

Torah-Based Improv: Games and How to Teach Them

Benjamin Miller
1st edition
September 2026

If you would like to get in touch about these games, you can reach me at miller.benjamin@ymail.com .

If you would like to show gratitude for this resource,
please consider donating to the Kiever Shul at kiewershul.com .

Preface	1
Structure of the Book	2
Part 1: Improv Concepts Through a Torah Lens	2
Part 2: Torah-Based Improv Games	5
Shabbat and Holidays (Yom Tovim)	7
Shabbat	7
Pesach/Passover	11
Shavuot	15
Rosh Hashana	19
Yom Kippur	22
Sukkot/Simchat Torah	26
Hanukkah	30
Tu B'Shvat	34
Purim	38
Character Traits (Middot)	42
Gratitude	46
Humility	50
Silence	53
Stronger Together	56
Mitzvot	60
Prayer (Tefillah)	60
Tzedakah	63
Torah Study	67
Part 3: Reflections on Teaching Torah-Based Improv	71

Preface

I wrote this resource because doing improv in high school had a strong formative effect on my character. Not only did it boost my confidence, it highlighted for me values that became crucial to opening my heart and mind to Jewish growth in university and beyond. Skills like listening to other players for an invitation to advance the scene grew into how to listen to people's needs for the opportunity to do a mitzvah. Insights like the person playing the furniture may be as vital to the quality of a scene as the "lead" translated to an appreciation for those thankless tasks whose impact is difficult to see but which are no less important to maintain Jewish community.

Over the years, I have sporadically shared my love of both Torah and improv by facilitating Jewish themed improv classes (some of the games you will encounter in this guide are taken from those early efforts). I have always found that however hesitant people may be at first, if they were curious and committed enough about either improv or Torah to come, they left feeling more excited about both. However, it wasn't until recently that conversations with parents and educators has led me to believe that we need all the help we can get in getting children (and really students of all ages) access to Jewish education that is both genuinely rigorous and exciting. It is in that spirit that I share these games with you.

Structure of the Book

The book has four parts:

1. **Improv concepts through a Torah lens:** This includes foundational concepts to explain to improv beginners (or serves as a refresher for more experienced participants). The games in this part should form the first 10-15 minutes of any class for beginners.
2. **Torah-based improv games:** thematically divided lesson plans. While you can certainly mix and match the games to different effects, I grouped the games in this way both for the ease of the educator's use and to call attention to how different games work together to build common spiritual muscles (the mitzvahs after all are likened to organs and bones of the body).
3. **Reflections on teaching Torah based improv:** This section includes practical tips and anecdotes about teaching this material that I have gathered from my experience teaching Torah-based improv to adults. It also includes some more foundational reflections on the relationship between Torah and improv that informs my whole approach.

Part 1: Improv Concepts Through a Torah Lens

Because participants will often have limited or no prior formal experience with improvisational drama, in order to get the most out of the substance of the exercises below it's important to start each class ([e.g.](#) the first 10-15 minutes) with 1-2 of these basic concepts regarding the logistics of improv. Below, we will look at some basic improv skills and concepts through a Torah lens.

Even with a more experienced groups, in between scenes as the instructor and other players give feedback there is an opportunity to highlight these concepts and make some of the Torah connections below.

Yes, and...

Probably the best known improv concept, “yes, and...” means that when a player introduces something into a scene, it's not contradicted but built upon. This can be very challenging when a player believes what has been introduced is a bad direction or they believe they have a better idea.

At first glance, “yes, and...” may seem anathema to Torah. After all, don't Jews love to argue? But when it comes to how scholars relate to prior generations, the attitude completely shifts and the goal is to figure out a way for the prior statements to be true notwithstanding apparent difficulties. In the course of finding ways to make the prior statements work, one inevitably adds one's own commentary that deepens it.

The Huddle

Before a scene is performed players are given a certain amount of time (e.g. 10-60 seconds depending on the game and style of improv) to plan the scene. This takes place in the centre of the performance area. Players need not touch each other but should be close so as not to reveal the planning to the audience.

A huddle is intended to generate a shared understanding between the players of those most essential details about a scene, such as:

- Settings
- Characters
- Relationship between characters
- Problem
- How the prompt will be used
- Where the scene is going

There are two types of tendencies to overcome among beginners that can be viewed through a Torah lens:

- **Not using the time:** some assume that improv requires no preparation and so either don't plan or don't use all the time allotted.
- **Always wanting more time:** some players always want more time or keep asking questions once the scene is started.

To the first group of people, you can point to the mitzvah before and after davening to reflect on what you are doing. There is no set time for this mitzvah and could even be fulfilled with 30 seconds, but one should at least have a sense of:

- Who are you praying to
- What is your relationship
- Where are you
- What are you praying for

To the second group you can emphasize that action not speech is the main thing and other sources that emphasize there is a time for everything (i.e. planning versus doing).

The sidelines

Generally, there is a central performance area and a more or less well defined sidelines demarcating which players are not in a scene. Players may further demarcate whether or not they are in the scene by crouching if able to do so.

Anyone who has ever davened (prayed) at the Kotel (the Western Wall in Jerusalem) or synagogues with many simultaneous minyanim (minyan factories) knows the chaos of many prayer groups happening at once. Everything from where you stand to what direction you are facing to what sounds you make determines which group you are counted towards. This is just one of the ways in which Jews turn a space into a place and the people who are on the outside of it help to define its borders.

The offer/invitation

In any scene players must learn to recognize opportunities to advance or jump into the story. These rarely come as straight-forward requests, but for example may come as:

- **Statements of fact:** “I can't believe it's snowing in July!” is an invitation for someone to be the snow (or at least to signal they're cold).
- **Body language:** someone buckling in to a seatbelt is an invitation for someone to become the vehicle or make vehicle noises.

This concept has many implications within Torah, such as:

- Explicit mitzvahs where we're called on to react to a situation without being asked (e.g. a lost object, or donkey struggling under a load)
- The doctrine of Hashgacha Pratit (Divine Providence) as taught by the Baal Shemtov invites us to think about every person we meet as being for a purpose that we should look for.
- A wise man hears one word and understands two.

Waffling

A player waffles when they say something that puts the responsibility on another player to advance the scene. For example, “I don't know how to fix this, what do you think we should do?” Players should avoid waffling, which means that as much as possible, every utterance should advance the scene somehow. This is also important with respect to what is said within the huddle.

This imperative to make every word matter is reflected in proverbs such as “words should be weighed and not counted”, or “where there is no leader be a leader.”

Show Don't Tell

Especially when students are not used to the physicality of improv or are embarrassed to take different positions (e.g. hands and knees to be a table), it's important to emphasize that the audience should be able to understand the story from watching what the players are doing. If a player has to explain what they're doing (e.g. “what a nice day to be digging a hole.”) it means they have failed to express it with their body and actions.

Some Torah lessons this can be connected to include:

- We are required to praise G-d with every part of ourselves, not just the mouth.
- Every body part has its own mitzvah.
- Actions speak louder than words.

Narrative Structure

There is no requirement for every scene to be a linear story, but understanding the basic structure of a story makes it easier to plan, set common expectations, and focus on what comes next. One common narrative structure is:

- Establish the characters, their relationship to one another and the setting
- A problem emerges
- The stakes are raised (i.e. it gets worse)/a solution may be attempted and fails at this point
- The problem is solved

Structure allows for a focused spontaneity. We see this for example in the Pesach seder (lit. Order) and the commandment to make it new each year.

Soundscape

In addition to playing human characters, players have the opportunity to act as objects or simply produce background sounds of a scene. This creates a more immersive experience for the audience. It's not always intuitive that this is also a role and it may be especially appealing to otherwise shy people, so it's important to stress the importance of these background roles.

From a Torah perspective, you can point to passages that stressed the importance of background sound to the events, such as the thunder at Mount Sinai or the shofar blasts as the Israelites surrounded Jericho.

If you stress how important these background roles are, you can also point out how in the Tanakh the soldiers who stayed with the equipment (i.e. played a background roles) shared equally in the spoils of war with those who “took centre stage”.

Make Your Partner Look Good

Building on the above principles is a commitment to act in a way that brings out and enhances the performance of others in the scene. This could take the form of implementing their suggestions, finding narrative ways to justify the weird things they introduce, or simply giving them space to speak.

From a Torah perspective, this principle is an expression of humility and the idea that we should regard every person as superior to us in some respect or another. Furthermore, from a chassidic perspective, we should recognize the power of our speech to not only articulate, but thereby make more real, what is good in others.

Part 2: Torah-Based Improv Games

In this part, we will explore thematically organized sets of games as “lesson plans”. What makes these groupings lessons is that they are organized with a common structure:

- **Warm-up (~5-10 minutes):** These are designed to get people at least standing if they are able, be participatory without the focus being on any one actor, and fairly low barrier to entry to encourage participation.
- **1 skill-based exercises (15-20 minutes):** This exercise focused on building a skill (e.g. listening, speaking kindly, working together) associated with the mitzvah or theme
- **1 lesson-based exercise (15-20 minutes):** This exercise more explicitly engages with the content of the topic or theme of that day.
- **Culminating Exercise (15-20 minutes):** This is a more complicated exercise intended to build and integrate the skills, lessons, and themes from the previous exercises.
- **Wind-down (~5 minutes):** These shorter games are intended to help you end with a bang to ensure that people leave with an emotional high from the experience.

Generally speaking, after an introduction covered in part 1 of 10-15 minutes, with a group of 8+ individuals, you will likely be able to get through 3-4 games in a 60-90 minute slot with considerable time for feedback and discussion.

Each game will include the following information as suggestions for you. Feel free to take or leave any element:

- **GAME X: Name of game:** Generally a Jewish adaptation of an existing improv game.
- **TORAH SOURCE:** A possible Jewish text that you can relay or share in a source sheet for that class. It is meant to support later discussions as well as ground implicit lessons in the structure of the game.
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** These include some thoughts about how to connect the Torah source to the improv lesson.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Games will either be whole class games (usually warm-ups or wind-downs), or require a smaller number. Unless the game is strictly a 2-person game, there will usually be a range so you have options about how to break up the class to account for varying scene lengths, class time, and class size.
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Usually all you need is open space. Theatre boxes are often helpful in improv. Everything else is strictly optional. Some of the games call for players to write things down and put it in a hat or receptacle (remember to bring paper and pens!).
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** This is purely an estimate of the likely energy level. You will certainly have to set your own flow based on factors like class size, attention span of class, desire for more discussion or more action, etc. individual scenes will generally be 2-4 minutes.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** After your introductory remarks, you should generally explain to the class the instructions of the game. In some cases, you may need to adjust the difficulty level of the game to meet the Jewish knowledge level of your class as well as their drama skills and ambitions. If your class is really struggling to listen you can also print out these instructions as a hand-out with sources.
- **NOTES FROM THE PLAYERS:** You are also encouraged after each scene as time allows to invite specific audience feedback. This builds the skill of participants to give

each other feedback and invites a wider range of feedback. It's also gratifying for participants to receive specific feedback on their choices and performance.

- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (1-2):** These are sometimes meant to invite participants to explicitly draw on the experience they just had. Others are thematically paired with the game and only implicitly draw on their experience. Discussion questions are optional, particularly for the opening or closing exercises, based on your time constraints, class tendencies, and desired level of Jewish depth. However, I encourage you to share the questions with participants even if you don't discuss them as food for thought.
- **Learning objectives:** I have classified the learning objectives into knowledge, skills, and attitude. Not every exercise emphasizes all three categories, though the extent of your introductory remarks will generally address knowledge, the exercise itself will generally build skills such as listening, attention, teamwork, etc. Consequently, I have most consistently listed what attitude it's meant to foster in the participants.

Shabbat and Holidays (Yom Tovim)

These games are particularly suitable for synagogue youth programs as well as Sunday or afternoon schools because of their relationship to the Jewish calendar.

Shabbat

Shabbat, the day of rest, renews us. It commemorates that final step in Creation, the granting of purpose. It is a day that traditionally has a recognizable structure and yet within that can give rise to infinite variety through different guests, learning, customs, random encounters and more. Good improv too starts with a robust structure and in so doing gives rise to infinite possibility of variation and spontaneity.

GAME 1: How many ways can we say Shabbat shalom?

- **TORAH SOURCE:** "There is many a person whose petty conceit will not permit him to recognize anyone unless he is recognized first. The other person must make the first move. This is his way of establishing and maintaining his 'dignity.' Others will hesitate from a sense of insecurity to be the first to extend a warm greeting to those they meet. They are afraid to give a token of friendship and receive only an icy stare in return. They will therefore insist on waiting until the person they meet takes the 'emotional risk,' while they 'play it safe.' Whatever the reason, such behavior is wrong. Take the initiative, says our Sage. Do not seek a sense of importance, or an illusion of security, at the expense of another's feelings. Give him a friendly greeting with a warm smile, and inquire of his welfare." (Irving Bunim, *Ethics from Sinai – A Wide-Ranging Commentary on Pirkei Avos* (New York: Feldheim, 1964) , 587)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** How we start our interactions with each other, just like the energy we bring to start off a scene, sets us up for peace, friendship, and working well together. This is true all week long, but on Shabbat we have many special greetings.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole class

- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Standing in a circle
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 5 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Someone in the circle is picked to start. Facing the person to their left or right, they begin by issuing some form of a shabbat greeting (e.g. Git Shabbos, Shabbat Shalom, good shabbos, good sabbath, Happy Friday at sunset to Saturday at the appearance of 3 stars, etc.) + “my name is X”. The next person then repeats back that person’s greeting (e.g. “Good Shabbos X”), then turns to the person beside them and issues a different greeting + “my name is Y”. Try not to repeat the same form of greeting and get as creative as possible.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - What do you think the way a person greets others on Shabbos says about them?
 - What effect do you think greeting others first has on others?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** motivation to greet others
 - **Skill:** Attention and memory
 - **Knowledge:** Shabbat greetings from different languages and customs

Activity #2: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly Dvar Torah

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “Words from the heart enter the heart.” (Proverb)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Some of us may have had the pleasure of hearing good dvar Torahs. Most, I’m sure, have never heard a bad dvar Torah. Few, if any, are the ugly divrei Torah. But what makes a dvar Torah, good, bad, or ugly? It’s a vital skill to be able to give a quick teaching and in this game we’ll explore just that.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 3
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** You can have a podium for each speaker, set up three chairs for the three players or have players simply stand around.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 4-5 minutes per set of three
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Line up 3 actors
 - The audience provides Jewish topics, events that might be happening at the shul (e.g. bar mitzvah, wedding, etc.),
 - The actors have to give a brief dvar torah
 - One gives good dvar Torah
 - One gives a bad dvar Torah
 - One gives a really bad dvar Torah
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - What do people look for in a dvar Torah?
 - How do you make Torah relevant to others?
 - What makes it more difficult to learn from a dvar Torah?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Skill:** Giving a dvar Torah.
 - **Attitude:** Sensitivity to what one looks for in a dvar Torah and the experience of other listeners.

GAME 3: Home Creature Light in Nature

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “Mishneh Torah (ibid. 5:1) describes ner Shabbat (Shabbat candles) in terms of delight. In 30:5, however, it is described in terms of honoring Shabbat. The Rebbe (Likkutei Sichot, vol. 11, p. 295) resolves this: lighting before Shabbat honors the Shabbat by preparing for it. Once Shabbat has entered, the light provides delight. I focus here on the second aspect, since (see Shulchan Aruch ha-Rav, 263:11, end) the main mitzvah of ner Shabbat (Shabbat candles) is not the lighting, but the enjoyment of the light on Shabbat (and for this reason, a woman who has not made the blessing at the time of lighting can make a blessing later on Shabbat, when she benefits from the light).” (Tzvi Freeman)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Physical light is intended to be an integral part of the Shabbat evening experience and it is in other commentaries linked with shalom bayit, peace in the home. In this game, we’ll build different kinds of homes, bring different kinds of light and ultimately reconfigure.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 4-6
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Place for players, place for audience
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 2-3 minutes per scene
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Solicit suggestions from audience of different kinds of settings and creatures
 - Player 1 is the creature and they begin the scene by using the other players as materials to build a home that’s appropriate for them.
 - Once the home is built, they must then use another player to create some kind of light.
 - Something then happens to knock down the structure, but the light remains.
 - The scene ends and the next group repeats with different suggestions.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - What does light symbolize for you?
 - What do Shabbat candles contribute to a Shabbat dinner?
 - What do different homes teach us about different creatures (including us)?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** think about what our homes say about us and other creatures.
 - **Skill:** Wordless scenes.

GAME 4: Shabbos Invitation

- **TORAH SOURCE:** Rav Yehuda said that Rav said on a related note: Hospitality toward guests is greater than receiving the Divine Presence, as when Abraham invited his guests it is written: “And he said: Lord, if now I have found favor in Your sight, please pass not from Your servant” (Genesis 18:3). Babylonian Talmud ([Shabbat 127a](#))
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** The power of bringing people together is unparalleled in provoking surprising connections and new possibilities. Of course, this is also a great formula for all kinds of improvised shenanigans.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 4-6 players

- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:**
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 4-6 minutes per scene
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Class is asked for suggestion such as “relationship”, “problem” (which will define the guests), “setting” or “special Shabbos” (that will define any distinctive features of the Shabbos tables)
 - The class then selects among the players who will be the host and who will be the invitees.
 - Part 1: A scene for each guest, between one of the guests and someone else that introduces the character and where they are as well as going some way to explain why they would accept the invitation. The scene ends with the host entering inviting the person over for Shabbos.
 - Part 2: The three guests are at the Shabbos table of the host and do not know each other. The host locks the door and explains that he will not let everyone go until they figure out what they’re doing here. They must figure out what they’re all doing together at the Shabbos table or work together to try to escape.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - What do you try to find out about someone when you first meet them at a Jewish event?
 - What do you think inviting someone new over for Shabbos accomplishes?
 - How is understanding each character’s backstory vital to engaging them?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** It’s an exciting mystery to meet someone new.
 - **Skill:** How to ask questions to really get to know someone.

GAME 5: Havdalah

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “At the conclusion of Shabbat, the Holy One, Blessed be He, granted Adam, the first man, creative knowledge similar to Divine knowledge, and he brought two rocks and rubbed them against each other, and the first fire emerged from them.” (Talmud Bavli, Pesachim 54a)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** The passage from Shabbat to the week is traditionally marked with havdalah which literally means separation. Havdalah includes wine (or a drink that is considered fit for a “king’s table” in that region), incense, and fire with at least two wicks. The wine engages our taste, the incense engages our smell, the fire engages our eyes, and the blessing engages our ears. A good scene should also be as multi-sensory as possible.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole class
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** stage for whole class, bring in boxes and props.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** One scene 3-4 minutes.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** One person starts to narrate a setting. Other players jump in to be the setting, or start making the sounds of the background (soundscape). The setting and soundscape continue. At some point, a second person takes over from the narrator and

describes a taste, actors jump in to physically embody what that taste feels like (i.e. not just act as a person eating something). Continue until everyone is in the scene.

- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - What are other ways that Judaism engages all our senses?
 - How can we use havdalah to bring people in our life together?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** Jumping in to fill needs. See the power of people coming together.
 - **Skill:** Focus on embodied performance outside the role of human characters.
 - **Knowledge:** Basic elements of havdalah.

Pesach/Passover

Every generation must regard itself as if it went out of Egypt. It is possible for each generation to draw insight from Pesach because, like the Jewish tradition more generally, it is just so multi-faceted. In this class, we'll be focusing on the improv skill of seeing one thing, story, character, etc. from many perspectives.

GAME 1: 10 Fingers of Hashem

- **TORAH SOURCE:** "Rabbi Yossef HaGelili says: How can you know that the Egyptians were struck with ten plagues in Egypt and another fifty at the sea? For in Egypt it is said, "The astrologers said to Pharaoh, 'This is the finger of God,'" while at the sea it is said, "When Israel saw the great hand the LORD raised against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in His servant Moses." If a finger struck them with ten plagues, conclude from this that they were struck with ten plagues in Egypt and with fifty plagues at the sea." ([Haggadah](#))
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Passover is about **remembering** the Exodus from Egypt. Can you remember all 10 plagues? In this game you'll be challenged to not only remember them but find new ways to describe them.
- **PLAYERS:** Whole class
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Stand in circle
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** If there is no winner after 10 minutes, whoever remains is tied.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Everyone who can holds up 10 Fingers
 - Each person in a circle says one of the ten plagues
 - When a plague has been said everyone lowers a finger
 - If a person hesitates too long or says a plague that has already been said they are eliminated
 - Once you have done a full round of 10, start again but this time people must use new words to describe the plague (e.g. instead of hail, "really bad weather" instead of frogs "jumping amphibians")
 - If a person hesitates, repeats a plague that has already been said in that round or uses the same terms that have been used in any round, they are eliminated
 - Last one standing wins!
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- Why is it important to remember the plagues?
- How does using different words affect how you feel about each plague?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Knowledge:** Memorize plagues by repetition and using own language
 - **Skill:** Appreciate how specific choices of words convey layers of meaning

GAME 2: Search for the Chametz

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “In the era of the Beis HaMikdash, the Sages of the early generations ordained that communal lecturers begin publicly expounding the laws of the [three pilgrimage] festivals 30 days before the festival, i.e., from Purim onward [the lecturers] should expound the laws of Pesach, from the fifth of Iyar onward, they should expound the laws of Shavuot, and from the fourteenth of Elul, they should expound the laws of Sukkos.” (Shulchan Aruch HaRav 429:1)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** While the practice of studying for each holiday 30 days before is not practiced by most, it is still widespread to study the laws of Pesach 30 days before. The reason is simply that there are just so many laws! In this game, we’ll focus on coping with so many rules.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 3-6 per scene
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Place for the players and for the audience
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 3-4 minutes per scene
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Solicit prompts from class for 3 rules the players must follow in the scene. The one constant is that the scene must involve in some way a search for chametz.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - What effect does having so many laws have on your experience of Pesach?
 - What is your favourite Pesach law or custom?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** An abundance of rules can be a source of delight.
 - **Knowledge:** Reminder to study the laws of Pesach early and some history about how this was practiced for the other holidays too.

GAME 3: The Four Advisors

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “Blessed is the Omnipresent – blessed is He. Blessed is the One who gave His people Israel, the Torah – blessed is He. The Torah relates to four types of sons – one who is wise, one who is wicked, one with a simple nature, and one who does not know how to ask.” (Haggadah)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** While we may have an aspect of each of these sons in all of us, the Haggadah is clear on the surface to suggest that each characteristic may dominate a particular person’s personality. This doesn’t just show up at the seder but in all areas of life. In this exercise, we will play out what it’s like to interact with each.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 4 players per scene
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Place for the performers and place for the audience.

- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 3-4 minutes per scene (four vignettes are done per scene, one for each son. It is advised that for less experienced players, the teacher force a scene transition by clapping to control pace.)
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - The class is solicited for suggestions of a problem. May be serious and the scene may be played seriously or may be a trivial problem.
 - The scene opens with two players. Player 1 has a problem that he has taken to Player 2 who is one of the four sons. Player 2 then provides advice in the character of that son.
 - Player 1 may ask questions but must ultimately accept the advice (more or less willingly).
 - The players then shift to a scene playing out what the implementation of that advice would look like.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - What do you look for in the person you seek advice from?
 - Why did the advice in the scenes work or not work?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** When we have a problem we seek advice from others. Wisdom alone may not be sufficient for good advice.
 - **Skill:** Imagining how a course of action will play out.

GAME 4: Telling and Retelling

- **TORAH SOURCE:** And you shall tell your son on that day, saying, "Because of this, the Lord did [this] for me when I went out of Egypt." (Exodus 13:8)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** The core of the seder is all about how we tell and retell the story of the Exodus from Egypt. It is up to every child to draw out more from the story by asking questions.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:**
 - Phase 1: 3 players
 - Phase 2: 1 storyteller, 3 question askers
 - Phase 3: 3 players
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:**
 - Phase 1: An open space. Boxes helpful. Passover props helpful
 - Phase 2: could be done standing or 4 seats in a semi-circle facing the class to imitate the seder table. If sufficient space, seats should be to the side of where phase 1 and 3 take place. If not, then seats should be moved forward after phase 1 and back before phase 3 as a scene transition.
 - Phase 3: Same as phase 1.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 15-20 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Phase 1: Get 3 volunteers to start. They are told to put on a 1 minute scene from some part of the story of Passover based on prompts from the audience (e.g. plague, person, etc.)

- Phase 2: Someone volunteers to be the “seder leader” to recount the scene that just happened. Three people volunteer to be “the children” who will ask questions. OPTIONAL: Each person may ask one question and is assigned a different kind of question:
 - Action-a question asking for more detail about what happened.
 - Colour-a question asking for more detail on the background description (e.g. time, place, setting, etc.)
 - Emotion-a question asking about a feeling, either how someone in the scene was feeling or how we’re supposed to feel.
- Phase 3: Get 3 more volunteers to put on the 1 minute scene based on the retelling of the first scene.
- **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - How did the story change in the retelling?
 - How can we deepen our understanding of Jewish stories through questions?
 - What’s one question you want to ask at your seder?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Content:** Explore the dynamic between the written and oral Torah.
 - **Attitude:** Desire to ask more questions about stories they perhaps took for granted as familiar.
 - **Skill:** How to ask questions that are aimed at drawing out different aspects of a story.

GAME 5: Walking Into the Sea

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “This tribe said: I am not going into the sea first, and that tribe said: I am not going into the sea first. Then, in jumped the prince of Judah, Nahshon ben Amminadab, and descended into the sea first, accompanied by his entire tribe, as it is stated: “Ephraim surrounds Me with lies and the house of Israel with deceit, and Judah is yet wayward toward God [rad im El]” (Hosea 12:1), which is interpreted homiletically as: And Judah descended [rad] with God [im El].” (Talmud Bavli, Sotah 27a)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Sometimes it seems like something will never end (e.g. class)! Servitude in Egypt perhaps felt like that. When you come up against a wall or a sea that is preventing you from moving on, it takes a special kind of courage or folly to ignore what seems like a true limit and press on. In this game, we’ll explore following someone in taking that initiative.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole class
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Room could either be as clear as possible or full of lots of obstacles.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 3-5 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Everyone lines up on one end of the room. One person is appointed Nachshon ben Aminadav. They must mime plunging into the sea. Those behind Nachshon must imitate this player’s actors until they have crossed the room/sea. For colour, the teacher can narrate the feeling of the ground or midrashim about what was going on in the waters all around them.
- **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- What does it take to be a good leader?
- What does it take to be a good follower?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Knowledge:** Learn midrashim about the parting of the sea.
 - **Attitude:** Be ok with following when the time is right.

Shavuot

Shavuot, by its very name, is a holiday about sequence (i.e. the time for Shavuot is defined only in terms of its relationship to Pesach). In this class we will focus on the concept of sequence as it applies to leadership, storytelling, and generational renewal.

GAME 1: School of Fish

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “Israel camped there by the mountain.” Exodus 19:2. “They camped like a single person with a single heart.” Rashi ad loc.
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** In order to receive the Torah there needed to first be unity. In any cohesive improv scene there must be unity. The challenge for Jews today and improv artists is how to achieve unity when people are so different and there is no single accepted leader.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole class. (note for instructor: you may or may not choose to participate yourself. By participating you add an element of formal leadership that may or may not be followed which you can interrogate afterwards.)
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Room should be clear enough so there’s space for everyone to mill about.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 3-5 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Everyone starts by milling about. No talking. The goal is to get everyone to synchronize their actions. However, there’s no appointed leader, so people have to just look around and imitate what other people are doing.
- **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - How does unity emerge out of a disconnected group? Does a leader have to emerge?
 - Did you notice any obstacles in trying to get everyone to synchronize their movements? What do you think these tell us about organizing the wider community?
 - Does your experience in this game make you think it would be better to have an appointed leader in the Jewish community everyone must accept? Why or why not?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** Get players to think about group dynamics and how their actions influence and are influenced by others.
 - **Skill:** Coordination without talking, leadership without formal selection.

GAME 2: A New Generation Arises

- **TORAH SOURCE:** We are commanded to remember the giving of the Torah at Sinai: “But beware and watch yourself very well, lest you forget the things that your eyes saw, and lest these things depart from your heart, all the days of your life, and **you shall make them known to your children and to your children’s children**—the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb.” (emphasis added)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** It was the children who stood at Sinai who would become the adults who entered the Land of Israel. This contains an important message that the Jewish people ultimately depend on how the next generation will embody Judaism. In this game, we’ll explore taking over someone else’s role.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 4-12 per scene
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Space for performers and for audience.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** Each scene should be 3-4 minutes broken down into roughly 3 phases of pairs of players taking over from each other.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - A scene is started, played by 2 to 4 players.
 - Mid-scene the teacher (or anyone in the audience) interrupts, the players freeze, and new players step into the roles of the old players.
 - The new players should take over the original characters, and stick to the story that was being developed.
- **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - How do you think your generation will take over from your parents? What will it keep? What will it change?
 - What does Jewish continuity mean to you? Is it important in your life?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Skill:** Perceiving the arc of a scene and following through on someone else’s vision.
 - **Attitude:** Assuming responsibility for something you didn’t choose.

GAME 3: When were all the Laws of the Torah Taught?

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “God spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai, saying, “Speak to the Israelites. You must say to them: ‘When you enter the land that I am giving you, the land must rest an agricultural Sabbath in honor of God.’” (Vayikra 25:1-2) Rashi comments on 25:1 “At Mount Sinai. What connection does the sabbatical year share with Mount Sinai, that Scripture expressly states that its laws were given there? Surely all the commandments were stated at Sinai! This statement only is meant to teach us that just as with regard to the sabbatical year, its general rules, specifications, and nuances were all stated at Sinai, so too were the general rules and nuances of all the other commandments stated at Sinai. So is stated in Torat Kohanim...” Ramban responds to Rashi, “But this does not appear to me to be correct at all.” providing reasons to hold various mitzvot cannot be analogized with this verse and therefore could have been taught later at the Tent of Meeting.

- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** The above debate between Rashi and Ramban is perhaps one of the most fundamental and it could be understood as relating to another fundamental debate between them: should we assume the Torah telling a story in chronological order unless it says otherwise or not? The order in which we tell a story has a profound impact on the audience. Playing with this idea is following game.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 6-8 players
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** A space for performers and a space for audience.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 1-2 minutes per scene
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Ask the audience for prompts such as “lesson”, “genre”, “character”
 - Player 1 makes a statement that starts a story and stands at far left.
 - Player 2 makes a statement that ends the story and stands at the far right.
 - Players after that make statements that fit somewhere in the middle, trying to fill in gaps between players in somewhat random order. (if people have forgotten what someone said, you can point at them to ask them to repeat).
 - Once every player is on stage, each then makes their statement in order.
- **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - What does it do to how a story is experienced to tell it out of order?
 - Why would we assume the Torah is told “in order”?
 - Are there orders besides “chronological” that could structure a story?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Knowledge:** Be introduced to these twin classic debates between Rashi and Ramban.
 - **Skill:** Develop non-linear storytelling abilities.
 - **Attitude:** Displace the assumption that one order is automatic or logical simply because it corresponds to human preferences.

GAME 4: We Will Do and We Will Understand (na’aseh v’nishma)

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “...And the Holy One, blessed be He, also went forth to meet them; like a bridegroom who goes forth to meet the bride, so the Holy One, blessed be He, went forth to meet them to give them the Torah, as it is said, "O God, when thou wentest forth before thy people" (Psalms 68:7).” (Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer 41:17) the Jews responded “We will do and we will understand” (Exo 24:7).
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Shavuot is a wedding anniversary between G-d and the Jewish people. Some Sephardic congregations, for example, go so far as to actually read a ketubah before the Torah reading on the first day of Shavuot. The basis of Judaism is thus the openness to start by accepting this most fundamental offer and then figure out what it means.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 10 (2 at a time)
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Place for half the class to sit and half to stand in a line.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 1-2 minutes per scene
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**

- Have players line up and assign each one a number.
- Call out two numbers.
- Those two players step forward and each immediately begin performing an action and/or saying something that makes an “offer” (i.e. if someone is digging, the invitation to the other is to help them dig).
- Each player must respond to the other’s offer in some way and work towards an integrated scene that makes sense of both.
- **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - When do you feel open to Judaism (or what life brings)? When don’t you?
 - Why is accepting before asking so important in improv? In Judaism?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** The power of acceptance.
 - **Knowledge:** Introduction to the wedding line of commentary which is a fundamental strain of thought not just on Shavuot but underpinning the entire Torah.
 - **Skill:** Working to integrate two visions for a scene.

GAME 5: Sequence

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “There is no chronological order in the Torah.” (Rashi)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** The order of things in the Torah as in life is not always intuitive or how we would have done things. In this game, we will challenge each other to put things in sequence.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 2 at a time
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** none
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 30 seconds per round
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Form a line by the door.
 - The two players closest to the door face each other.
 - Player 1 (closest to the door) offers a list of three things in the Torah (e.g. Sarah, Leah, Rachel)
 - Player 2 must either say what principle justifies the order they’re in or rearrange them according to another principle
 - If Player 2 does this accurately in 30 seconds or less they get to leave, if they don’t, player 1 leaves.
 - Whoever stays reverses roles.
 - **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** None
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**
 - **Knowledge:** game to reinforce various short-hand structures
 - **Skill:** interpreting a counter-intuitive order

Rosh Hashana

Rosh Hashana more than any other Jewish holiday is about the renewal of leadership. The games we'll focus on today focus either directly or symbolically on how we relate to leading on and off stage and changing ourselves and others.

GAME 1: Salmon or Herring

- **TORAH SOURCE:** "We face today a crisis of leadership. In almost every area of life—familial, communal, global and personal—there is a gaping void at the top. Rather than leading with vision and purpose, today's leaders are often no more than followers. ... So, as a new year dawns, we pray that we should be the head and not the tail. We need it for our world, our families and ourselves." ([Rabbi Aron Moss](#))
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Fish have a very special place in symbolic Jewish cuisine on Shabbat and Rosh Hashana to name just a few places. In this fun warm-up we will try to remember whether we're a salmon or herring.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole class
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Stand in a circle
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 5-8 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Everyone, at their turn (starting clockwise) does either:
 - Say "Salmon", and hold both hands in front of you, about 3 inches or 10cm apart. It continues in the same direction.
 - Say "Herring", and hold both hands in front of you, about 15 inches or 50cm apart. When this is done, the direction changes.
 - If someone does the wrong combination or speaks outside their turn, they "die" and are out of the game. The game ends when there's two fish left.
- **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - What do you think of the statement that we're facing a crisis of leadership today?
 - Is it always appropriate to try to be a leader?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Skill:** Memory and focus

GAME 2: Avinu Malkeinu (Our Father, Our King*)

- **TORAH SOURCE:** "If he were capable of communicating [his gratitude] with all his limbs, with his inner-most being and outward appearance, he would do so. If he were capable of galvanizing heaven and earth and all that is in them to thank and praise the king, out of his wish to convey to him his good feelings toward him, he would do so." (Rabbeinu Bachya, Duties of the Heart)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** On Rosh Hashana we reaffirm G-d as our King. The true reflection of a sovereign's relationship with his people is not in the pomp and circumstance but in the day to day fulfillment of the laws and policies of the government and devotion to the welfare of the Kingdom.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 2
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Space for performers, space for audience.

- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 1-2 minutes per scene.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Player 1 plays the father or king or mother/queen. This can be decided between the players in advance or can be established spontaneously in the scene through context setting.
 - Player 2 is the child or servant.
 - Player 1 asks Player 2 for something. Player 2 block the request but has to give a really good explanation why it is not possible.
 - Player 1 can choose to either challenge Player 2 on their explanation or request something else (i.e. back down on their request).
- **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - How do we relate to requests from our parents?
 - How would we want our children to react to our requests?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** Reflect on how their relationship to their parents may be reflected in their relationship with their children.
 - **Skill:** Challenge themselves when they feel they can't do something to really inspect their stated reasons.

GAME 3: Taschlich

- **TORAH SOURCE:** "Tashlich comes from the Hebrew word meaning "to cast," referring to the intent to cast away our sins via this meaningful and ancient Rosh Hashanah custom common to both Ashkenazi and Sephardic communities. ... Though Tashlich is not mentioned in the Talmud, its earliest reference appears to be in the book of the Prophet Nehemiah (8:1) which states, "All the Jews gathered as one in the street that is in front of the gate of water." This gathering is known to have taken place on Rosh Hashanah." (Dinka Kumer, Chabad.org)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** It's one thing to symbolically leave behind the negative elements of who we were in the previous year, it's quite another to show that to other people. In this game we'll practice communicating through action who we've become.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 2
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** One player must leave the room
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 2-3 minutes per scene
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Player 2 leaves the room.
 - Player 1 receives suggestions from an audience concerning a negative character trait and bad habit.
 - Player 2 re-enters the room.
 - Player 1 starts a gibberish only scene, in which she somehow conveys to Player 2 that she has that negative character trait. Once Player 2 believes she knows the character trait/bad habit she claps and spins around. The scene then proceeds and player 1 attempts to convey that she kicked the trait/bad habit.

Again, once player 2 thinks she has figured it out she claps and spins around. The scene ends.

- Player 2 then says what she believes the trait/bad habit was and how it was proven to be changed and Player 1 confirms whether or not she was correct.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS;**
 - How do you know if you've kicked a bad habit?
 - What does taschlich mean to you? Do you think it's an effective ritual? If so, why? If not, what do you think could make it more effective?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Skill:** Show don't tell
 - **Attitude:** Taschlich has a transformative potential.
 - **Knowledge:** Teshuvah is about action.

GAME 4: Unetaneh Tokef

- **TORAH SOURCE:** "On Rosh Hashanah it is inscribed, and on Yom Kippur it is sealed - how many shall pass away and how many shall be born, who shall live and who shall die, who in good time, and who by an untimely death, who by water and who by fire, who by sword and who by wild beast, who by famine and who by thirst, who by earthquake and who by plague, who by strangulation and who by lapidation, who shall have rest and who wander, who shall be at peace and who pursued, who shall be serene and who tormented, who shall become impoverished and who wealthy, who shall be debased, and who exalted. But repentance, prayer and righteousness avert the severity of the decree." (Mahzor)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** The judgment for the rest of our year is written, though not sealed, of Rosh Hashana. In the following long-format game we will explore this dynamic between what is set and what is variable. Ultimately, we can change the trajectory of any scene through repentance, prayer, and tzedaka!
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 8-12
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** boxes helpful but not required. Place for players, place for audience.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 6-10 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - 2-3 types of Suggestion is given from the audience. Could be anything but it might be focused on the new year like "something you want to happen this new year" or "something you really don't want to happen".
 - Players receive enhanced time to prepare, e.g. two minutes.
 - Players put on an initial scene (3-4 minutes). [not all players need to be in all scenes and of course players can serve as more than just characters.]
 - The players then put on a series of at least 3 scenes, each building off of and related to the initial scene in some way (e.g. exploring something that was mentioned, jumping into the future or the past, conceptually related).
 - Ultimately all the scenes are sealed in a final conclusion that ties it together.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- When does your life feel like one continuous scene? When does it feel like many unrelated scenes?
- Did anything surprise you in the trajectories of the story from the initial scene to the later scenes?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Skill:** Complex storytelling and cohesive thinking.
 - **Knowledge:** reflection on a central prayer of the high holidays.
 - **Attitude:** Reflecting on the ways in which we're setting ourselves on a trajectory and yet there is room to change it later on.

GAME 5: My Fault

- **TORAH SOURCE:** parts to Teshuvah: 1. Leaving the Sin 2. Regret 3. Confession Before G-d 4. Acceptance for the Future ([OU](#))
- **INTRODUCTORY INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** The second step of regret implies some level of assuming responsibility for the action. The confession of the sin publicizes this assumption of responsibility.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole class
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Room should be fairly open. Two plastic water bottles should be filled with a bit of water and taped shut.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 5-8 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Players mill about the room.
 - Two people are holding water bottles.
 - Whenever either of those two people make eye contact with someone, they throw the water bottle to that person. If the other person doesn't catch it, both shout "my fault" and lie down.
 - Someone else picks it up and the game continues until no one is standing.

TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS :

- Do you find it easy to say "my fault"? When? Why or why not?
- How do you handle things when you think it is someone else's fault but they refuse to take responsibility?
- What does it do to responsibility when multiple parties assume it?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- **Attitude:** normalizing accepting responsibility

Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur focuses on one of our most profound capacities as human beings that is the very heart of drama; namely, the capacity to reinvent ourselves. In these exercises, we will focus on our own malleability physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

GAME 1: Finger Washing

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “Similarly, when rising from sleep in the morning, one should wash his hands three times [alternately] as stated in sec. 4[:4], for the reason stated in sec. 554,3 and recite the blessing al netilas yadayim. He should be careful not to wash beyond his fingers. He should not intend to derive pleasure from the washing, but only to remove the spirit of impurity from his hands. After drying the hands with a towel, one should wipe his eyes with it in order to remove “the bonds of sleep.”” (Shulchan Aruch HaRav 613:2)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Five things are prohibited on Yom Kippur: eating, anointing yourself, wearing leather shoes, marital relations, and washing for pleasure. Consequently, the morning handwashing is only done up to the fingers. There is a crowd warm-up exercise in improv in which you get the crowd to clap just with two fingers until they make their way to their whole hand. We’ll be adapting this for Yom Kippur.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole class
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Standing in a circle
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 3 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Get everyone stretching as if they just woke up. Instruct everyone to either mime going to a sink or perhaps they have a cup and bowl by their bed. Either way, they should begin by miming washing just one finger being careful not to let the water get on their whole hand. Next, they should wash two fingers, ensuring they are not enjoying the washing. Continue in this way, taking more extreme measures not to get the water on their palms until they are washing all five fingers.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - What does washing our hands in the morning accomplish?
 - Why do we care about such minute details in Judaism?
- **Learning objectives:**
 - **Knowledge:** Handwashing halacha and basic prohibitions for Yom Kippur.
 - **Attitude:** Paying close attention to details.
 - **Skill:** Detailed miming.

GAME 2: Jonah and the Whale

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and proclaim against it, for their evil has come before Me. And Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from before the Lord, and he went down to Joppa, found a ship going to Tarshish, paid its hire, and went down into it to come with them to Tarshish from before the Lord.” (Jonah 1:1-2)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** In the Book of Jonah, which we read from as the haftorah on the afternoon of Yom Kippur, G-d sends Jonah to give the corrupt city of Nineveh a warning so they have an opportunity to repent before they’re destroyed (which they do). Jonah doesn’t think they should get this second chance so he tries to run away from his mission. In this game, we’ll explore running away from your mission.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 4-6 per scene
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** space for players and audience to watch.

- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 3-4 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Audience is asked for three prompts, one should be a mission or mitzvah, the others are flexible (e.g. setting, character, time period, etc.).
 - Player 1 establishes character and relationship sends Player 2 on the mission.
 - Player 2 spends the rest of the scene trying to avoid doing the mission.
 - The other players must establish the problem Player 2 is trying to solve, up the stakes from their failure to solve it and ultimately through circumstance force player 2 to their mission.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - Is there anything you think is beyond forgiveness? Why or why not?
 - If you procrastinate, what helps bring you back to your mission?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Skill:** Develop main elements of story.
 - **Attitude:** The importance of being brought to tasks we don't want to do.

GAME 3: Clay in the Hands of the Potter

- **TORAH SOURCE:** Like clay in the hands of the potter, if he wills, he can expand it, if he wills, he can contract it; so too are we in Your hand, Preserver of kindness and not the accuser!
Like stone in the hand of the mason, if he wills, he holds it [in position], if he wills, he smashes it; so too are we in Your hands, Causer of life and death. Heed the covenant and not the accuser! ...
(Machzor Yom Kippur Ashkenaz, Maariv Service for Yom Kippur Eve,)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** In the Piyyut above different metaphors are used to describe how we are subject to the Divine will. In short, very fundamental aspects of what we will experience over the coming year are out of our hands and we need to learn how to accept with humility what happens. Learning how to go with the flow is also vital in improv and vital to helping things go well.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 3
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** place for the scene and place for the audience.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 2 minutes per trio
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Player 1 chooses to be a lump of clay, iron, or rudder and says what their choice is out loud. Behind her, Player 2 is a Model who takes a pose, which Player 1 is not supposed to see. Player 3 becomes the artist who must try to imitate the model as best as possible within the time give by:
 - If clay, the artist cannot touch the clay and can't speak.
 - If iron, the artist gets a stick and gently uses it to guide the iron into position, but cannot speak and cannot use other gestures.
 - If rudder, the artist can speak but cannot use gestures or touch the rudder.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - What makes it hard to adapt to new situations?
 - How do you stay calm when you're not in control of a situation?

- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

- **Attitude:** Trusting that we can make things go better by not fighting what is out of our control.
- **Skill:** Providing guidance to others, physical imitation and observation.

GAME 4: If Only we Could Rewind

- **TORAH SOURCE:** When the residents of Sodom find out that Lot is hosting guests they form a mob and storm his house and try to break down the door, demanding that they be brought out to receive punishment. These guests are in fact angels and blind the mob. Sforzo comments on this, ""Even though they were smitten by blindness, they toiled to find the opening in order to break the door. This is in accordance with the saying of the Sages that even when the wicked are standing at the opening of Gehinom (Hell) they do not repent.""
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** One of the most important skills for personal and collective growth is learning how to take criticism. If we cannot productively accept when people rightly point out we've done wrong, then like the people of Sodom, we will only cause the situation to go from bad to worse.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 6-8 players
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** A place for the players and a place for the audience.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 4-5 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - A certain number of the players play as actors. One player is the director. Optional: other players can be dedicated "off-camera" players, such as cinematographers, sound technicians, etc.
 - The actors start by putting on a scene. At some point, the director player yells "cut" explains what was wrong with the scene and tells them to either do it again differently or move on to a different scene. The director can provide guidance and intimate details about the wider story. The other off-camera support staff can also provide rebuke and direction in their specific domain.
 - The players scenes weave together to form a story, but the "Behind the scenes" can form a sub-plot or meta-story
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - Which of the directors instructions were most effective? Why?
 - When do you find it easiest to take criticism?
 - What makes it hard to accept criticism?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** Criticism, provided it is based in truth, is a gift that allows us to grow.
 - **Skill:** Providing instructions like a director, i.e. productively and with a vision.

GAME 5: Don't Say Food

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “And [all this] shall be as an eternal statute for you; in the seventh month, on the tenth of the month, you shall afflict yourselves, and you shall not do any work neither the native nor the stranger who dwells among you.” (Vayikra 16:29)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** The purpose of fasting all day on Yom Kippur is not so we should think of food. Rather, it's so our minds should be freed up to think about how we can do better as people. In this game, we'll try our hardest not to think of food.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole class
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Everyone sitting in a circle
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 3-5 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Each person in the circle has to say a word not at all related to the word before it.
 - When someone says a word that could be related to food (as determined by peers who can shout “prohibited” or “usur” and explain how it's connected to food) that person is out.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - What practices do you use to focus on what's important on Yom Kippur?
 - How do you keep your mind off of food?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Skill:** How to focus on what's important during Yom Kippur

Sukkot/Simchat Torah

The holiday of Sukkot commemorates the journey of the Israelites through the desert on their way out of Egypt. It is also referred to as “zman simchatenu”, the time of our rejoicing. It was a particularly high point of unity since in the year after the shemitta year (Hakhel), when the King would bring all the people to Jerusalem to read to them from the Torah. Today, we'll be focusing on joy!

GAME 1: In-Gathering

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “And Moses instructed them as follows: Every seventh year, the year set for remission, at the Feast of Booths, when all Israel comes to appear before your God in the place that [God] will choose, you shall read this Teaching aloud in the presence of all Israel.” (Deut 31:10-11)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Sukkot is the culmination of the three pilgrimage festivals to Jerusalem. That means that there were a very large number of animals in Jerusalem at that time. At the Temple, they were kept in separate areas based on which type of sacrifice they were for. If they all got loose, you could only imagine the panic that would ensue! We're going to play the role of those animals and we're going to try to get back together.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole class

- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Print out animal cards to hand to students so others don't see what animal each person was assigned. These animal cards include each of the sacrifices of Sukkot specifically:
 - Young bulls
 - Rams (snorting)
 - lambs
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 3-5 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Hand out the cards to each student without the other students seeing
 - Count down, then people wander off in all directions.
 - Count down again and wherever they are they should start making the sound of their particular animal.
 - They must then find their way to the other animals. The first group to get together wins.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - What relevance do you think bringing sacrifices still has today?
 - How do you identify your true peers in a group of new people?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Knowledge:** Minimal knowledge about sacrifices of sukkot.
 - **Attitude:** Get people to think about the practicalities of implementing some of the things described in the Torah.

GAME 2: Building a Sukkah

- **TORAH SOURCE:** Two kings cannot simultaneously rule over a single city, so there is a constant war in people directing them towards good or ill. (based on the teachings of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi in the Tanya)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** The journey in the desert we are commemorating by building sukkahs was not a straight-forward route. It involved many steps forward and backwards. So too every person in life has many drives that take them forwards or backwards depending on the circumstances. Additionally, sukkot is a time of gathering and unity. When the Jews moved backwards in the desert, it was due to internal fighting.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 5-7
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** One person stands in the middle with enough room to act out a scene. 2-3 players sit on each side facing the audience either on chairs, boxes, or on the floor.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 2-3 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - One side's job is to direct the person to build a sukkah correctly. One person at a time should give instructions. The actor carries it out then says what happens next?
 - The other side's job is to give bad advice about how to build the sukkah. The actor carries it out then says "what happens next?"
 - The pro-sukkah side then takes a turn giving instructions that must both fix the earlier issue caused and advance the sukkah. Repeat the above pattern.

- The person in the middle must act out each piece of advice as it's being given to them.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - Do you ever feel pulled in different directions? How do you deal with these internal disputes?
 - How can we ensure that when groups make decisions they are pulling in the same direction?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Knowledge:** People can share what they know about how to build a sukkah.
 - **Skill:** How to plan as a group.
 - **Attitude:** Awareness that it's totally normal to have conflicting thoughts and feelings internally.

GAME 3: Sukkah Salesman

- **TORAH SOURCE:** "The beauty of my father's sukkah was the personage who sat in the sukkah. With my father, the awesome acceptance of the Yoke of Heaven on Rosh HaShanah, and his avodah on erev Yom Kippur and on Yom Kippur, and his joy on Sukkos, were all experienced in the innermost depths of his soul." (based on the [teachings of](#) Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak of Lubavitch)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** The law and customs of Sukkot contain two opposites in them. On the one hand, the legal minimum for a sukkah are quite minimal (e.g. just two walls and a bit, just 51% roof coverage). On the other hand, sukkahs in ancient times just like today could be very fancy and this can express our desire to do mitzvahs most beautifully.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 6-8 players
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** More space than usual should be made to allow the maximum mobility in the scene. A place for the audience to sit and watch.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 2-3 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - One player is a sukkah salesman guiding 1-2 other players through a sukkah.
 - The sukkah is extremely luxurious. As the salesman points features and objects out, players should jump in to fill that role. They may only remain in that role and cannot move unless interacted with (or if the object is a moving object).
 - The 1-2 players being guided through should express what they're really looking for in a sukkah and the sukkah salesman must try to please.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - What do you think makes a sukkah beautiful?
 - What is your fondest memory of being in a sukkah?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** There are different ideas of what makes a sukkah beautiful and provided they are sincerely motivated they are all valid.
 - **Knowledge:** Students learn about each other's experiences with sukkahs as well as the difference between halacha and minhag of sukkah construction.

GAME 4: World's Worst Lulav and Etrog

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “It is an established Jewish custom that person who is unfamiliar with the laws governing a lulav and esrog should show the items he purchased to a halachic authority to determine whether they are kosher or not.” (Kitzur shulchan aruch 136:1)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** The different customs and laws of what makes a lulav and esrog beautiful and kosher are extensive and diverse. In this game we’ll explore how what might be a good lulav or esrog to one won’t work for another. This game is the reverse of the previous game in some ways.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 4-8 players
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Consider obtaining cards that summarize what makes each of the four species kosher or not.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 3-4 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Ask the class for suggestions of things like “defects”, “type of emergency”, etc.
 - All the players are at a lulav and esrog market. Some players are sellers, others are buyers who may be alone, a couple, or in a group, still others can be the lulav or esrog.
 - Unfortunately, with the lulavs and esrog, there’s always some problem (e.g. the couple are disagreeing about what they’re looking for, the single person doesn’t have enough money, two customers want the same one, etc.)
 - The scene resolves when everyone gets a lulav and esrog they’re happy with.
- **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - How have our relationships to mitzvahs changed given how wealthy the Jewish community is now compared to historically?
 - Why do you think some people go to such great lengths to obtain beautiful lulavs and esrogs?
 - What does our lulav and esrog say about our approach to mitzvahs in general?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** See how the path forward in halacha, within the bounds of what is kosher, is a function of compromise and relational dynamics.

GAME 5: Family Tree

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “Both Ramban (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, 13th century) and Rabbi Don Yitzchak Abarbanel (15th century) agree that as long as rates are reasonable, there isn’t necessarily anything morally wrong with interest (ribbit). They explain that the reason Torah prohibits ribbit between Jews is simply because your fellow Jew is family. It’s just not appropriate for family members to help each other out on terms of interest. The Jewish nation is meant to behave as a cohesive unit, like a single organism, each one concerned for the other’s benefit as much as with his own.” (as explained by [Tzvi Freeman and Yehuda Shurpin](#))

- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** We sometimes talk about being a large family, but how well do you really know your 16th cousin? Sometimes you meet someone who is a real master of Jewish geography. We'll practice that skill together.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole class
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Stand in a circle
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 5-10 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - A player is randomly chosen to start. That person says "I'm X related [the person next to X] by...". If they happen to be related they can say how if they're not obviously related by blood, they can say where they met or if they're in a club together or stayed in the same cabin at camp together, etc.
 - The next player Y then introduces themselves and explains how they're related to X then the person to their other side.
 - The next player Z then explains how they are related to Y and how Y is related to X. They then explain how they are related to A.
- **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - Did any relationships surprise you?
 - Does it change anything when you know how people are connected?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** Feel closer to their classmates.
 - **Skill:** enhance their Jewish geography acumen.
 - **Knowledge:** Learn some commentaries on ribis.

Hanukkah

Hanukkah commemorates one of the deepest challenges Jews have ever faced and which we still face today, the intellectual appeal of hellenism. Indeed, North American culture and this very class combines a tradition rooted in Greek traditions of drama and puts them in dialogue with Jewish sources. Learning how to respond to this culture in a healthy and productive way for Jews and non-Jews alike remains one of the most pressing skills for us.

GAME 1: Ya-di-day-day-di

- **TORAH SOURCE:** "And you shall make a menorah of pure gold. The menorah shall be made of hammered work; its base and its stem, its goblets, its knobs, and its flowers shall [all] be [one piece] with it. And six branches coming out of its sides: three menorah branches from its one side and three menorah branches from its second side." (Exo 25:31-32)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** The 8-branch hanukkiah we light for hanukkah is intentionally not supposed to be like the 7-branch menorah in the Temple, although Hanukkah is a commemoration of the rededication of the Temple. Only by coming together was it possible to rise up against the Seleucid Empire.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole class

- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Whole class stands in a circle with one player in the middle.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 5-10 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Player standing in the middle closes their eyes and spins around a couple of times. Optionally, people in the circle can also move around. When they open their eyes they point at someone and say “ya-di-say-say-di”. The person being pointed to and the two people to their sides must come together to form a 7 branch menorah with their bodies.
- **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS :**
 - How do you identify a leader to follow?
 - How do you figure out what your role in a group is?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:** Mainly to build energy
 - **Skill:** Attention and reaction time.
 - **Attitude:** We must come together when the moment calls for it.

GAME 2: Opposites Interrogation

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “In the days of Matisyahu, son of Yochanan the High Priest, the Hasmonean and his sons, when the evil Greek kingdom rose up against Your people Israel to make them forget Your Torah and to turn them away from the statutes of Your will— You, in Your abundant mercy, stood by them in their time of distress, You defended their cause, You judged their grievances, You avenged them.”
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** At the basis of the spiritual of Chanukah is a clash between a society and political structure based on the idea that empires can be maintained not just if everyone learns to live together but also have no commitments to anything higher. In this game, we'll play out a dialogue between a Greek officer who happens to be a philosopher and a trapped by self-assured Macabee.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 4
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** table with two chairs arranged like an interrogation room.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 3-4 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Player 1 is a Greek officer who happens to be a philosopher. His goal is to prove to player 2 that there is no underlying unity to the world by positing opposite things (e.g. night and day, hot and cold, etc.)
 - Player 2 is a Macabee. His goal is to show the Greek officer the connection and underlying unity between the two opposites.
 - Players 3 and 4 are the opposites. They must first mime the opposition and then the reconciliation.
- **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS :**
 - Do you feel there's still a tension between Hellenistic (Greek) and Jewish thought?
 - For those who played as 3 or 4, what is it like to embody opposition in the world? How do you express unity?

- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

- **Knowledge:** Introduce students to the idea of a spiritual conflict underpinning Hanukkah that relates to our relationship to the broader society today.
- **Attitude:** A sense of confidence in our ability not just to fight but offer answers to the sincere and forceful challenges of society.
- **Skill:** Physical expression of conceptual tensions and storytelling based on abstract concepts.

GAME 3: All Who Are For Hashem...

- **TORAH SOURCE:** When the old priest Mattityahu began his revolt against the officers of the Greek-Syrian army, he purportedly called “All who are for G-d come to me!”
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Any community, movement, or social change starts with somebody making an offer. This is also how any scene begins or is advanced, explicitly or implicitly. In this game we’ll explore the art of making an offer by breaking one of improv’s cardinal rules...
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 3-4
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Space for players and for audience
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 3-4 minutes per scene
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - The class is canvassed for a suggestion, be it a problem, a mitzvah, a goal, anything of the nature people want to move away from or move towards.
 - After the group confers, player 1 starts a scene (i.e. establishing location, problem, relationships, etc.)
 - Player 2 makes an offer that has the goal of either addressing the problem or moving towards the goal.
 - Player 1 has the option of accepting the offer or rejecting it. If Player 1 rejects it, player 2 must make a better offer. (Player 1 must not unreasonably reject offers if it’s clear how the offer would advance the plot.)
 - In the course of moving on Player 2’s offer, they meet Player 3 who’s brought into the efforts. Player 3 makes an offer that Player 1 and 2 must both accept or reject (according to the same principles as above).
 - Finally, Player 4 enters and their offer must solve the problem or accomplish the goal to the satisfaction of all the other players.
- **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - How did your experience of making or refusing an offer change when there were more people involved?
 - What compels you to join others in good deeds (e.g. donate when someone is fundraising, volunteer, Etc.)?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Skill:** How to make a narratively compelling offer.
 - **Attitude:** Understanding the importance of group dynamics in certain kinds of mitzvahs.

GAME 4: Gilgulim or Initiation

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “All the millennia of our history have demonstrated the triumph of the Hanukah spirit in Israel’s midst. Israel is the one nation that knows not only the historic Hanukah but also a constantly renewed Hanukah, a reconsecration celebrated over and over again, each time with greater inspiration and more intense devotion to the goal that was set for Israel from the beginning at a sevenfold height. Why, then, should we lose our courage now and celebrate Hanukah only as frigid remembrances of olden days instead of Hinuch Al Pi Darco - educate according to his way—Proverbs 22:6], a preparation and consecration for our own future?” ([Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch](#))
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Hanukkah which means inauguration, shares the same root as primary education or chinuch. To be educated is to be inaugurated into something. In this game, we’ll explore how players get initiated into a story.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 2 players per scene
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Space for the players space for the audience
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 2-3 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Player 2 is sent out of the room
 - Class is canvassed for a suggestion about a vocation and a mission in life.
 - The scene is the “First day on the job”. Player 1 is a mentor, who was only recently hired himself, and must show player 2 the ropes of the job without ever telling him what it is. The way Player 1 goes about the job should also imply the mission in life.
 - At the end of the scene, Player 2 must guess the job and the mission.
- **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS :**
 - How do you teach somebody something you yourself are brand new to?
 - What is the difference between a job and a mission?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Skill:** If you know aleph, teach aleph.
 - **Knowledge:** Connection between Chanukah and education.
 - **Attitude:** Our work does not define us. Think about mission.

GAME 5: Clap, Snap, Spin

TORAH SOURCE

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

NUMBER OF PLAYERS: Whole class

SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS: A basket with a dreidl for everyone, enough space for everyone to sit in a circle

LENGTH OF TIME: 5-8 minutes

INSTRUCTIONS: The goal is to get a unified rhythm

- Each person sits in the circle (starting with someone arbitrarily selected)
 - Take a dreidl out a basket (and put it on the floor), then before the dreidel stops spinning

- Slap both hands on thighs
- Clap both hands together
- Snap to their left
- Snap to their right
- Then pass the basket to the right
- If the dreidel stops spinning before they pass it on, they must start again.
- As the next person does it, they must repeat until everyone is doing it.

TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Tu B'Shvat

Tu B'Shvat, the new year for the trees draws our attention to how what's been going on out of our sight (beneath the earth through the falling of the rain throughout the rainy season) has set a trajectory for growth that we will witness unfold. So too, how we set up a scene and how we act in the world will do much to set a trajectory of how things will unfold even if there remains an element of unpredictability.

GAME 1: Planting Seeds

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “There are four New Years...on the first of Shevat is the New Year for trees, according to the words of Beit Shammai. Beit Hillel says [it is on] the fifteenth [of Shevat]” (Rosh Hashana 2a). According to [Rabbi Jay Kelman](#) “As to why Shevat is the New Year for trees, the Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 14a) explains that by the month of Shevat, the majority of the rainy season (in Israel) has ended; and, as Rashi notes, it is the time of the first blossoming of the year’s fruit. While most fruit will not be ready for at least a few weeks, their growth is primarily due to the rain that fell up until Shevat.”
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** The first blossoms tell us much about what a season is going to be like. In this game we’ll explore how we can influence the path of a scene through our physical expression.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole class.
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Open space big enough to allow everyone to move around comfortably.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 5 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Everyone starts milling about like seeds floating on the wind. The teacher or one of the students is selected as the gardener.
 - The gardener then calls out a student’s name then says “plant INSERT type of plant”.
 - That person jumps up and poses as that type of plant.
 - Other students congregate around that person and pose as other plants that would make sense in the same setting as the first plant. For example, if the first plant was a cactus, one might expect the other plants to be more distant. If the

first plant was a tall cedar, perhaps other students will be undergrowth around it. Students continue to join until the whole class is a scene.

- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**
 - How did the people near you influence your decision about the shape you took?
 - How do you think you influenced others around you?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** Reflect on physical and spiritual networks of interdependencies.
 - **Skill:** Making a physical setting at different levels (i.e. standing, sitting, lying down)

GAME 2: Being and Becoming

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “man bears a relationship and likeness to the earth in a way that differs from that of all other animals and creatures. The ground has the power to grow things. It brings out the potential in plants, trees, fruits, and everything else it produces. Adama essentially exists in potential, and brings everything to fruition. In a similar vein, Adam is distinct in that he represents pure potential, and, like the land, the ability to bring forth bounty, namely, his own perfection.” (adapted and translated from an [essay of the Maharal](#))
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Humans are likened in the Torah to a tree of the field, but as the passage above suggests, there is another level on which we are likened to the very earth. It has to do with our infinite potential and malleability. This malleability is of course the very heart of improv (and why we’re really doing improv at all times!). In this game, we will focus on becoming different living creatures and sharpen what it means to be each.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole class
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Enough space for everyone to stand comfortably apart from each other.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 5-10 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Teacher (alternatively, students at random) calls out a plant, animal, or some other natural feature or body for people to act as. Players must not just change but think about what a transformation into that thing would entail (e.g. is it all once or in stages?)
 - Once everyone has transformed into that thing, the teacher (or student) asks questions to push people to express themselves more precisely. Always saying “show me”. For example:
 - What season are you in?
 - Are you flat ground or on the side of a mountain?
 - Are you old or young?
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - How do we manifest who we want to be in small details?
 - How do we go beyond thinking about who we want to be and think about how to become that person?

- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

- **Attitude:** We have infinite potential to change for the better!
- **Skill:** Paying greater attention to how smaller details in our physicality tell a broader story.

GAME 3: A Burning Bush

- **TORAH SOURCE:** Moses was pasturing the flocks of Jethro, his father-in-law, the chief of Midian, and he led the flocks after the free pastureland, and he came to the mountain of G-d, to Horeb. An angel of the L-rd appeared to him in a flame of fire from within the thorn bush, and behold, the thorn bush was burning with fire, but the thorn bush was not being consumed. So Moses said, "Let me turn now and see this great spectacle: why does the thorn bush not burn up?" The L-rd saw that he had turned to see, and G-d called to him from within the thorn bush, and He said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am!" And He said, "Do not draw near here. Take your shoes off your feet, because the place upon which you stand is holy soil." (Exo 3:1-5)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Ramban emphasizes that this mountain was the same as Mount Sinai and was particularly characterized by its dryness (thornbushes thrive in dry areas). While Tu B'Shvat is the new year of trees for the purpose of those trees we harvest fruit from, other woody plants also have valuable things to teach us.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 4-8
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Space for scene. Space for audience.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 3-4 minutes per scene
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Audience is canvassed for suggestions of a natural setting, and other optional categories like problem, object, time period, etc.
 - Players put on a scene. At some point, one of the characters must be distracted by something the others cannot see and say "Let me turn now and see this great spectacle." They must describe what it is to the other players and what message it bears for the scene.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - How do we notice all the natural wonders around us?
 - How do we learn lessons from the plants around us about how we can do better?
 - What are some ways we can better tend to the places we are more like sacred ground?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** More appreciation and reverence even for humbler seemingly not useful plants.

GAME 4: Gilead Named it After Himself

- **TORAH SOURCE:** "When the Holy One, blessed be He, was about to create humankind, He consulted with His ministering angels, saying, "Let us make Adam." The angels responded, "What's so wonderful about this Adam?" So He brought each

creature before the angels and asked them, "This creature, what is its name?" But they did not know. Then He brought the creatures before Adam and asked him, "This creature, what is its name?" To which Adam responded, "This is shor [Hebrew for ox], this is chamor [donkey]..." (Bereishis Rabbah 2:19)

- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** We read in Bereishis about how Adam named the animals, but did he name the plants? Abarbanel asks this question, but I don't know of any answer. Either way, the power of naming is clear in many places (from Pharaoh renaming Joseph to the tribes renaming lands upon conquest). In this game, we'll explore this power of naming.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 3-4 players
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Place for players. Place for audience.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 2-3 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Player 1 stands in the middle of the stage and strikes the pose of a tree or plant.
 - Other players come onto the stage as a team of researchers and encounter this never before seen tree or plant.
 - They begin a discussion about what to name it, all the while interacting and inspecting the tree/plant and making invitations to it (e.g. I wonder when it blossoms? And then the tree blossoms, etc.). Players may choose to interweave a character drama or external story into the discussion of what the tree should be named (e.g. what brought them there?)
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - How do names shape our experience of the natural world?
 - What does it mean that a thing's name in Hebrew is its essence?
 - How did incidental factors affect the naming process in the scene? What impact do you think that has in real life?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Skill:** Think more critically about the names of things and be more careful about giving things a name.
 - **Attitude:** Treat the power of naming things in nature with greater reverence.
 - **Knowledge:** Perhaps be exposed to Abarbanel's question they never thought of before.

GAME 5: King of the Trees

- **TORAH SOURCE:** The trees went forth to anoint a king over them. And they said to the olive tree, 'Reign over us.' But the olive tree said to them, 'Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honor God and men, and go to wave over the trees?' And the trees said to the fig tree, 'Go you, and reign over us.' But the fig tree said to them, 'Should I leave my sweetness, and my good fruitage, and go to wave over the trees?' And the trees said to the vine, 'Go you and reign over us.' And the vine said to them, 'Should I leave my wine, which causes God and men to rejoice, and go to wave over the trees?' Then all the trees said to the thorn, 'Come you, and reign over us.' And the thorn said to the trees, 'If in truth you anoint me king over you, (then) come and take refuge in

my shade; but if not, let fire come out of the thorn, and consume the cedars of Lebanon.' (Judges 9:8-15)

- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Trees communicate with each other in many different ways by transporting water and other resources through their root networks, by emitting chemicals to ward off different bugs and plants, and in many other ways. In this scene, we will assume the characters of the forest and imagine a conversation.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole class
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Players should feel free to “grow” around the environment however it happens to be (as opposed to clearing a space).
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 5-10 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Everyone should assume a position and a posture of a different plant in the forest (whether a tree, bush, grass, flower or something else).
 - Someone should begin a conversation that would happen in the woods (e.g. can you believe the trash those campers left? “Did you hear the news of the fire the next forest over?”)
 - Each player should contribute to this communal discussion with the character and from the vantage point of its particular plant.
 - It’s ok if the overall conversation devolves into many. That is part of the ecosystem of the scene.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - How do you embody the particular vantage point of a plant?
 - What do you think the passage from Judges is teaching us?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Knowledge:** Plants communicate
 - **Attitude:** Being in community, in a scene, means spontaneously finding and inhabiting niches.
 - **Skill:** Finding and inhabiting physical and narrative niches.

Purim

Purim is a holiday in which the truth is hidden until the right moment to reveal it. We don’t always understand why we are put in the positions that we are put in but we must always ask ourselves “How can I make the world better from this place? What is my mission?”.

GAME 1: Assassin

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “At that time, when Mordecai was sitting in the palace gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king’s eunuchs who guarded the threshold, became angry, and plotted to do away with King Ahasuerus. Mordecai learned of it and told it to Queen Esther, and Esther reported it to the king in Mordecai’s name.” (Esther 2:21-22)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** In part because Mordechai performed his duties to the King faithfully and in part because Esther cited her sources, the Jews were saved.

- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole class.
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Enough clear space for people to move around quickly without bumping into things.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 5 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Each player must secretly designate someone as their assassin and someone as their bodyguard. Without revealing who is who they must try to keep their bodyguard between themselves and their assassin at all times.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - Have you ever realized later that someone was relying on you for something and you didn't know?
 - Do you rely on anyone for something without telling them?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:** Mainly to get people to run around
 - **Attitude:** People depend on us without us realizing it.

Game 2: Zoom Out

- **TORAH SOURCE:** "In the third year of his [Achashverosh's] reign, he made a feast for all his ministers and servants; the army of Persia and Media, the nobles and all the ministers of the provinces in his service." (Esther 1:3) The Midrash (Esther Rabbah 7:18) explains that the Jews were destined for destruction because the men attended the banquet of King Achashveirosh, as described at the beginning of the Book of Esther. The text emphasizes that the food and drink were "according to the law," i.e. kosher (Meg. 13b). What, then, was so bad about this? Rabbi Yosei Bar Hanina expounds that King Achashveirosh held the banquet to celebrate the end of what he understood to be 70 years since the Temple was destroyed and the Jews went into exile. Jeremiah had prophesied that the Jews would be redeemed after 70 years. King Achashveirosh, thinking this deadline had passed, was celebrating the seeming falsification of the prophecy, thereby implying permanency of the exile. (See this articles on [the Six Remembrances](#))
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** In order to be understood, all Torah passages, just like all events in life need to be seen in their fuller context. In improv, even when we don't explicitly show the audience, we should pay some thought to what came before and what might come next.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 4-8 players
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Place for the scene and place for the audience.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 2-3 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Get suggestions from the class such as "problem", "feeling", or "Jewish personage"
 - The players put on a 1-2 minute scene incorporating suggestions chosen by the teacher.
 - They then pause (or if they've reached the time limit, the teacher pauses them) and turn to the audience and ask whether the audience wants to see what happened before this scene or what happens after.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- If we never really have the full picture, what does this mean for how we should study Torah text?
- If we never really have the full picture, what does this mean for how we should judge situations?

GAME 3: What am I supposed to Do? (or “The Outsider”)

- **TORAH SOURCE:** "Do not imagine to yourself that you will escape in the king's house from among all the Jews. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and rescue will arise for the Jews from elsewhere, and you and your father's household will perish; and who knows whether at a time like this you will attain the kingdom?" (Megillah Esther 4:13-14)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Wherever we go in life, we're always walking into the middle of the scene. It can be difficult to figure out exactly what we're meant to be doing there. But there almost always is something we can be doing to make things better.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 3 players per scene.
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** A space for the performers and a space for the rest of the class to watch.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 12-15 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - A volunteer is sent out of earshot.
 - Two volunteers are given a suggestion for a scene that they must act out wordlessly.
 - The volunteer is brought back and the scene begins. The volunteer jumps in within 10 seconds whether or not they understand.
 - After the scene the first volunteer explains what they thought the scene was about and why. Then the players explain what they were doing.
 - Repeat a few times.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**
 - Have you ever been in a space where you didn't understand what was expected of you?
 - How did you figure out how to act in those spaces?
 - What tools can we use to figure out our mission in any given case?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** We can learn techniques to be comfortable in ongoing scenes even if we don't understand them.

GAME 4: It's all in the Telling

- **TORAH SOURCE:** Now, Queen Esther, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordechai the Jew wrote down all [the acts of] power, to confirm the second Purim letter. And he sent letters to all the Jews, to one hundred twenty-seven provinces, the realm of Ahasuerus, words of peace and truth, to confirm these days of Purim in their appointed times, as Mordechai the Jew and Esther the queen had enjoined them, and as they had ordained for themselves and for their seed, the matters of the fasts and their cry. Now Esther's order confirmed these matters of Purim, and it was inscribed in the book." (Esther 9:29-32)

- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Part of what converts something from a simple event to a holiday is the fact that it is recorded. How it is recorded and retold fundamentally shapes the meaning of that event. In theatre as well, a narrator adds a layer of meaning to any story that is more than just a simple repetition of whatever the audience is already seeing (if that was the case what would be the point, beyond accessibility?).
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 4-8 players
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** A place for the scene, the audience, and enough space for someone to stand to the side and narrate.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 3-4 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Suggestions are solicited from the audience, such as “setting”, “insurmountable problem”, “Name”
 - The players start a scene. One player stands to the side and begins to narrate the scene like a nature documentarian, providing commentary along the way of the scene being acted out.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - What are some ways in which narration is always commentary?
 - Have you ever realized something about something that happened to you by telling the story of it to someone later?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** Wariness about narrators that claim to be objective.
 - **Skill:** Develop sensitivity to how descriptions of events in Torah are always conscious choices that we should ask about.

GAME 5: Kehilla Meeting

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “For Mordechai the Jew was viceroy to King Achashverosh, and great among the Jews and **accepted by most of his brethren (le’rav ahov)**; seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all their seed.” (Megillah 10:3). On the other hand, when it came to Joshua’s leadership, “The Lord said to Moses, “Take for yourself Joshua the son of Nun, **a man of spirit**, and you shall lay your hand upon him.” Rashi comments, “As you requested; someone able to deal with the character of each one. — [Sifrei Pinchas 23]”
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** It is customary for congregations to repeat this last line after the reader of the megillah. One element of it that is difficult to translate is who exactly Mordechai was accepted by among his people. Some translations say “many” others say “most” but it’s definitely not all. Implying some level of dissent. There are different explanations as to why this is, one being simply that sages have a hard time accepting anyone who has to spend as much time on politics as a viceroy. In this game, we’ll explore just how hard it is to please everyone.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 1 player at a time + whole class.
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** podium helpful but not necessary.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 1-2 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**

- Send one student out of the room. The rest of the class picks a leader or Torah figure from Jewish history.
- The person comes back in (not knowing who they are supposed to be) and steps up to the podium.
- There is a kehilla meeting (community meeting or town hall). Members of the class ask questions to the player that may be more or less challenging of their leadership but should give them some clue as to who they are. (e.g. We've already circled 6 times, isn't that enough already?)
- The player must answer in a manner trying to meet that individual's apparent needs, but must remain consistent across answers.
- The game ends when the person guesses who they are or they are overthrown.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - How do we balance the needs of individuals and a whole group?
 - What is the mark of a man of spirit like Joshua?
 - Why does the megillah inform us that Mordechai was not accepted by everyone?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **attitude:** You can't please everyone, but the work of leadership is meeting people where they're at.
 - **Knowledge:** Understanding that Jewish leadership was rarely if ever an exercise in unanimity.
 - **Skill:** Meeting people's needs while maintaining integrity.

Character Traits (Middot)

Judaism is not just about what we do, but who we are. The Rabbis have written countless works over history about how to develop good character traits. In improv, it is crucial to learn how to express that you have different character traits.

GAME 1: Oy, Red Heifer, Goat for Azazel

- **TORAH SOURCE:** "Each and every man possesses many character traits. Each trait is very different and distant from the others. ..." (Rambam, Mishneh Torah, De'ot 1:1)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** People are very different from each other. We shouldn't try to get everybody to be the same. Except in this game.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole class.
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Everyone stands in a circle.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 5 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Everyone in a circle. There are 3 things a player can be:
 - A complainer: They raise their hands to the heavens and cry "oy, oy, oy!"
 - A red heifer: They bend forward, put their hands on their cheeks and go "Moouu"
 - A goat for Azazel: they put their fingers on their head like horns, and say "mehhh".

- On your sign, every player decides to become one of the three. The idea is for everyone to become the same, which obviously won't be the case, the first time. We re-do this until everyone is in sync.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - When is conformity valuable?
 - How did you choose who to copy?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Skill:** Coordination of a group without anyone giving instructions.

GAME 2: Kosher Hot Dog Stand

- **TORAH SOURCE:** "Between each trait and the contrasting trait at the other extreme, there are intermediate points, each distant from the other. ... The two extremes of each trait, which are at a distance from one another, do not reflect a proper path. It is not fitting that a man should behave in accordance with these extremes or teach them to himself." (Rambam, Mishneh Torah, De'ot 1:2-3)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** How we are influenced not only ourselves, but others. For example, sometimes when we're sad, it may bring the mood down for others or cause them to want to cheer us up and so be extra cheerful. How others are affected is up to them if they realize they're being affected.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 4 per scene, including one kosher hot dog vendor and three customers
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Desk, table, or some other form of physical separation to represent the hot dog stand.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** Should aim for about a minute per customer and no more than 3-4 minutes collectively for each set.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - 4 players are selected. Three are sent outside of the room.
 - One remains who will be the kosher hot dog vendor.
 - The class is asked to provide prompts about character traits.
 - The vendor selects one of the character traits without telling anyone.
 - The 3 other players are invited back in and line up on one side of the kosher hot dog stand. It is explained to them that the vendor will manifest some character trait and that each of them can respond by either trying to be more of that trait or the opposite of it.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - How did the different strategies produce different results in the interactions?
 - Do going to extremes ever make sense? Do you think there are any exceptions to the previously idea shared from Rambam?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Skill:** Sensitivity to the way other people's emotions and character traits may influence us.
 - **Attitude:** Belief that we have a choice in how we react to people behaving in a difficult way.

GAME 3: Thought Speech Action

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “Shammai taught: Receive everyone with a friendly face (panim)” (Pirkei Avot 1:15)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Some comment on the above teaching that the Hebrew word for face “panim” is always plural because there are always two sides to a face. Understood this way, Shammai is teaching that our outside should reflect our inside. But that’s not always so easy to accomplish. Layered storytelling relies on the fact that there is more going on with every character than what might appear on the surface by their actions. In this game, we will see how radically a story can change when an audience knows what’s going on beneath.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 3-4 per scene
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** place for audiences to sit and players to perform
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 3-4 minutes per scene
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Solicit prompts from the class like “setting”, “object”, “problem”, “goal”
 - Players are given 30 seconds to plan the scene
 - Players begin the scene
 - At any time any player can shout freeze and the other players freeze. That player narrates to the audience what their character is really thinking at this time. The audience knows but the other characters do not.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - Is it ever okay to act friendly and not mean it?
 - What happens to our actions when our thoughts and actions are not aligned?
 - What happens to our thoughts when our actions and thoughts are not aligned?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** Adopt the perspective of “what would people think if they knew the whole story?”
 - **Skill:** reflect on the motivations of a character beyond their actions.
 - **Knowledge:** Learn about the technique of first person narrative exposition.

GAME 4: Learn Modesty From a Cat

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “Rabbi Yoḥanan said: Even if the Torah had not been given, we would nonetheless have learned modesty from the cat, which covers its excrement, and that stealing is objectionable from the ant, which does not take grain from another ant, and forbidden relations from the dove, which is faithful to its partner, and proper relations from the rooster...” (Babylonian Talmud Eruvin 100b)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** We can learn good or bad character traits from everyone and everything around us. The passages above shows how the sages learned from nature various moral lessons. In acting, we can take on the persona of something without necessarily becoming that thing. Someone could embody a storm without literally wooshing around and raining on people.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 4-6

- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** A place for the players and the for the audience to watch.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 3-4 minutes per scene 1-2 minutes guessing
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Solicit suggestions from the class of different animals
 - Each player then decides for themselves what animal they are going to embody and choose either one or more good traits from that animal or one or more negative traits for that animal to emphasize. (note: they are not actually playing that animal)
 - After the scene the class is invited to guess who was what animal and say why.
 - The players end by explaining what animal they were, what trait(s) they were embodying and how that animal teaches that trait.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - What are some lessons you've learned from observing animals?
 - Is there something in the world (an animal, plant, object) you wish you were more like?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **attitude:** We can learn from nature all around us.
 - **Skill:** How to emulate the good character of another and realize how bad character traits may negatively influence us.

GAME 5: Ethical Will

- **TORAH SOURCE:** "Joshua the son of Perachia and Nitai the Arbelite received from them. Joshua the son of Perachia would say: "Assume for yourself a master, acquire for yourself a friend, and judge every man to the side of merit."" (Pirkei Avot 1:6)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Pirkei Avot (Ethics of our Fathers) is full of the catchphrases or life maxims of different sages. These aren't exactly their last words but they're the words that come to define them as people for thousands of years.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 2 at a time
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Two lines facing each other.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** total 5-8 minutes depending on size of class (rapidfire game)
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - One person steps forward from each line.
 - One player offers the name of a Jewish figure (Rabbi, poet, philosopher, political leader, etc.).
 - The other player invents (or simply says) a catchphrase they might have said given what they're known for.
 - Those players sit down in the audience and the next two players step forward.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**
 - What is the use of catchphrases or maxims? What are their limitations?
 - Do you know anyone personally who so strongly holds by a certain saying you'd call it their catchphrase or maxim?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

- **Attitude:** Get players to think about how individuals set an example through their life.
- **Skill:** Rapid response under pressure.
- **Knowledge:** Learn about different figures people share.

Gratitude

It is a mitzvah to start each day by saying:

“Modeh ani L’fanecha Melech Chai v’Kayam she-he-che-zarta bee nishmati b’chemla raba emunatecha.” “I thank You, living and enduring King, for You have graciously returned my soul within me. Great is Your faithfulness.”

Being grateful for everything we have changes the way we treat others, our possessions, and react to difficult situations. In improv, we learn how to be grateful for what people bring to a scene even if it was not quite what we had in mind.

GAME 1: Rehearsing Applause

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “And how do we know that the Holy One, blessed be He, gave His approval of Moses smashing the first set of tablets? Because it is said, “Which you have broken” (asher shibarta). Resh Lakish said, (Yishar kochecha sheshibarta) “All strength to you [i.e., congratulations] for breaking them.” ([Shabbos 87a](#))
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Performers feed off the energy of the audience. Being a good audience member is not a passive matter. Every member of the audience is an active contributor to the energy and atmosphere that makes improv enjoyable to others. (This is incidentally also true about how we act in class, synagogue, etc.). Today we’ll be focusing on gratitude so we’re going to start off with practicing some appreciation.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole class.
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** None
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 3-5 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** The teacher asks, “how would you show your appreciation if someone puts on...
 - A decent scene?
 - A great scene?
 - A fascinating scene?
 - A tear-jerking scene?
 - Etc.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - What signs do you look for in others to see if what you’re doing is appreciated/welcome or not?
 - What are the most common ways of expressing appreciation? How could these be improved?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** Develop an awareness of our responsibility as audience members.
 - **Skill:** Be exposed to different ways to express appreciation.

GAME 2: Borrowed Words

- **TORAH SOURCE:** "Thus you have learned: everyone who says a thing in the name of him who said it, brings deliverance into the world, as it is said: "And Esther told the king in Mordecai's name" (Esther 2:22)." (Pirkei Avot 6:6)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Citing sources is vital to maintaining the integrity of tradition. Additionally, in contrast to modern scholarly practice, who a scholar was in their personal life heavily affected the weight their words was given. In this game, we'll see the great advantage of bringing in other people's words.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 4-6 players
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** bucket, hat or some receptacle. Scraps of paper and writing utensil to hand out to everyone.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 3-4 minutes per scene
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - At the beginning of the class or section, hand out a scrap of paper to everyone and ask them to write a statement of wisdom on it. They could sign their own name or give the source they know it to come from.
 - The class should be canvassed for suggestions, such as a "problem", "genre", "colour", "object", or anything.
 - The players start a scene. At any random time, a player, the teacher, or someone from the audience can pick up the bucket and offer it to one of the players.
 - The player says "thank you," takes a scrap reads the wisdom in the name of the one who signed it. They must then apply that wisdom to the scene.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - How does our understanding of wisdom change when we try to apply it? What happened in the scenes?
 - How does what we say change when we have to sign our name to it?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Knowledge:** Players learn the content of wisdom that is important to their classmates (thus distributing the role of teacher)
 - **Attitude:** We can glean surprising perspective from sources when we strain to apply them in unexpected ways.
 - **Skill:** Accepting offers no matter how unrelated they may seem.

GAME 3: Who Needs This? Torah and the Circular Economy

- **TORAH SOURCE:** "And Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn." (Bereishis 32:25) "And Jacob was left. He had forgotten small bottles and returned for them. — [from Gen. Rabbah 77:2, Chullin 91a]" Rashi
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Jacob was experiencing one of the most stressful nights of his life and yet still he saw to it that none of his possessions would go to waste. We live in a time when more stuff is produced than ever before and yet people are still in need. How we treat our objects, especially when we are done with them is crucial to ensure that everyone gets what they need and nothing is wasted. In this game we'll see that every gift has a purpose if you only know how to receive it.

- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole class, 1 at a time.
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** bring some scraps of paper and pens to distribute to everyone as well as a receptacle to contain the suggestions in.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** Rapidfire
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Distribute paper and pens and ask everyone to write down an object they think is useless. Put all the suggestions in the receptacle. Shake the receptacle.
 - The whole class then lines up. One at a time, players step forward fish a paper out of the receptacle without looking. They then say as enthusiastically as possible “Thank you, this is just what I needed to...” and they proceed to tell a story of what they’re going to use this thing for.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - What is the spiritual dimension of recycling?
 - What message does it send when we throw something out that could be used?
 - Have you ever received a gift you thought you’d never use until much later when you realized you actually needed it?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** Appreciate the relationship between recycling and the character trait of gratitude.
 - **Knowledge:** Learn Rashi’s commentary on Jacob in a context that has practical applications for them.
 - **Skill:** Finding a use for suggestions or objects that seem otherwise useless.

GAME 4: More or Less

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “The Sages taught: Once, most of the month of Adar had passed but rain had still not fallen. They sent this message to Ḥoni HaMe’aggel: Pray, and rain will fall. He prayed, but no rain fell. He drew a circle in the dust and stood inside it, in the manner that the prophet Habakkuk did, as it is stated: “And I will stand upon my watch and set myself upon the tower...” Ḥoni said before God: Master of the Universe, Your children have turned their faces toward me, as I am like a member of Your household. Therefore, I take an oath by Your great name that I will not move from here until you have mercy upon Your children and answer their prayers for rain. Rain began to trickle down, but only in small droplets. His students said to him: Rabbi, we have seen that you can perform great wonders, but this quantity of rain is not enough to ensure that we will not die. It appears to us that a small amount of rain is falling only to enable you to dissolve your oath, but it is not nearly enough to save us. Ḥoni said to God: I did not ask for this, but for rain to fill the cisterns, ditches, and caves. Rain began to fall furiously, until each and every drop was as big as the mouth of a barrel, and the Sages estimated that no drop was less than a *log* in size. His students said to him: Rabbi, we have seen that you can call on God to perform miracles and we will not die, but now it appears to us that rain is falling only to destroy the world. Ḥoni again said before God: I did not ask for this harmful rain either, but for rain of benevolence, blessing, and generosity. Subsequently, the rains fell in their standard manner, until all of the people sought higher ground and ascended to the Temple Mount due to the rain. They said to him: Rabbi, just

as you prayed that the rains should fall, so too, pray that they should stop. He said to them: This is the tradition that I received, that one does not pray over an excess of good. (Babylonian Talmud, Taanit 23a)

- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Too much of a good thing is a bad thing but it can make for a great scene! In this game we'll explore how to moderate different elements of a scene.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 6-8
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Helpful to have boxes props or other things on hand
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 3-4 minutes per scene
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Class is solicited for a problem, character trait, good thing, or something of that nature.
 - Players begin a scene with the above suggestions. At random intervals, any player can stop and ask the audience if there's too much or too little of a particular thing (e.g. energy, pace of scene, number of characters, etc.).
 - Based on the prevailing audience sentiment (e.g. shouting more too much or too little), the scene then resumes and an adjustment to that thing is immediately made with consequences for the story (e.g. fewer characters means someone suddenly dies or must leave).
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - How do you know when you have too much of a good thing?
 - How do read the audience's reaction to know when to adjust something?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** Appreciating the role of moderation even in what works for us.
 - **Skill:** Reading audience reactions.
 - **Knowledge:** Honi story.

GAME 5: I appreciate you!

- **TORAH SOURCE:** "A person should make an accounting with himself when he feels love, attachment, and yearning for one who, he thinks, has similar feelings toward him, as it is written: "As in water face answers to face, so the heart of man to man" (Mishlei 27:19)." (Rabbi Bachya ibn Paquda, Duties of the Heart)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** We work together better when we appreciate each other. This is true in life as in improv. We will therefore take a moment to the person on each side of us and say something we appreciate about that person.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole class.
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Sitting or standing in one or more straight lines.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 3-5 minutes (including discussion)
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Take a moment to think. Turn to a person on your left and share something you appreciate about them, they should respond alike. Afterwards do the same on your right.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - Why don't we always tell people what we appreciate about them?
 - What does showing appreciation do to a relationship?

- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

- **Attitude:** Develop a more positive relationship with classmates
- **Skill:** Finding things on the spot to express gratitude about someone.
- **Knowledge:** Learn more about what their peers appreciate about them.

Humility

Humility is not just one among many good character traits in Rabbinic thought. Rather, it is the character trait par excellence, because it makes room for Hashem in our lives. To the extent that a person is full of pride, they are misattributing success and at risk of making more serious spiritual errors as well. Often when we think of actors, we think of celebrities who hog the spotlight. But the truth is a good improv artist is not someone who draws all the attention to themselves, it's someone who does what needs to be done in a scene and is willing to support someone else's vision even if it conflicts with their own. This leads to a better scene and a better experience overall.

GAME 1: Everyone's Accomplishments

- **TORAH SOURCE:** Mount Sinai was chosen as the site of the giving of the Torah because it was the lowest of the mountains that could have been chosen, showing the importance of humility as a prerequisite for acquiring the Torah. But it was also a mountain. Humility is not denying the truth of our skills and accomplishments but recognizing that these are Divine gifts. (based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe's Likkutei Sichot, vol.2)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Part of humility is being able to share in other people's success and hold other people up. In improv that's crucial because someone may be leading a scene and you totally disagree with the direction they're going in and think you have a better idea. Wanting the scene to go well for other people is a crucial character trait.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole class
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Sitting in chairs in a circle. One person stands in the middle.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 5 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - The person in the middle shares something they did recently that they are proud of (e.g. they studied something, they helped someone in a particular way, they won a competition).
 - Other people who have done the same thing at some time get up and everyone has to run to find a seat.
 - Whoever hasn't found a seat goes in the middle and repeats the process.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - How do you celebrate other people's wins?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** Emphasizing other people's accomplishments doesn't take away from your own.

- **Knowledge:** Students learn about each other.

GAME 2: Setting the Stage

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “the Patriarchs are truly the [divine] chariot.” (Bereishit Rabbah 47:6)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** When midrashic sources refer to the righteous as “chariots” it means they go where G-d instructs them to go. The idea of becoming an object also implies a single-minded dedication to a particular purpose when it is needed. There are many opportunities when building an environment within a scene to play the role of an object. This enriches the audiences experience and gives other actors more to work with when playing out a story.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 4+
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** The more room for the scene the better, a place for the audience, and a place for 3+ of players to be on standby to jump into the scene.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 1-2 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - One player starts an activity that implies some kind of location
 - Other players jump in to fill out the objects of that location
 - The player then interacts, as one would normally, with the objects in that location, and may move the story along in a way that changes the setting.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS L:**
 - What was it like to be a prop? How did you think about doing your job well?
 - How did you figure out what was needed in the scene?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** It’s ok not to be the leading actor.
 - **Skill:** Playing objects with the same care and attention as human characters.

GAME 3: Eulogy/Hesped

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “The wise man said “days are parchment. Write upon them what you wish to be remembered for.” (Rabbi Bachya ibn Paquda)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Our lives tell a story that is made up of many stories. These stories are the evidence we leave behind of who we are. In improv too, narrative is sometimes just an exposition of character.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 3-4 players
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Optional podium for the speaker.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 3-4 minutes per character
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - The audience is canvassed for suggestions of things they want to be remembered for. (if the class does not know each other or are uncomfortable sharing such things, you can change the prompt to “things people wish to be remembered for”.)
 - The players confer to choose among the suggestions, each player focusing on one.

- Each player takes turns giving a eulogy (hesped) in which they relay a short story (~1 minute) about the deceased that exemplifies that thing the deceased individual should be remembered for. The other players act it out.
- **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - How might contemplating our legacy affect what we choose to focus on in life?
 - How much time do people spend on the kind of stories people chose to share?
 - Were there any examples of things people might want to be remembered for that you were surprised by?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** Put what seems urgent and immediately important in the context of one's whole life.
 - **Skill:** How to tell stories about others to honour their legacy.

GAME 4: Untold Stories

- **TORAH SOURCE:** "Humility is not what it is sometimes taken to be – a low estimate of oneself. That is false or counterfeit humility. True humility is mindlessness of self. An anav (the biblical word used in this chapter) is one who never thinks about himself because he has more important things to think about. I once heard someone say about a religious leader: "He took God so seriously that he didn't need to take himself seriously at all." That is biblical humility." (Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, [Covenant and Conversation](#))
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** In the article the above quote is taken from, Rabbi Sacks connects the disintegration of community to the desire for individuality and the pursuit of fame and ultimately the death of humility. In improv we can practice bringing humility back by playing roles that won't make us famous.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 6-8 players
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** place for scene and place for audience
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 4-8 minutes per scene (including 1-2 minutes interview)
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - The audience is asked for suggestions of an act of kindness or good act they saw someone do that didn't get that person famous.
 - The players confer and pick someone.
 - That person is invited on stage and 1-2 of the players interview them to learn more about the story, describing it in as vivid details as possible (i.e. where was it? What time of year? How did it smell? Where there sounds around?)
 - The players then have 30 seconds to plan.
 - They put on one or more episodes either enacting what the person described, expanding on it, based upon it, etc. Particular attention should be paid to actors filling in the soundscape and objects as described by the person.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - How does the drive to be recognized or famous lead people astray?
 - What other kinds of validation can we seek that would encourage us to do more of what we know is right?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

- **Attitude:** Value doing mitzvot anonymously.
- **Knowledge:** Learning about acts of kindness their peers have witnessed.
- **Skill:** Building soundscape and environment.

GAME 5: Gnat

- **TORAH SOURCE:** Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish “If a person is meritorious, it is said to him: ‘You preceded the ministering angels’; if not, it is said to him: ‘A fly preceded you, a gnat preceded you, this earthworm preceded you.’” (Berishit Rabbah 8:1)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** It is sometimes helpful to be reminded of what we have in common with even the humblest of animals. This is a silly little game to do just that.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole class.
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Bring a picture of a gnat to show people
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 2-3 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Teacher shows the picture of the gnat to everyone.
 - People randomly form the body of a gnat, e.g. by tucking their hands under their torso and bending forward.
 - The two nearest people then go to the side and act as the wings flapping.
 - Then everyone repeats, until all in unison, “gnat, gnat, gnat”.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - How can contemplating the natural world make us humbler?
 - What is our place in the order of creation?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** Willingness to be a little silly even in front of peers.
 - **Skill:** How to gain a healthy perspective about how negative actions degrade us.

Silence

Jews have been called the People of the Book, but Jews don’t like to read quietly! Whether it’s loudly arguing a point of Jewish law or saying goodbye and refusing to leave, Jews have a reputation for talking... a lot. But the Torah also contains a tradition recognizing that the great power of speech means “words should be weighed and not counted” and that silence should be the default unless there’s a reason to speak.

GAME 1: Turn up the temperature

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “Shimon, his son, used to say: all my days I grew up among the sages, and I have found nothing better for a person than silence. Study is not the most important thing, but actions; whoever indulges in too many words brings about sin.” (Pirkei Avot 1:17)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** We can communicate a lot without ever saying a single word. That’s exactly what we’ll do in this game.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole class.

- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** An open space in which the whole class can walk around following no particular pattern or form.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 5 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - At first, let everyone walk around in whatever pattern (like atoms floating around) in silence.
 - The instructor then calls out a simple action people can do, either while stopping in place or as they continue to walk (e.g. flying like a bird, replacing a car tire, making a sandwich) in silence.
 - After they've done that action for 5-10 seconds, call out a number between 1-10. The higher the number, the more detailed their actions.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - What did you do to communicate better what you were doing without saying anything?
 - How can our body language communicate things unintentionally?
- **Learning objectives:**
 - **Skill:** Greater awareness of non-verbal communication.

GAME 2: 3 verses (pesukim)

- **TORAH SOURCE:** the minimum number of verses for an Aliyah is 3 verses (provide an example of three verses with an enormous amount of detail) (Talmud Bavli, Megillah 21b)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** We don't need to talk a lot to say a lot. In this game, you will establish as much of the story as you can (e.g. characters, relationships, motivation, setting, problem, etc.) in just 3 lines.
NUMBER OF PLAYERS: 2
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** N/A (boxes optional)
LENGTH OF TIME: depends on number of students could either debrief after each scene or go rapid fire
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Optional: solicit prompts for stories in Tanakh or personalities in Tanakh
 - Two players huddle for 8 seconds. They decide between them who will go first.
 - two players can set up physically however they like.
 - Players take turns speaking
 - After third line they're cut off
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - Why do you think the Torah is very detailed about some things (like the building of the Temple) and not at all about others?
 - How does having limited speech affect what you say?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Skill:** How to accomplish much with few words.
 - **Knowledge:** A greater awareness of the essential elements of narrative.

GAME 3: Elephant in the Room

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “The Gemara relates: Rabbi Yehuda, a man of Kefar Gibboraya, and some say he was a man of Kefar Gibbor Hayil, taught: What is the meaning of that which is written: “For You silence is praise” (Psalms 65:2)? The best remedy of all is silence, i.e., the optimum form of praising God is silence. The Gemara relates: When Rav Dimi came from Eretz Israel to Babylonia, he said: In the West, Eretz Yisrael, they say an adage: If a word is worth one sela, silence is worth two.” (Talmud Bavli, Megillah 18a)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Sometimes the thing most pressing on us is what we do not say or nobody articulates. In theatre, this is referred to as an absent presence.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 3-4
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Space for audience and actors
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 3-4 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Canvas the audience for a problem people don’t like to talk about.
 - The players put on a scene in which the fact of not talking about that issue is driving the action.
 - The scene resolves in some way through the voicing of the issue.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - When is it inappropriate to stay silent?
 - Why are some problems harder to talk about than others?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Skill:** Show don’t tell.
 - **Attitude:** Speak up when something is not right!

GAME 4: Good for the Body

- **TORAH SOURCE:** Shimon, his son, says "All my days I grew up among the Sages, and I did not find anything better for the body except silence. And the exposition [of Torah] is not what is essential, but the action. And whoever increases words brings sin." (Pirkei Avot 1:17)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** When we can’t speak, we’re forced to express ourselves through actions. In improv, this is a cardinal rule, “show don’t tell!” In this fun exercise we’re going to get a bit of physical exercise while practicing showing rather than telling.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole class in pairs.
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Room should have as much open space as possible.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 3-5 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Class is split into pairs.
 - Player 1 chases player 2.
 - Player 2 mimes obstacles and player 1 must imitate and overcome those same obstacles (e.g. pretend there’s a fence, or quicksand).
 - Once Player 1 catches player 2 the roles are reversed until time runs out.

- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** [can have a longer discussion as it's a shorter game]
 - How can we make a habit of speaking through action?
 - Why does Rabbi Shimon talk about advantage to the body? What is the advantage of silence for one's body?
 - How do we create obstacles for ourself and others in life when we remain silent?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:** Mainly about energy levels.
 - **Skill:** Miming.
 - **Attitude:** Thinking about action as a primary means of communication.

GAME 5: Niggun Circle

- **TORAH SOURCE:** ““If words are the pen of the heart, then melody is the pen of the soul.” (Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, Alter Rebbe)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Many different Jewish traditions contain wordless melodies, called niggunim. These songs can be much easier to join along for individuals who may not share a common language. They express profound truths that cannot be clearly stated in words.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole class
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Sit in a circle.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 5-10 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Someone starts a simple melody. Everybody copies it and repeats it until someone feels like adding a few notes.
 - **ALTERNATIVE:** If class is shy, instructor can begin with a bar of an existing niggun. **OPTIONAL:** Ask everyone to close their eyes.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - Why is singing so important in Judaism?
 - How can we make Jewish music more accessible to others?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** Comfort with singing and fostering judgment-free space.

Stronger Together

One cannot be a Jew alone. Whether it's the need to live in a Jewish community or the imperative to study with a chevruta (partner), Jewish sources are clear that we are stronger together. In improv, the better you can listen and support others the better the show, much more so than hogging all the glory as the “star”.

GAME 1: Three-fold chain

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “a three fold chain is not easily broken”.
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** This line is used to refer to three generations of leadership (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob). Preserving a quality across generations requires the active cultivation of memory. In this game, we will practice not losing the plot.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** full group

- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** stand in a circle
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 5 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Someone states the first in a set of at least three in Torah (e.g. three holidays, three patriarchs, etc.) they then point to someone who says the next thing until the set is complete.
 - Once the set is complete, the last person points back at the first person and repeats.
 - Once a chain has been completed, someone outside the chain starts a new set and can do so by pointing at anyone including those already in a chain. They must now carry on both chains and repeating.
 - This is repeated until everyone is in at least three chains.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - How were you affected by others in the chain?
 - How are you affected by those around you in your Jewish practice?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Skill:** Memory

GAME 2: Yes, Let's

- **TORAH SOURCE:** "For one commandment leads to another commandment, and transgression leads to another transgression; For the reward for performing a commandment is another commandment and the reward for committing a transgression is a transgression. (Pirkei Avot 4:2)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** We all have something to contribute to any activity, but in order for people to make their contribution, others need to be willing to listen. This is one of the reasons that one mitzvah leads to another because if you associate yourself with people doing mitzvahs, it will naturally lead to them offering you other opportunities to do mitzvahs.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole class
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Space for the scene and space for the other players to stand in line.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 10-12 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - The class is canvassed for suggestions of a particular mitzvah (e.g. tzedakah, tefillin, light shabbat candles).
 - Someone starts a scene in which they say "Let's do X" selecting one of the mitzvahs and applying it in a particular way. They start acting that out.
 - Then the next person jumps in and suggests a way to enhance the mitzvah or another mitzvah that naturally flows from the first (e.g. if they're in the middle of going to visit someone who is sick, they can give tzedakah on the way, etc.).
 - Once they make their suggestion, the existing players on the stage say "Yes, let's..." and they all start acting out that mitzvah.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - How do you see one mitzvah lead to another in your life?

- Do you always notice when someone offers you the opportunity to do a mitzvah? If not, why not?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Skills:** How to recognize and accept offers to do mitzvot
 - **Knowledge:** One mitzvah leads to another

GAME 3: Strange Dream

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “We have learned that when a man has had a dream, he should unburden himself of it before men who are his friends so that they should express to him their good wishes and give utterance to words of good omen. Desire, which is Thought, is the beginning of all things, and Utterance is the completion; and so a deep symbolism will in this way have been effected, and all will have been made good. Thus a man’s friends should affirm the good interpretation, and so all will be well.” (Zohar, Mikeitz 9:152)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** We can sometimes get stuck in our own heads, spiralling in negative interpretations of our thoughts. One of the things we can do as good friends is to share in people’s anxieties so we can give positive spins on situations they may be uncertain of. Similarly, in improv, when someone says something, it rarely needs to be taken in just one way and could be portrayed multiple ways.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 4-6 players
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** space for players, place for the rest of the class to watch.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** Scenes should be 3-4 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Class is solicited for prompts from bad dreams they’ve had (or really any category of prompt).
 - The players then confer to select a prompt and plan.
 - The scene opens with Player 1 relaying a bad dream he had last night to his or her friend, Player 2.
 - The other players should portray the bad dream according to the tone and in the way dictated by player 1.
 - After Player 1 has relayed their scene, Player 2, reassuringly, should say something to the effect of, “Don’t worry, here’s what it means,”.
 - The other players should portray this interpretation.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - How does giving a positive interpretation of events help us deal with them?
 - How does talking with friends help us process events?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** Encourage people to open up to their friends about anxieties.
 - **Skill:** Give positive interpretations of ambiguous or apparently negative events.

GAME 4: Tzitzit Scenes

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “The L-rd spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the children of Israel and you shall say to them, that they shall make for themselves fringes on the corners of their

garments, throughout their generations, and they shall affix a thread of sky blue [wool] on the fringe of each corner. This shall be fringes for you, and when you see them, you will remember all the commandments of the L-rd to perform them, and you shall not wander after your hearts and after your eyes after which you are going astray.” (Num 15:37-29)

- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Commentators have pointed out that the way in which tzitzit are tied represent the 613 mitzvot. Similarly, good storytelling involves weaving together apparently disparate threads.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 6-15 players
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** It is worthwhile to have boxes and chairs available.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 15-20 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Jewish related prompts are solicited by the class (e.g. foods, roles, communities, mitzvahs, etc.).
 - Based on the size of your class, decide how many players there will be in any given “run”.
 - Two players start a scene.
 - At any time, another player can yell cut. They can pull one or more other players in with them and start a new scene.
 - By the third scene, there should be an effort to weave together the previous scenes, until by the 5th scene (equivalent to the 5 double knots of the tzitzit) all the scenes form a unified whole.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - Do you ever feel like the various Jewish practices in your life are separate from each other or your life more broadly? Do you ever feel like it’s all connected? What’s the difference?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** Our lives should feel whole and Jewish practices are meant to all reinforce each other.
 - **Knowledge:** Significance of tzitzit and number of knots.
 - **Skills:** Storytelling and including others.

GAME 5: A Complete set

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “With respect to the four species of the lulav: (The lulav, etrog, myrtle, and willow (see Leviticus 23:40)) ... failure to bring each of the components prevents fulfillment of the mitzva with the others. (Talmud Bavli, Menahot 27a)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** The four species represent different kinds of Jews. Ultimately, we need each other even though we’re different as we’re not complete without each other.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole class
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Stand in a circle or in a line. As sets are completed, they can go into a separate space.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 5-10 minutes

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** In this game, each person will say something and then the next person will say something else that goes in that set until the set is complete. The group must continue until everyone is included in a set. If anyone is left out at the end, it begins again. For example, menorah, candle, light, match, etc. After each person, if you believe something is still missing from the set, you call out “incomplete”. If only one person called out incomplete, that person can say what is missing and join that set.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - Were there times in which you thought a set was complete but something was missing?
 - How did you try to make room for others to join your set?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** Everyone is essential.
 - **Content:** Learn sets in Judaism from the perspective of halachic completeness.

Mitzvot

Judaism is sometimes referred to as a religion of action. While there are 613 mitzvahs we could choose from, this section focuses on just three that are referred to as the pillars of the world: tefillah/avodah (prayer), tzedakah (justice/charity), and Torah (study).

Prayer (Tefillah)

Game #1: Action syllables

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “There are a number of halachic and ritual matters where one is required to stand. For example, one is required to stand during the Shemoneh Esrei,[1] when one receives an aliya, or when an aged person or Torah scholar passes by. So too, it was actually forbidden to sit anywhere in the courtyard of the Beit Hamikdash.[2] What is unclear, however, is whether leaning is considered to be standing, sitting, both, or neither.” ([Rabbi Ari Enkin](#))
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Prayer is an embodied experience, when we speak, therefore, we must be mindful of what we are expressing with our entire bodies.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole class.
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Enough room for the class to stand or sit in a circle.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 3-5 minutes depending on size of group
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Each person introduce themselves do an action for each syllable.
 - The group then repeats the name and actions.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - What do you think your body language or those of others you see, conveys during prayer?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Knowledge:** Learn the names of other participants.
 - **Skill:** Coordinating speech with action, a fundamental element of integrity.

Game #2: Freeze Singing

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD, and spoke, saying: I will sing unto the LORD, for He is highly exalted;” (Exodus 15:1)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** There are different views expressed in Talmud regarding how Moses led the Jews in song (e.g. call and repeat, call and answer, start off sentence and finish sentence). There are radically different customs across different communities with respect to how rigid leadership in prayer is. These vary from approaches that make the prayer leader essentially a performer to a passive audience to far more shared responsibility not only for allotted tasks but for spontaneous expression.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole class
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Enough space to sit or stand in a circle.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 3-5 minutes for singing unless there is sustained momentum to go longer.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Stand/Sit in a circle.
 - One person volunteers to go to the centre or from their place starts singing.
 - Others join along in the singing.
 - At some point in the singing someone taps them to take over and starts singing.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - How does the prayer of those around us influence our prayer? What does this mean for what we can expect and our responsibility in community?
 - What are the pros and cons of having set roles from the beginning in prayer?
 - How does prayer change when there are multiple people leading?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Skill:** Assuming leadership spontaneously within a scene.
 - **Attitude:** Distributed leadership is natural.

Game #3: It's All in the Script, Right? (15-20 minutes)

- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** In the beginning prayer was a spontaneous act, a fluent conversation in Hebrew. Over time, the language and the eloquence was lost that necessitated a more formalized approach. Nevertheless, even as the approach formalized, the essentially personal and conversational nature of prayer never completely left.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 2
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Standard place for performers and audience.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 2-3 minutes per scene (2-3 minutes prep)
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Two teams of two are selected.
 - Each team is given the same simple script (see Appendix A). Copies are also handed out to the audience.

- They are told to go out and prepare it (~3 minutes).
- The first team comes and presents the scene while the second team is still away. Then the second team comes and presents it.
- The audience is asked to point out the differences between the presentations and how they would have done it as well. A list is written down of all the ways they differed.
- The players are asked to explain their interpretive choices.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - How does this list of differences between the two performances map on to the discretion we have as people praying “with a script”?
 - What is our interpretation of the prayers and how does that inform the choices we make in praying?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Knowledge:** Even though the prayers may be written down, there’s enormous discretion in how they’re presented.

Activity #4a: Just Gibberish

- **TORAH SOURCE:** Rambam, among others, posits that because intent is a requirement for halachically valid prayers, it’s preferable to pray in a language you understand. On the other hand, it is preferable to pray in Hebrew, G-d’s holy language with which he created the world. There is only one way to satisfy both criteria and that is to understand Hebrew. But if that’s not possible, let’s focus on how to get the most of the common practice of praying in Hebrew anyway.
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** When we lose the ability to connect with the words we are saying, we may give up on the act of communicating, but the truth is words are just the surface of how and what we communicate. So in this game we will be focusing on just how much can be accomplished even if we were speaking complete gibberish.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 3-4
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** ordinary space for performers and audience.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 3-4 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Ask for a suggestion from the audience, e.g. setting, theme, story, etc. One the suggestions will be one of the blessings of the amidah (siddurim will be handed out for this purpose).
 - They play out the scene but can only use gibberish.
 - Repeat a few times.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - How do we communicate our prayers when we don’t understand what we’re saying?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:** Even if we don’t understand the words on the page we can communicate a lot.

Activity #4b: Bartender (modified)

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “Away from me, all you evildoers, for GOD heeds the sound of my weeping. (Psalm 6) “...And every sick man who prays by this Psalm is able to say this, for he is confident that God will hear his prayer if he prays with a broken and contrite heart.” (Radak on Psalm 6)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Many Torah sources emphasize prayer as a vehicle to share one’s deepest troubles. Indeed the very laws of prayer are learnt from Chana, who was so intense in her prayers for a child that the High Priest accused her of being drunk. In this game, we will work on pouring out our hearts.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 2
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** two chair and a small table may help.
- **TIME:** 3-4 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - The audience is asked for suggestions of life problems inspired by the Amidah.
 - One player sings a song expressing that life problem. The other player sings a song back offering a solution.
 - The roles rotate (i.e. next player replaces problem person, problem person becomes bartender).
 - **OPTIONAL:** If the participants are not particularly musical, the scene can be done without singing.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - How can we make room in prayer for the expression of our problems?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** Prayer as an opportunity to pour out one’s heart and discuss one’s problems. The Amidah as an exploration of different problems in life.

Activity #5: Imitation

- **Torah Source:** “Be as bold as a leopard, as light as an eagle, as strong as a lion and as swift as a deer, to do the will of your Father in heaven.” (Pirkei Avot 5:20)
- **Introductory remarks:** Imitation is the highest form of flattery. Emulation is the highest form of education. Some have the custom of imitating the sounds of animals during the Chad Gadya song. [Rabbi Naftali Reich](#) suggests there might be a deeper message to this practice.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole class
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Standing in a circle
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 3-5 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Invite people to make different animal calls that they might be particularly good at. (If people are shy, consider prompting by asking who has a dog or a cat and asking them specifically how would they sound if X happened). After each person makes the call, the rest of the class responds.
 - Expand it out from animal sounds to other sounds people can make (e.g. by stomping to represent a storm).

- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS :**
 - What is your favourite sound in nature?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** Appreciate the music of nature. Paying attention to its subtleties.

Tzedakah

It is commonly observed that the word “tzedakah” does not mean charity but justice or righteousness. Fundamentally, it’s about giving people their due. But unlike charity which a person can receive, justice is not something received but a state created. In improv as well by ceding the stage to others when they need it, we create space not only for them to thrive but for the scene for everyone to be better.

GAME 1: Circle of Acceptance

- **TORAH SOURCE:** Rav Zalman Sorotzkin taught that the one who accepts tzedakah does a favour for the one who gives tzedakah and the one who gives tzedakah does a favour for the one who receives tzedakah. Only when both recognize and appreciate that the other has done a favour for them is the mitzvah truly complete.
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** In a scene, when a player makes an offer to another player, they are both doing something for them (i.e. giving them direction about how to advance the scene or giving them an opportunity to shine), and receiving something from them (when the other person accepts the offer they are fundamentally realizing the first person’s vision for the scene). This parallels in some ways the dynamic Rav Sorotzkin describes and a scene benefits when both players realize this.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole group
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** stands in a circle. No equipment needed
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 5-10 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Choose someone to start. That person makes a small gesture and sound. The person to their left or right (choose ahead of time), then tries to copy them exactly. If there are any changes however, the next person will accept those changes and do it with the changes.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - Do you find it easy to accept help? If not, why not?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - Attitude: Even if we don’t like how things have changed, it’s important to accept and decide how we will respond rather than stew.

GAME 2: How I got Here

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “The mishna cites another reason Adam the first man was created alone: And this was done due to the importance of maintaining peace among people, so that one person will not say to another: My father, i.e., progenitor, is greater than your father.” (Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 37a)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Everyone has a story and the Torah emphasizes that no matter what the current difficult circumstances of individuals, we ultimately come from a

place of unity and richness. Recognizing where people come from is not only important when giving tzedaka, but understanding that characters come from somewhere is key to effective storytelling.

- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 6-8 players
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Boxes and other props can be helpful.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 3-4 minutes per scene
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Prompts are solicited from the class such as things that people need or things that people lack or issues that people face that they need help with.
 - Two players start a scene in which one player is in a bad state in need of that help.
 - At some point, the other player makes an insensitive comment and the player in trouble says “I wasn’t always this way, I used to be X....”.
 - At this point the players spin around and other players step in putting on a sequence of short flashback scenes showing the individual’s rise or fall.
 - The flashback scenes should ultimately end by coming back to the original scene and show how the person who made the insensitive comment reacts to this revelation (as if they had just been told this whole story shown by the scenes).
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS :**
 - How does knowing someone’s backstory help us help them better?
 - What effect does it have when we don’t know someone’s backstory when they need help?
- **Learning objectives:**
 - **Attitude:** Build empathy for individuals in need.
 - **Skill:** Scene transitions and planning narrative arc.

GAME 3: 180 Guests!

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “Yossei the son of Yochanan of Jerusalem would say: Let your home be wide open, and let the poor be members of your household.”
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** The more guests we have, the greater the blessing! In this game, we’ll come up with some witty replies to objections to serving guests.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 2
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Paper and pens for everyone and a receptacle.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 1-2 minute per scene
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Pass out the paper and pens and ask people to write down types of people (e.g. firefighters, paupers, redheads)
 - Player 1 plays a child of Player 2.
 - Player 1 selects a scrap of paper from the receptacle and says to Player 2 “I’ve invited 180 [insert answer from paper] to Shabbos dinner and they’re waiting outside.”
 - Player 2 reacts (perhaps mortified perhaps sympathetic) that “it won’t be possible to have 180 x over for Shabbos dinner because...” and gives a reason specific to that group.

- Player 1 then explains why in fact why it is possible or how the issue can be accommodated.
- If there's time Player 2 can push back.
- The scene ends when a plan is made to host all 180 x.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS :**
 - What's a time when you stretched to accommodate someone? How did it work out?
 - When our means to host others is genuinely limited, how else can we support people who might be lonely?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** Where there's a will there's a way. In particular, where some group is initially considered undesirable for some reason one has to especially respond with creativity.
 - **Skill:** Figure out how to accommodate large groups.

GAME 4: Inside Out

- **TORAH SOURCE:** "If one gives tzedaka while expressing a begrudging face one doesn't get any mitzvah even if he gave a very large sum of money. Rather, one is obligated to give him with a nice expression, happiness, empathy for his plight, and with words of encouragement." ([Halachipedia](#) citing several sources)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** The impact we have on people in how we give tzedaka can sometimes be as important as the giving itself. This is true of many mitzvahs in different ways, but sometimes it's hard to know exactly how what's happening is affecting others. In theatre, there are devices such as monologues to reveal the inner-experience of characters. This game focuses on the inner experience of stories.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 3-5
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** space for the players and space for the audience.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 3-4 minutes per scene
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Suggestions are canvassed from the class (it can be anything!).
 - The players stand in a line and one begins to speak telling the story of the scene from their character's perspective.
 - Other players can speak in some sequence or interspersed each telling the same story from their character's perspective.
 - Players should be sure to add comments about how their characters are experiencing the story as it unfolds.
 - As each player tells the story it should unfold more and to the greatest extent possible characters should cross-reference each other and incorporate what other players have said.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - How do we express our inner experience without using words?
 - How does paying attention to what others are expressing help us act ethically?
 - Can you think of mitzvahs besides tzedakah that emphasize the emotion you express as you do it?

- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** The emotional dimensions of mitzvot are important.
 - **Skill:** Narrative exposition.
 - **Knowledge:** Halacha of tzedakah.

GAME 5: Stumbling Blocks Before the Blind

- **TORAH SOURCE:** “You shall not insult the deaf, or place a stumbling block before the blind. You shall fear your God: I am the LORD.” (Lev 19:14) “Cursed be he who misdirects a blind on his way. And all the people shall say: Amen.” (Deut 27:18) Rashi comments “Before a person who is “blind” regarding a matter, you shall not give advice that is improper for him. [For instance,] do not say to someone, “Sell your field and buy a donkey [with the proceeds],” while [in truth,] you plan to cheat him since you yourself will take it from him [by lending him money and taking the donkey as collateral. He will not be able to take the field because a previous creditor has a lien on it.] [Torath Kohanim 19:34]”.
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Especially in our complicated modern world, we rely on a lot of different people for advice, and when it comes to getting around we rely heavily on GPS systems like Google Maps or Waze. In this quick game, we’ll see that in practice.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole class
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Whole room used, some objects to be used as obstacles, but care should be taken that it’s not so crowded as to create a danger.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 4-8 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Send someone outside the room. When they’re gone, put a bunch of obstacles all around the room (e.g. chairs, garbage cans, boxes, etc.). Someone should blindfold the person who went outside. They are then brought back in and spun around. They are trying to get to a selected point in the room and the class as a whole must guide them around the obstacles.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - Who do you rely on for advice? How do you know you can trust them?
 - Do others ever rely on you for advice? How do you ensure your advice is appropriate for them?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** Recognizing our fundamental condition of interdependence.
 - **Skill:** Teamwork in a very collective task.

Torah Study

Unlike other religions that posit it is possible to gain knowledge through direct, immediate, and ecstatic experience of the divine, Torah study is always a collective endeavour, whether across generations, in community, through translation. These games will explore the various roles transmission plays in the act of Torah study.

GAME 1: Alephbet Circle

- **TORAH SOURCE:** At the age of 40, Akiva started at the very beginning, learning the Hebrew alphabet alongside his son. In fact, they even shared a writing tablet. Intrigued and excited, he continued learning until he had mastered the entire Torah. (Avot d'Rabbi Natan 6:2)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** The alephbet is the foundation of studying Torah in its original. But more than just knowing the alephbet is appreciating its order. We are each a letter in the Torah which represents our unique perspective in Torah study.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole class
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Stand in a circle.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 5 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** One person says aleph then throws it to the next person who says bet as quickly as possible. The goal is to get to taf as quickly as possible. If anyone hesitates it restarts. If there is concern that members of the class do not all know the alephbet, then you can begin with an alephbet song as a refresher.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS :**
 - How do you think different alphabets affect different cultures?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** Make people feel like they have a unique contribution to make to the group, without them nothing moves forward.
 - **Knowledge:** Reinforce the order of the alephbet, and for those with more advanced knowledge to call their attention back to the basics.

GAME 2: Lost Tradition

- **TORAH SOURCE:** Moses stepped back until he found himself standing in the 18th row of Rabbi Akiva's class. You see, the students were arranged in this class by order of their understanding. It seems the only thing left after the eighteenth row was out in the hallway. So Moses stood there and listened—and was unable to follow a thing that was said. He became weak with despair. Until finally, the story tells, a ruling came up for which Rabbi Akiva could provide no source. A student asked of Rabbi Akiva, "Where do you learn this from?" Rabbi Akiva responded, "This is an oral tradition passed down from Moses." By those words, Moses was set at ease. (Talmud Bavli, Menachot 29b as retold on Chabad.org)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Sometimes we don't understand something the sages said. Rather than just dismissing it, we have a lot to gain by trying to understand what they could mean that would make what they're saying true.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 2
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Provide a printed copy of 3 scripts for a 2 minute scene to one of each pair of players.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 1 minutes per scene
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** One player is given a script, the other player is not. Whatever the player with the script says, the player without the script must justify it and move the scene forward.

- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- What's an example of a Torah source that seemed baffling to you until someone explained it?
- How do you think approaching your Torah study like the actor without a script would change your Torah study?

- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

- **Attitude:** Become less dismissive of Torah sources that aren't immediately understood.
- **Skill:** Develop patterns of thinking that work backwards from the truth of what the other says.

Sample Script

- Yankl: I can't believe it's raining! The weather report said it would be a sunny day.
- Shmuel: BLANK
- Yankl: Shmuel, I see you have an umbrella, but you're not opening it. Why not?
- Shmuel: BLANK
- Yankl: Well then why did you bring it?
- Shmuel: BLANK
- Yankl: Well at this rate we're going to be late for the bris.
- Shmuel: BLANK
- Yankl: Wait a minute, you don't have the knife!
- END SCENE

GAME 3: You Know What, You're Right!

- **TORAH SOURCE:**

- "Every dispute that is for the sake of Heaven, will in the end endure; But one that is not for the sake of Heaven, will not endure. Which is the controversy that is for the sake of Heaven? Such was the controversy of Hillel and Shammai. And which is the controversy that is not for the sake of Heaven? Such was the controversy of Korah and all his congregation." (Pirkei Avot 5:17)
- A husband and wife go to the Rabbi with a dispute. First, the husband gives his side of the story. The Rabbi says, "You know what? You're right!" The wife protests, "But you haven't heard my side of the story." The Rabbi says, "So tell me." She relays her side of the story. To which the Rabbi replies, "You know what? You're right!" The Rebbetzin can hear the whole thing from the other room and is surprised by the Rabbi's answers. She blurts out, "but Rabbi, they can't both be right!" To which the Rabbi replies, "You know what? You're right!"

- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Two Jews, three opinions! But if we disagree over so much, how can we be sure of anything in Judaism? It's all about how we synthesize these different views to decide what at the end of the day we are supposed to do in practice.

- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** 3

- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** space for the players and space for the rest of the class to watch.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 2-3 minutes
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Pick 3 students to serve as the first players. Two will serve as the disputants and one as the Rabbi. Ask the class for prompts something Jews argue over. One player starts by making a wild statement about that topic. To which the Rabbi says, "You know what, you're right!" The next player then makes an apparently conflicting wild statement about the topic. "You know what, you're right!" To which the two players respond "But we can't both be right!" The rabbi then explains how both of these things could be true.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**
 - What do you do when you receive conflicting instructions about doing something?
 - When is "agreeing to disagree" not helpful?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** Tolerance for different points of view.
 - **Skill:** Synthesizing patterns of thought to make sense of different points of view.

GAME 4: Gibberish Shiur

- **TORAH SOURCE:** "In a limited sense, it signifies the officer who stood at the side of the lecturer or presiding teacher in the academy and in meetings for public instruction, and announced loudly, and explained to the large assembly in an oratorical manner, what the teacher had just expressed briefly and in a low voice. While the lecturer generally pronounced his sentences in the academic language, which was chiefly Hebrew, the Amora gave his explanations in Aramaic, the popular idiom (see Rashi on Yoma, 20b). The original term for such an office was meturgeman ("the translator," or "the interpreter")..." (*Amora*, The Jewish Encyclopedia, 1901)
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Judaism exists today because of a long chain of people explaining what others have said, expanding, simplifying, and ensuring the ongoing relevance is clear. A good improv actor knows how to perceive someone's vision and contribute to a scene by illuminating it.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** There are two versions of this game depending on how ambitious your class is:
 - **Traditional:** 2 players
 - **1000 parables:** 7 players
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:**
 - **Traditional:** A lectern, shtender, or podium for player 2 and a chair for player 1.
 - **1000 parables:** a lectern, shtender, or podium and a row of 6 chairs.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 2-3 minutes (traditional), 3-4 minutes (1000 parables)
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Suggestions are canvassed from the class for a Jewish related topic, prompts could be: a mitzvah, a holiday, a time period, a subject, etc. The players can collectively decide which suggestion they will proceed with.
 - **Traditional:** Two players are selected. Player 1 sits down and player 2 stands (at a lectern or without). Player 1, speaking in a low voice in gibberish, begins giving

a lecture on the topic selected from the prompts. Based on the gibberish, player 2 translates and expands on the lecture. They go back and forth this way for 2-3 minutes.

- **1000 parables:** Seven players are selected. Player 1 sits down and player 2 stands at the lectern. Player 1, speaking in a low voice in complete gibberish, begins giving a lecture on the topic selected from the. Player 2 then explains and expands on what Player 1 has said in slightly less gibberish (e.g. one word per sentence is intelligible). Once player 2 is finished, she sits down and Player 3 comes to the lectern explaining and expanding on what Player 2 has said in slightly less gibberish. This continues until 6 players are sitting and the seventh player is speaking clearly in a manner that summarizes all that has been said.
- **TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS :**
 - How do Jewish sources use parables and metaphors to explain things?
 - What's an example of a Jewish source you explained to someone who wasn't familiar with it? How did you try to translate?
- **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**
 - **Attitude:** We can all be teachers.
 - **Skill:** How to pick up non-verbal meaning and translate it into verbal meaning.
 - **Knowledge:** History of Jewish teaching methods and insight into pedagogical rationale.

GAME 5: Drawing Connections

- **TORAH SOURCE:** Rabbi Yishmael taught 13 principles of derivation by which we can derive all the laws of the oral Torah from the text of the Torah. (copy text from a siddur as needed, prior to beginning of Pesukei d'Zimrah in the weekday shacharit service).
- **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** While the Written Torah is finite and we may neither add to it or take away from it, the Oral Torah is infinite. This allows for us to constantly achieve greater heights or plumb greater depths and continue to apply the Torah to new situations. As with the scientific process, even experimenting between two concepts we ultimately decide are not connected in the way we thought can reveal interesting things along the way.
- **NUMBER OF PLAYERS:** Whole class in a circle or line.
- **SPACE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS:** Seating optional.
- **LENGTH OF TIME:** 5-10 minutes based on size of class.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:**
 - Pick any two Jewish topics (e.g. Yom Kippur and the month of Nissan).
 - The first player has up to 5 concepts to connect them (e.g. Yom Kippur, **holiday**, **Pesach**, month of Nissan =2)
 - The next person must try to find a different way to connect them.
 - Every 4th person pick a new set of two concepts (if time allows by soliciting suggestions from class)

TAKE AWAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What's a surprising connection you just learnt or thought about for the first time?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- **Knowledge:** Hear how other people connect two Jewish topics.

Part 3: Reflections on Teaching Torah-Based Improv

With the support of the Hadar Institute, I had the pleasure of testing these games out in sixteen 90 minute sessions from the winter to the fall of 2025-26 with adult participants (about 4 games per session). So my practical experience is limited but some lessons became almost immediately apparent. Experienced educators will likely find many of these observations obvious but for those who, like me, lack formal training in education and are coming to Torah-based improv out of personal curiosity or a community role, you may find these tips helpful.

Stand up the whole time if you are able.

Torah-based improv consists of a mix of games and discussions. Both could go on endlessly if you let them. Especially if some of your participants are new to improv or otherwise nervous about it, they may feel more comfortable about the discussion. Therefore, I have found that if the instructor sits down with everyone else to have the discussion the powers of inertia can make it harder to shift back to the next game.

Be mindful of how technically difficult a game is.

There are four kinds of students of Torah-based improv:

- One who is new to improv but experienced in Torah.
- One who is new to Torah but experienced in improv.
- One who is new to Torah and improv.
- One who is experienced in Torah and improv.

Ideally, you want a mix of all four. As such, you will want to ensure that especially if you have the same group for multiple sessions that you backload the more technically complex games (either viewed from a Torah or improv perspective). For example, the session on Torah study is generally speaking more advanced, the longer format games with 6-8 players are generally harder.

What is the relationship of improv to Torah?

I have been asked by participants what my views are on the improv and the Torah. This isn't mere philosophy. The conscientious participant may want to know if they're expected to censor or direct their improv in a particular moral direction.

I have generally encountered three schools of thought among teachers and students of Torah based improv that are informed by wider views on the relationship of Torah and art:

- **Good improv and Torah are aligned.** This view is most supported by the observation that vulgar or bawdy improv ("barprov") tends not to be very good improv when judged purely technically.
- **Improv and Torah's relationship is simply a matter of content.** Improv is essentially a technique and as such can be used to express various contents. This view is implicitly expressed in participants who come expecting to be putting on Bible scenes.

- **There is a tension between improv and Torah.** This line of thinking follows the commentaries that see in artistic practice a tendency towards self-glorification. Improv particular raises the prospect of Levity which various rabbinic sources treat as either inappropriate in exile or likely to lead to negative patterns (e.g. gossip, lewdness, wasting time).

My own view is closest to the third, but that it possible to use the artistic impulse as a force for Torah study by:

- Adapting rules of the game, so that the rules themselves bear moral lessons, e.g. one mitzvah leads to another is a radically different story arc than the more common one sin leads to another.
- Pairing the games with Jewish texts and discussions both to draw out lessons but also to set a mood.
- Physically setting the classes in Jewish spaces to encourage a sense of reverence.

However, I strongly discourage limiting the contents of the scenes to only explicitly Jewish topics (e.g. parsha scenes). This sends an incorrect message about human experience (i.e. that if it doesn't appear in Tanakh it's not Torah).

Empower Participants

Torah-based improv is a very different way to approach Jewish study than most people are used to. It therefore has the potential to be exciting to a wide range of people who have perhaps not engaged much in the more traditional formats of study. Two techniques allow for greater participation in discussion by these types of students:

- If time allows, after each scene, invite the audience and the players themselves to “give notes” to the players. This is an opportunity to both express appreciation for one another as well as to focus more on the technical side of the performance. For those coming from more of an improv than Torah study background, this is an excellent time to shine.
- Validate all contributions to the discussion and work to relate it back to the theme and draw out underlying Torah sources or content that support aspects or all of what they are saying.

Ask if Anyone has Any Questions About the Instructions

After giving instructions concerning any game, ask participants if they have any questions about the instructions just shared.

Invite Participants to Suggest Games

Participant created, co-created, or simply suggested games give participants a feeling of ownership of and leadership in the content. This fosters an atmosphere of exciting experimentation as well as showing trust and respect for the students.

Conclusion

It is my sincere hope that you will be able to use some or all of these games either in a formal classroom or in community. Doing Torah-based improv repeatedly will inevitably attract incredible people who may not otherwise have the opportunity to know each other. Now is the time to re-engage with Torah in bold new ways!