- Paper
- Pencils/pens
- Post-it notes

Lesson pre-prep:

- Send out an email to parents and the rest of the school, as well as community members (with permission from the educator/rabbi) to invite people to visit the God interactive museum and learn about God. Possibly have the students help you craft the invitation.
- Also, clear with the educator/rabbi ahead of time that you will be doing this museum during the last twenty minutes of class.
- Introduce the museum in the previous class session so students can mentally prepare for it.

Set Induction

Main idea: create the expectations for how the students should act in the museum (as both docents and participants).

Have students come up with different things that people do in a museum and write them on the board. Use this as the guideline for how to participate in the Docent Practice activity later in the lesson.

Presentations

Help students create a “museum” of the materials they amassed throughout the year. Remind them that this is an opportunity for them to share what they learned and understand about God. Their job is to serve as the docents for the museum and to explain the different things that they exhibit.

Have each student write up an explanation of one of the pieces presented in the museum, so visitors will understand what the assignment was. The options include:

- A Facebook page for God
- Individual blessings (Unit 3)
- Ritual created (Unit 3)
- A Comic book (or comic book outline) (Unit 4)
- The art representing God (Unit 5.2)

Encourage students to write up an explanation of each of their pieces in the museum, that clearly explains their beliefs. This way they know ahead of time what they might say about the piece if someone asks them questions.

If developmentally appropriate, create a list of expectations with the students of appropriate behaviors during the museum and what the expectations are on them as students, so all the students know the expectations.

Docent Practice

Have students practice visiting each other’s “exhibits” in the museum and ask each other questions. Invite the students visiting the “exhibits” to offer feedback on the presentations on post it notes, and then hand out each person’s post-it notes after everyone has presented.

God Museum (AA/MM)

Present the God museum for the rest of the school and community members! If necessary/ appropriate, remind the students of the expectations that you created as a class.

Exit Questions

- What about your beliefs in God was clarified through the museum and why?
- What questions came up that you still cannot answer?

Lesson 4: God, Continued

Education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel. - Socrates

Goals:

- To excite students about continuing to learn about God
- To provide resources for continued learning about God
- To review the material from the course

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, SSBAT:

- Access resources for further learning about God
- Produce a list of questions they still have about God
- Examine their own God questions and determine where to go to find answers.

Materials:

- A compilation of each student's journal entries

Set Induction:

In 3 minutes, invite students to write as many things that they can remember about God from the course. Once students finish, have them create the list on the board and possibly discuss what they remember. Also, fill in any gaps.

God Shopping List

Option A: Give students their journals and have them read all of their journal entries. Instruct them to write down any questions that emerge from the reading of their journal on a sheet of paper entitled "God Shopping List." Also, invite them to write down powerful insights they noticed in their own writings, or connections they make between journal entries from different lessons.

Option B: Have students read through their journal entries. Invite them to draw one picture that represents what they know about God based on the course and then draw another picture based on a question they still have about God.

Part II: Discussion

Once students finish, discuss. Possible questions for discussion:

Main idea: The learning about God never stops. Instead, if we stop searching, our understandings of God will stagnate where they are, and we will never gain the sophistication or greater comprehension that comes with deeper learning and exploration.

- What questions do you still have about God?
- What else did you notice about your understanding about God?
- How can you continue to ask your questions about God? To whom and when?
- Why should Jews continue to ask questions about God throughout our lifetimes?

- Can you ever know all you need to know about God? Why or why not?

Part III: Learning Forward

After the discussion, make a list as a class detailing all the places to continue to ask questions about God, and/or find answers about God. Offer internet and book sources (see annotated bibliography for books).⁷²

Rabbi/Cantor/Educator discussion

Set up a meeting with the rabbi/cantor/educator, asking the rabbi/cantor/educator to discuss his or her personal exploration of God. The point is for students to see that even rabbis/cantors/educators continue to think about God and ask questions.

Before entering the discussion, have the students write down 2-3 unanswered questions about God and bring them to the meeting. Invite them to ask the harder questions too.

Exit Question

- Why do you need to continue to ask questions and think about God?

⁷² Internet sources include myjewishlearning.com, reformjudaism.org and other such sites.

Book sources include: Rifat Sonsino and Daniel Syme, *Finding God: Selected Responses* (URJ Press: New York, 2002); Josh Barkin, Ed., *God: Jewish Choices for Struggling with the Ultimate* (Torah Aura Productions: Los Angeles, 2008).

Resources

1. Autism Adaptation Resources: a. An Educators Guide to Autism Spectrum Disorder b. Jewish Funders Network: Guide to Jewish Values and Disability Rights c. How to support a child
2. Sonsino and Syme filled in God grid
3. James Fowler Stages of Faith Development
4. Torah Resources
5. Suffering Resources
6. Teshuvah Resources

1. Autism Adaptation Resources

a. An Educators Guide to Autism Spectrum Disorder: To access this resource, please go to: <https://researchautism.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/An-Educators-Guide-to-Asperger-Syndrome.pdf>.

b. Jewish Funders Network: Guide to Jewish Values and Disability Rights (a good resource for how to talk about disabilities and also how to discuss values specifically through the lens of disability) Find the resource here: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BzCWeTabmq9WXZjd2ZGZlp4aDg/view>.

c.

2.

How to support an Autistic child in the classroom

@Michelle Sutton *www.michellesuttonwrites.blogspot.com.au *Please credit when sharing *Do not reproduce without written permission

Classrooms are very difficult places for Autistic children. They are bright, noisy, uncomfortable and full of expectations.

Child may

"be disruptive": fidget, walk around, clap their hands, stamp their feet, vocalise loudly, hum, whistle, ask lots of questions, talk loudly to classmates, talk to themselves aloud

"be aggressive": lash out at others, throw things, yell

"be unresponsive": not answer when spoken to, hide, avoid eye contact, refuse to do assigned work

"be demanding": tell others what to do, insist on having things their way, expect things to be done a certain way every time



Things you can say

"I can see you are having a hard time"

"How can I help?"

"It's OK, I understand. I am here for you."

"Don't worry, we will work it out"

"Do you need a break?"

"What do you need right now?"

Things you can do

"be gentle and patient"

"explain to other students that the child is having a hard time"

"ask other students to be gentle and patient"

"reduce audio, tactile, visual and smell distractions in the classroom"

"use quiet and calm times to talk to the child about behaviours that are unsafe for the classroom (flashing out, throwing, etc.)"

"use visuals to communicate things the child needs help remembering (e.g. class expectations, daily schedule)"

"provide ear defenders and fidget toys"

"not expect the child to always respond immediately"

"regularly offer breaks to destress, eat and use the bathroom"

"allow fidgeting and doodling"

You should not

"label the child as 'naughty' or 'a trouble maker'"

"raise your voice"

"say anything to shame the child (i.e. 'how dare you', 'you should know better', 'even the little kids don't do that', 'you are being naughty/rude/disruptive')"

"punish the child for doing things they need to do to cope"

"belittle the child if they need lots of support and encouragement"

"rush the child to complete tasks or move on to the next activity"

"attempt to force the child to do things"

**Remember: The child is not *giving* you a hard time-
the *child* is having a hard time and needs your help and support**

Filled in God Grid

Theologians --> God Questions V	Biblical Ideas	Rabbinic Writings	Moses Maimonides : Neo- Aristotelian Rationalism	Rabbi Isaac Luria: Jewish Mysticism	Baruch Spinoza: Pantheism
1. What is God like?	At burning bush God says: "Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh - I am what I am" ("or I am what I will be"). God is described in many ways in Torah	Talmud offers multiple views of God. God is healer, ruler, King, shechinah (feminine spiritual presence), warrior, and more.	We don't know what God is like. We can only say two positive things about God: That God exists and that God is one.	God is endless (ein sof). God is like a pipeline, that you can connect with. It comes from the infinite but it comes to us on earth as tangible. [God has no beginning or end. God goes on forever.]	God and the universe are one. God is nature. [Spinoza was excommunicated - thrown out - of the Jewish community in his lifetime for ideas including this]
2. How can I get to know God?	Some people - Abraham, Rebecca, Moses, Miriam, and the Prophets (Isaiah, Deborah, Jonah) - have "met" God, but they haven't told us what God is like.	We can get to know God in many ways: through Torah (study), Avodah (prayer/sacred work), Gemilut Chasadim (acts of lovingkindness), Tikun Olam (social action), and Imitatio Dei (imitating the actions God takes in the Torah/Tanach (Bible))	We cannot "know" God because God is transcendent (beyond us). Thus, we can only say what God isn't: God is limited; God does not have a physical form; God isn't evil.	We get to know God by receiving the outpouring of the pipeline. We get to know God by doing mitzvot to clear out the pipeline.	God is the whole universe. The more we know about the world, the more we know about God. [God is everything, so the more I know about the world, the more I know God.]

Theologians --> God Questions V	Biblical Ideas	Rabbinic Writings	Moses Maimonides : Neo- Aristotelian Rationalism	Rabbi Isaac Luria: Jewish Mysticism	Baruch Spinoza: Pantheism
3. What is the connection between God and the World?	God created the world and is involved in it. God rewards good people and punishes bad people.	God is like a Judge: God rewards good people and punishes bad people. God is like a healer.	God rules the world with the help of angels, who control the forces that shape the world. [Angels help God run the world.]	By studying the physical world, we can see that God exists. [I see God in the world around me.]	
4. What does God want from me?	God wants me to be a good person and do mitzvot (commandments).	God wants us to learn what it means to be Jewish and to do the 613 mitzvot.	We have free will, yet all is foreseen. [I can do what I want, but God knows what I will decide to do.]	God "wants" us to be the best we can be and to do tikun olam (to help fix the world).	God "wants" nothing. God simply "is."
5. What is the relationship between God and me?	God is like a Parent: God hears and answers prayers. God cares about me and watches over me. But, God can also get mad at me.		I can pray directly to God. The smarter I get, the better I can understand God.	Meditation, prayer, and thinking about God can help me to understand God.	

Theologians --> God Questions V	Martin Buber: Dialogue (I- Thou)	Steinberg: Limited Theism	Mordechai Kaplan: Naturalism	Eric Fromm: Humanism	Abraham Joshua Heschel: Depth Theology
1. What is God like?	God is an eternal presence that cannot be defined, described, or proven. [I can't explain God, but I know God has been around forever.]	God is like a parent who loves us but cannot save us from pain. Because God purposely limits Godself from intervening in the world. God wants us to live, not be robots.	God is the combined forces of the world: gravity, centrifugal force, the force that makes us breathe without thinking about it, the Force of attraction, etc. [God is the way things happen naturally in the world.] God is like "The Force" in Star Wars.	God is a symbol or idea of our highest human potential. [God is a good idea people have. We should try to be like God.]	God is the Source of insight and intuition. God is always there waiting for us.
2. How can I get to know God?	We can experience/find God through deep connections with others. When two people connect on an I-Thou (platonic but intimate) level, God is there. God is not necessarily in the I-It objectifying relationships.	We cannot know God completely, because facts are not enough. To believe in God, we need faith. [I can't prove God exists, but I can have faith that God exists.]	God is not supernatural. God is the totality of all forces in the universe. Still all these forces are part of a united whole; Adonai Echad (we sing in Shema), the Force is One.	I can get to know God by trying to be like God. The Torah gives examples of what God does: clothes the naked,	We find God when we open our eyes (ears, heart) to the wonder around us. We say, for example, brachot (blessings) over food to open ourselves to the awesomeness that we have food to eat.

Theologians --> God Questions V	Martin Buber: Dialogue (I- Thou)	Steinberg: Limited Theism	Mordechai Kaplan: Naturalism	Eric Fromm: Humanism	Abraham Joshua Heschel: Depth Theology
3. What is the connection between God and the World?	God is everywhere and it is up to us to let God into our lives. [Finding God is like playing Hide & Seek. God is hiding and I need to seek.]	God cares about the world and wants us to help make it better.	The world isn't finished yet; God is still creating it everyday.		God wants us to seek God out. God wants us to open ourselves to the wonder and awesomeness of creation and existence.
4. What does God want from me?	God "wants" me to connect with people on a platonic-intimate level (I-Thou).		God doesn't want anything. When I pray it is really for me.		God wants us to have special times, like Shabbat.
5. What is the relationship between God and me?	Through close connections with other people, we can get a sense of God in our lives.	God gave us free will so we can choose to work together with God. [When I do good things in the world, I am helping God.]	God acts as my conscience. [God is like Jiminy Cricket. God helps me decide what is right and wrong.]	God is an inner human experience. [God is only inside me]	

3. For **James Fowler's Stages of Faith Development**: <http://www.psychologycharts.com/james-fowler-stages-of-faith.html>.

4. **Torah Resources**

(This is a resource to answer questions about the Torah or how to think about Torah, especially if students do not think God wrote the Torah. Although these are metaphors, the examples they provide might serve as starting points for a conversation.)

Different metaphors for Torah:⁷³

- Torah is the diary of the people (family story helping us know where we come from and where we are going)

⁷³ from Wolpe, *Teaching Your Children*, 77-81.

- Torah is a world classic that many writers and artists used it to base their work off of. We need to understand Torah to understand how societies were created)
- Torah is a moral guide. The bible teaches us how to live through the struggle of the biblical characters. Sometimes it tells us what to do, and sometimes what not to do.
- Torah is a dialogue between lovers. The bible is like a set of letters between God and us, telling us about God's love and how we should live in relationship to God's love
- Torah is a story. To tell us stories that remind of what it means to be alive
- Torah is a collection of heroes to teach us what is good to do and what isn't (because the bible can be critical and also kind)

5. Suffering Resources

Theodicy resources:

Medieval Jewish views: There was an understanding that God was all knowing, all powerful (meaning that God causes everything that happens in the world), and all loving (i.e. just and fair) ...and then the story of Job came and destroyed that view because:

- All three can't exist together...
- So, people had to get rid of one of those three conceptions of how God acts in the world, but that wasn't easy.⁷⁴
- Therefore, people created new theologies to help them comprehend God's relationship to the world and humanity

Therefore, Maimonides created his theology: God created the natural laws of the world, and once created, can not suspend them. Therefore, regardless of what we think about God interacting in the world post creation, the argument continues that God cannot change the laws based on suffering of really good people in an earthquake or with disease.

Other theologies developed between Maimonides and the Holocaust, but for the purposes of this curriculum, the focus remains on post-Holocaust theology.

Explanations - post Holocaust⁷⁵ theology developed because Jewish theologians couldn't live with an all-powerful God who allowed the Holocaust to occur... If Jewish theologians attempted to provide "rational" explanations, for why the Holocaust occurred, like saying that people sinned or the world was corrupt, those explanations cannot be reconciled by someone actually experiencing suffering, for those explanations cannot mitigate the pain of the suffering.⁷⁶ This is due to the fact that when a person is suffering, they often want someone (for some people that is

⁷⁴ Kushner, *Bad Things*, 42-44.

⁷⁵ This theology is very difficult and does not answer all questions that might arise. For a more complete explanation, see Eliezer Berkowitz, "Faith After the Holocaust" in *Wrestling with God: Jewish Theological Responses during and after the Holocaust*, ed. Steven T Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 462-489.

⁷⁶ Rabbi Rachel Adler, "Bad Things Happen" in *Judaism and Health: A Handbook of Practical, Professional, and Scholarly Resources*, ed. Michelle Prince (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2013), 172.

God) to notice and care/understand that they hurt. The following explanations therefore provide options for how God is connected to suffering that better situate God in a positive role, especially in considering how the Holocaust fits into suffering. The truth value of these statements, although questioned by challengers of these theologies, are not the premise of the theology. Rather, the point is how the theology deals with and explains suffering so God may still be seen as a benevolent figure. In addition, they help assuage our pain.

Here are some possible explanations.

- God creates natural laws and then cannot change them. So the suffering that happens is a result of those laws. (Maimonides)
- Chaos explanation 3rd law of thermodynamics⁷⁷
 - Every system left on its own will move towards approaching equilibrium, which to some, means random distribution
 - “[...] events do not reflect God’s choices. They happen at random, and randomness is another name for chaos, in those corners of the universe where God’s creative light has not yet penetrated.”⁷⁸
 - Chaos is the natural state of the world. For some people, God helps alleviate the chaos that we experience, or, God at least provides tools or ways to experience chaos. And part of these tools are the responses.
- God punishes people (pre-Holocaust theology)
- God is hurt by our suffering and lessened when we make poor choices. Therefore, God is dynamic and we must choose how we act in relationship with God. The more positive choice we make, the better.⁷⁹
- God is the choice inside us, between good and bad. And when we pick the good, we are picking the Godlike option, when we pick the not good option, we are turning away from God.
 - “God can be neither good nor bad. In terms of [God’s] own nature [God] is incapable of evil. [God] is the only one who is goodness, But since, because of [God’s] very essence, God can do no evil. God can do no good either. God, being incapable of the unethical is not an ethical being. Goodness for God is neither an ideal, nor a value; it is existence, it is absolutely realized being...Man alone can create value. God is Value. But if man alone is the creator of values... then he must have freedom of choice and freedom of decisions. And his freedom must be respected by God Godself...If God did not respect man’s freedom to choose his course in personal responsibility, not only would the moral good and evil be abolished from the earth, but man himself would go with them. For freedom and responsibility are the very essence of man. Without them man is not human. If there is to be man, he must be allowed to make his choices in freedom. If he has such freedom, he will use it. Using it, he will often use it wrongly: and he does so

⁷⁷ Kushner, *Bad Things*, 61-63.

⁷⁸ *ibid*, *ibid*, 61.

⁷⁹ Artson, *God of Becoming and Relationship*, 20.

for the wrong alternative. As he does so, there will be suffering for the innocent.”⁸⁰ - Eliezer Berkovits

- God is the provider of the tools we need: “..in a world in which we all possess immortal spirits in fragile and vulnerable bodies, the God I believe in gives strength and courage to those who, unfairly and through no fault of their own, suffer pain and the fear of death.” —Harold Kushner⁸¹
- God is the connection between people: “God inspires people to help other people who have been hurt by life, and by helping them, they protect them from the danger of feeling alone, abandoned, or judged.” —Harold Kushner⁸²
- No longer can we use God as the defender of suffering, but rather, we must appear for the sufferer and help assuage their pain, by truly seeing it.⁸³

6. Teshuvah Resources

Answers to:

Why do we do teshuvah?

- We’ve sinned, turned away from God.⁸⁴
- Look at Lev 6-7 - its our modern version of sacrifices AND modern offenses where have to make restitution/recompense before God will forgive)
- Do we do it for ourselves (and our relationships), or for God (and our relationship to God)?

4 Essential elements of Teshuvah

- Remorse/regret for past sin
 - Easier to repent when have Torah law (other religions need self-affliction). For us, mouths and hearts “afflicted”: confess with mouth, repent with heart and resolve never to do it again (based on Deut 30:10, 30:2, most closely based on 30:14)⁸⁵
- Determination to avoid it
- Admit action and ask for pardon
 - From person wronged and from self, and from God
 - Three different kinds
 - Bein adam l’atzmo (self)
 - Bein adam l’chavero (friend)

⁸⁰ Eliezer Berkowitz, “Faith After the Holocaust”, 469.

Eliezer Berkovits lived between 1908-1992; was an Orthodox Jew born in Transylvania, who published works on subjects ranging from the Bible to modern Jewish thought. He is a modern theologian.

⁸¹ Kushner, *Bad Things*, 77.

⁸² Kushner, *Bad Things*, 153.

⁸³ Adler, “Bad Things Happen,” 173.

⁸⁴ Bahya Ben Joseph Ibn Paquda, *The Book of Direction to the Duties of the Heart*, Trans. Menahem Mansoor, (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, 1973), 330.

⁸⁵ Kravitz and Olitzky, *The Journey of the Soul*, 2-3.

- Bein adam l'makom (God) *makom is another name for God
- Belief that will never do it again
- The test is finding oneself in the same circumstance another time and not committing the same sin again.⁸⁶
- 5 Kinds of people with regard to Teshuvah
 - The person who is “lowly in spirit” is considered completely righteous. In them, good-ness rules over their Evil Inclination. Can never repent because they never do evil.
 - The person who is “contrite of heart” is one who spent their whole life moving towards conquering their Evil Inclination and finally conquers it. They can apply repentance because had to control it whole life. Most praiseworthy penitence.
 - A person who repent of one’s sin. This person is so sorry that they will never do again. The person who repents of their sin(s) but will do it again. When repents, it is not complete repentance.
 - The absolutely wicked person. Repentance is too holy for this person.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Yoma 86b

⁸⁷Kravitz and Olitzky, ed. *The Journey of the Soul*, 137-138.

Annotated Bibliography

Annotated Bibliography

David Wolpe, *Teaching Your Children About God* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1993).

The books intended audience is parents of children between the ages of 4 and 14, faced with questions from those children about God. Wolpe, as a rabbi, parent, and teacher, has the experience that comes from years in practice and research. He provides stories and actual exercises, as well as age appropriate questions for the parents to engage in discussion with their kids. God is discussed in terms of some of the questions kids might ask, starting from more basic and moving to specific like prayer, death, evil, and God's love.

Harold S. Kushner, *When Children Ask About God: A Guide for Parents Who Don't Always Have All the Answers* (New York: Schocken Books, 1989).

Similar to Wolpe's book, this one is also for parents with kids asking questions about God. As Kushner is a rabbi in the field, he draws on his own experience, traditional Jewish sources, and modern culture. However, this book organizes the topic of God in terms of questions kids ask and background, as well as accessible answers for parents. Because it is framed by questions, the approach focuses on what the children ask, rather than the big issues. This book does also touch on suffering and evil, and also provides a section on God and the bible as well as certain words we use in Judaism (what they mean, how we use them, and how related to God). Although not necessarily for these learners, the book provides ample ideas for how to talk to these students.

Josh Barkin, ed., *God: Jewish Choices for Struggling with the Ultimate* (Los Angeles: Torah Aura Productions, 2008).

This book takes rabbinical students, newer Jewish teachers, and people just emerging and independent Jews and asks them questions about God. It is intended for use in the classroom, seemingly older elementary and middle school age. Because it takes answers from people, as opposed to giving one person's perspective supported by others, it allows students to find their own voice among the voices they read. The questions are big ones, and hit on the big topics of chosenness, cosmogony, prayer, miracles etc.

Marc Gellman and Thomas Hartman, *How Do You Spell God?: Answers to the Big Questions From Around the World* (New York: Morrow Junior Books, 1995).

As a rabbi and monsignor working together, this book offers the perspective of other religions interacting with Judaism, in a way that opens the readers eyes to how each religion answers some of the tough questions. Aimed at children, but mostly young teens, this book offers easy to read explanations of the big religions. The topics are again divided by questions like: Can I Talk to God?, Who Works for God?, and How do you spell God? This book serves as a promising jumping off point to students looking to expand their God knowledge and delve into the deeper questions about God. In addition, this book would be a helpful resource for students with more questions after Unit IV.

Rifat Sonsino and Daniel Syme, *Finding God: Ten Jewish Responses* (Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1986).

This book has essays on Jewish thinkers of significance, exploring the questions about God and how to think of God that we often try to ask (or more often, avoid), attempting to aide the reader in his or her own theology. The book looks at approaches to God in biblical texts, prayerbook

texts and the rabbis. The newer edition of this book, *Finding God: Selected Responses*, published in 2002, includes newer theologians as well. *Finding God* offers an easily accessible introduction to different theologies as approached through biblical texts, and would be helpful for students throughout or immediately after this course.

Elliot N. Dorff, *Knowing God: Jewish Journey to the Unknowable* (Northvale: Jason Aronson Inc, 1992).

Written for adults looking to better understand God in a Jewish framework, this book provides a framework of looking at God through human action, divine action and words. Looking at how prayer connects one to God and how a person can better conceive of that God allows the reader to feel more connected to God. With undergrad and doctoral degrees in philosophy, Dorff worked to address the question of faith in God in his own life (how to believe in God and also the challenges that God presents), and therefore help others address it as well. Although for adults, this book offers keen insights into how to look at and conceive of God that can be modified for a younger audience.

Rabbi David Lyon, *God of Me: Imagining God Throughout Your Lifetime* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2011).

Based on the understanding that everyone can have a personal relationship with God, this book utilizes the *Amidah* as a way to discover that individual, sacred relationship. Utilizing prayer, Biblical text and rabbinic teaching, Rabbi Lyon works to help each individual deepen their own understanding of God by ridding him or herself of preconceived misconceptions and learning more. As each chapter is entitled God ____ Me, the topics delve into the deeply personal and

touch the soul. Also for an older audience, the ideas are pertinent and accessible, and easily adaptable for younger learners.

Bradley Shavit Artson, *God of Becoming and Relationship: The Dynamic Nature of Process Theology* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2013).

The Jewish book on process theology, Artson weaves the idea of the lure and human integration into a portrayal of how this theology works. Although some suggested that he utilized this theology to make sense of his son's autism, process theology holds up around special needs challenges and questions, and allows students of the theology to reconcile life with challenging events. He looks at similar questions of how to live and love and be in the world, but addresses them from the particular angle of process theology. The book is more advanced in its description of process theology, but might be a good additional resource for a teacher, for use with students.

Paul Yedwab, *The God Book: A Necessarily Incomplete Guide to the Essence of God* (New York: UAHC Press, 2002).

As a journal for teens, this book illuminates different prayers or biblical terms and helps teens delve into those questions in an even more profound and intellectual way. The author suggests that as someone who threw out God initially, he wants to help young people explore God in an intellectually honest way that shows them God can be interesting. Most books have the writing, but this one allows readers to engage with the ideas and share their own. I recommend this book for a young adult beginning their own God journey, to either begin or continue to deeper their spiritual process with the divine.

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