

---

# LET'S GET SPIRITUAL!

---

A CURRICULUM GUIDE EXPLORING JEWISH PRAYER, JEWISH SPIRITUALITY, AND WELL-BEING

Andrea McNellis

May 2020

*For my Mother, מלכה בת פרידה וצבי, ז"ל*

*Thank you for showing me the way. You live on through me, and through my work.*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Scope and Sequence of Units:</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Enduring Understandings &amp; Rationale</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Curriculum Goals</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Letter to the Teacher:</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Introductory Unit: Treat Yo’ Self</b> .....	<b>6</b>
Lesson 1: he 5 Elements of Flourishing .....	7
Handout 0.1 – Martin Seligman’s 5 Elements of Well-Being.....	10
Handout 0.2 – Journal Page Layout Example .....	11
Handout 0.3 – For the Teacher – Games and Symbolic Expression .....	12
Lesson 2: The 7 Gateways to the Soul.....	15
Handout 0.4 – The 7 Gateways to the Soul.....	17
Lesson 3: What is Jewish Prayer?.....	18
Handout 0.5 - Prayer Graphic Organizer .....	20
<b>Unit 1: I Believe in the Good Things Comin’</b> .....	<b>21</b>
Lesson 1: <i>Hoda’ah</i> (Gratitude).....	22
Handout 1.1 - Modeh/ah Ani.....	27
Lesson 2: <i>Birkot HaShachar</i> (Dawn Blessings).....	28
Handout 1.2 - Birkot Hashachar Cutouts.....	31
Handout 1.3 - Morning Routine Worksheet.....	32
Lesson 3: <i>Asher Yatzar</i> (Blessing for our Bodies) .....	33
Handout 1.4 - Blessings for Our Bodies.....	37
Handout 1.5 - Meditation for Our Bodies .....	38
Lesson 4: <i>Miz’mor Shir</i> (Psalm).....	39
Handout 1.6 - Reach Out and Tap Someone .....	42
Handout 1.7 - Psalm Worksheet.....	43
Lesson 5: <i>K’riat Shema al ha’Mitah</i> (The Bedtime Shema).....	44
Handout 1.8 - Bedtime Shema Text .....	48
Handout 1.9 - Bedtime Routine Worksheet.....	49
Handout 1.10 - Priestly Blessing/Meditation .....	50
<b>Unit 2: God and Mysticism and Movement, Oh My!</b> .....	<b>51</b>
Lesson 1: Got God?.....	52

Handout 2.1 - God Quotes.....	55
Lesson 2: <i>Kedushah</i> (holiness) – mysticism, angels, and more! .....	57
Handout 2.2 – Transcendence Resource .....	60
Handout 2.3 - <i>Kedushah</i> .....	61
Lesson 3: Kiddush Levana .....	62
Handout 2.4 – Kiddush Levana .....	65
Lesson 4: <i>Adonai S’fatai Tiftach</i> – music and movement .....	68
Handout 2.5 – The Amida .....	71
Handout 2.6 – Mysteries Council .....	72
Lesson 5: Shehechyanu.....	75
Handout 2.7 – Shehechyanu.....	78
<b>Unit 3: Is One the Loneliest Number? .....</b>	<b>79</b>
Lesson 1: Communal Prayers.....	80
Lesson 2: T’shuva and S’lichah.....	83
Handout 3.1 – Prayers from <i>Talking to God</i> , by Naomi Levy.....	86
Lesson 3: <i>Amidah</i> – Silence & Solitude vs. Loneliness .....	88
Lesson 4: Kaddish Yatom .....	91
Handout 3.2 – Naomi Levy’s “Memorial Prayer” (from <i>Talking to God</i> ) .....	94
Handout 3.3 – “Coping with Loss” exercises from <i>Making Prayer Real</i> (contributed by Rabbi Anne Brener).....	95
Lesson 5: Mysteries Council .....	96
<b>Conclusion: This is My Fight Song .....</b>	<b>99</b>
Lesson 1: This is My Fight Song .....	100
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>103</b>

## SCOPE AND SEQUENCE OF UNITS:

---

### INTRODUCTION: TREAT YO' SELF

This unit will begin by introducing the 5 elements of well-being as defined by Martin Seligman. Then, we dive into the 7 gateways to spiritual engagement laid out by Rachael Kessler. Finally, this unit brings Jewish prayer into the mix, illustrating for the learners the way we weave together each of these to form our own Jewish spiritual practices. By beginning with the concepts that inspired this curriculum guide, this unit helps establish transparency and trust. By exploring the “why” behind our learning, this unit brings together educator and learners as a team bonded by a shared need for a life of meaning.

### UNIT 1: I BELIEVE IN THE GOOD THINGS COMIN’

This unit will focus on Seligman’s Positive Emotion and Kessler’s Hunger for Joy. This exploration of this piece of well-being through the lens of spiritual yearnings taps into the positive emotion and hunger for joy and delight in each student.

### UNIT 2: GOD AND MYSTICISM AND MOVEMENT, OH MY!

This unit will explore Seligman’s Engagement & Accomplishment as well as Kessler’s Urge for Transcendence & Creative Drive. This unit will focus on Jewish prayerful pathways into wrestling with the “big questions”. This includes pathways through nature, god/higher power, creativity, and music. Through Jewish spiritual practices, we dive into creative expression deeply as a way to connect to one’s soul. We look at accomplishment and the natural human drive to succeed. We connect this all back to transcendence.

### UNIT 3: IS ONE THE LONELIEST NUMBER?

This unit will focus on Seligman’s Positive Relationships & Meaning and explore Kessler’s Yearning for Deep Connection, Yearning for Initiation, Search for Meaning and Purpose, as well as Silence and Solitude. This unit will develop a sense of community and delve into what spiritual practices say about community and its importance in Judaism. It will show the difference between communal practices and individual practice. In this unit, we grapple with particular and universal, solitude and loneliness, healing and loss, lament and forgiveness, through Jewish spiritual prayer practices.

### CONCLUSION: THIS IS MY FIGHT SONG

In this unit we will explore this question more in depth: What is Jewish prayer trying to say to us? This unit will help each student gather and understand their new understandings from the year of learning.

## ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS & RATIONALE

---

### ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:

---

- Jewish spirituality practices create opportunities for wrestling with life and for moments of transcendence.
- Jewish spirituality trains the brain to notice and wonder about the nature, purpose, and meaning of life.
- Jewish spirituality accesses parts of the psyche that contribute to well-being and flourishing.
- The intersection between Jewish spirituality and well-being connects Jewish spirituality *l'dor v'dor*.
- The intersection between Jewish spirituality and Jewish prayer invites an exploration of deep yearnings and personal meanings.
- The 5 elements of well-being – positive emotion, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment – work together through Jewish spiritual practice to create a life of meaning.
- The 7 gateways to the soul – the yearning for deep connection, the longing for silence and solitude, the search for meaning and purpose, the hunger for joy and delight, the creative drive, the urge for transcendence, the need for initiation – reflect the yearnings behind Jewish spiritual practice.

### RATIONALE:

---

This curriculum guide delves into the intersection between Jewish spiritual practices and well-being.

*Jewish spiritual practices range from the canon of Jewish prayer, modern Jewish prayer inventions, Biblical prayer, personal or communal moments of transcendence, personal or communal experiences of God, keva, and kavannah. Well-being, as described by Martin Seligman, includes these “five elements:” “positive emotion, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment” (Seligman, Flourish).*

The development of these 5 elements leads to what Seligman calls “flourishing,” the goal of well-being practices (Seligman, Flourish). While this curriculum guide builds in different ideas implied in well-being and wellness, the curriculum guide focuses particularly on Seligman’s definitions. The concepts of well-being and Jewish spiritual practices continue to develop as separate topics, and this guide aims to highlight the areas in which the content and practices of Jewish spirituality intersect with well-being. In this way, the curriculum guide both increases knowledge of the content of Jewish spirituality and increases the relevance of Jewish spirituality in context of contemporary psychological work.

This curriculum guide aims to create a deeper connection to Jewish spiritual practices, mainly Jewish prayer, both the traditional canon of Jewish prayer and modern additions to this anthology of wisdom. From words, to movement, to personal and communal experiences, this guide aims to engage students in an exploration of Judaism. By delving into the text of traditional prayer, this guide both creates a basic knowledge base and creates a deeper connection to the yearnings of liturgists over time, their questions about life, their fears, their God-concepts, and where their prayers intersect with personal spiritual experiences. By delving into the movement of prayer, both prescribed keva, Jewish yoga practices, and the movement central to traditional Jewish prayer, this curriculum aims to broaden the parameters of spiritual practices and provide a wide array of practices rooted in movement. Finally, in the process of bringing in personal and communal experiences into the classroom, both from the educator and the learner, this guide aims to connect Jewish spiritual practices *l'dor v'dor*.

In the journey through Jewish spirituality, this guide aims to highlight the intersection between Jewish spirituality and the “5 elements” of well-being: “positive emotion, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment” (Seligman, Flourish). The first element, positive emotion, focuses on feelings like “pleasure rapture, ecstasy, warmth, comfort, and the like” (Seligman, Flourish). Next, “engagement is about flow: being one with the music, time stopping, and the loss of self-consciousness during an absorbing activity” (Seligman, Flourish). While positive emotion and engagement form a base for well-being, the next element, meaning, necessitates a bigger purpose: “The Meaningful Life consists in belonging to and serving something that you believe is bigger than the self” (Seligman, Flourish). Similarly, positive relationships as explained by Seligman focus on interactions with others, with community, in a way that invokes positive feelings or profound moments (Seligman, Flourish). Lastly, Seligman highlights the element of accomplishment, a drive for “mastery for their own sakes,” a drive explained both in the short and long-term, a drive natural to human development and worth exploration in the context of well-being (Seligman, Flourish).

This topic and content aim to explore what Jewish spiritual prayer practices and well-being mean for teens entering high school (9<sup>th</sup> grade) and how they might incorporate these understandings, and practices, into their lives in order to cope with the stresses of teenage life. During the teenage years, brains become more malleable, they become more “creative” and “innovative,” and teens begin the process of individuation (Daniel J. Siegel). In addition, looking towards the future, many teens wonder about the mysteries of life (Kessler, *The Soul of Education: Helping Students Find Connection, Compassion, and Character at School*). In the current social and cultural contexts of liberal Jewish education, the idea of teaching for the soul, of addressing the mysteries of life, of bringing up the mysteries of life, often brings up discomfort. By mysteries of life, I’m referring to the questions Rachael Kessler talks about in *The Soul of Education*, but I also mean what I call the “big questions.” Those questions adolescents begin bringing up in the context of religion with regards to God, life, and their purpose. This critical stage of development requires challenge, engagement, and putting aside discomfort in favor of delving into deep, compelling, content together.

## CURRICULUM GOALS

---

- Introduce students to a new way of thinking about liturgy through the lenses of well-being and spirituality.
- Help students develop habits linked to Jewish liturgy that work towards well-being.
- Re-imagine the way students pray by looking at the questions and yearnings behind prayers in a language that students understand.
- Create a community of learners that feel connected to the learning and to their peers.
- Give students the space to wonder, challenge, and get curious about the mystery of life.

## LETTER TO THE TEACHER:

---

While the lessons in each unit address a combination of aspects of well-being and spiritual fulfillment, it fits into a continuum of units aimed at both reinforcing and reviewing these habits in new contexts. In this curriculum some “big questions” might arise naturally around the content. I encourage the educator to let the students answer their own questions or turn towards their peers before turning to an outside “expert.” The object of this curriculum guide lies in the sense of ownership over each individual’s spiritual journey and their own ability to explore their ideas about these “big questions” with one another and the educator. Sometimes the educator might find it helpful to bring in Jewish thought sources when they feel like the students need more support and guidance in this journey; however, keep in mind the difference between using sources to further explore a question rather than to answer a question. In addition, the learning should revolve not only around the new sources in these cases, but on how to find them for oneself. The curriculum guide works in ideas from both Martin Seligman and Rachael Kessler. I include the necessary materials, however if you have the time to read both *Flourishing* and *The Soul of Education* you will have the background knowledge to adjust this curriculum guide in a more nuanced way for your class or build on it for future courses. Lastly, I use a concept called the “mysteries council” in the third unit from Kessler that I recommend you review (handout 2.6). In unit 2 the students begin writing questions for the “mysteries council” and continue through unit 3 until the ceremonial reading of the questions.

## INTRODUCTORY UNIT: TREAT YO' SELF

---

This unit will begin by introducing the 5 elements of well-being as defined by Martin Seligman. Then, we dive into the 7 gateways to the soul laid out by Rachael Kessler. Finally, this unit brings Jewish prayer into the mix, illustrating for the learners the way we weave together each of these to form our own Jewish spiritual practices. By beginning with the concepts that inspired this curriculum guide, this unit helps establish transparency and trust. By exploring the “why” behind our learning, this unit brings together educator and learners as a team bonded by a shared need for a life of meaning. This unit sets the stage emotionally and logically for a meaningful year of learning.

## LESSON 1: THE 5 ELEMENTS OF FLOURISHING

---

### SUMMARY OF LESSON:

This lesson explores the 5 elements of flourishing as defined by Martin Seligman: positive emotion, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. By setting the stage, establishing group norms, and beginning with transparency and trust in mind, each learner, educator included, sets up the year of learning for success.

### ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:

- Jewish spirituality trains the brain to notice and wonder about the nature, purpose, and meaning of life.
- Jewish spirituality accesses parts of the psyche that contribute to well-being and flourishing.
- The intersection between Jewish spirituality and well-being connects Jewish spirituality *l'dor v'dor*.
- The 5 elements of well-being – positive emotion, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment – work together through Jewish spiritual practice to create a life of meaning.

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

- What is well-being?
- What is Jewish about the 5 elements of well-being?
- How do I create a life of meaning?

### LESSON GOALS:

*As an educator I aim for this lesson to...*

- ...establish a sense of transparency and trust.
- ...help learners explore what it means to live a life of meaning.
- ...spark questions about meaning and connection.

### OBJECTIVES:

*Students will be able to...*

- ...describe the 5 elements of flourishing.
- ...connect one or more of the 5 elements of flourishing with their lives.
- ...articulate something that gives their life meaning or purpose.

### EXPRESSIVE OUTCOMES:

*Students will have the opportunity to...*

- ...experience a moment of meaning marked with a Jewish spiritual practice.

---

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

---

- Journals – 1 for each student (I recommend purchasing quality spiral bound journals – unlined)
- Polaroid Camera
- At least 1 copy of *Flourish* by Martin Seligman (recommended: one copy for each student to keep) with a bookmark or post-it flag on page 16.
- Poster board

---

### LEARNING PLAN:

---

#### SET INDUCTION (10 MIN):

---

Welcome the students into this course and explain to them that you will be experiencing and exploring prayer, spirituality, and well-being this year. Explain that listening and participating, being kind and creating a safe space, will be key to this experience. Ask them to take a comfortable seat either upright in their chair or sitting on the floor. Ask the students to share a “rose and thorn”/ “something good that happened today and something bad.” Once everyone has shared, say that this year will be a journey of trust and connectivity. That we each will bring our whole selves into the classroom at various times. Because of that, we need guidelines of how to behave.

---

#### MAIN ACTIVITIES (TIME):

---

**Class Contract Activity:** Tell the students that in order to use this space as a place to explore prayer and well-being we need to attempt to create a safe space as well as create expectations for the group. Keeping in mind the first activity, ask the students what might be some good expectations for the group and write them on the white board. Narrow these down to 5-10 affirmative statements. Next, provide a list of consequence options, discuss, and help them choose appropriate consequences for breaking the class contract. Hand out their journals and have them write down the class contract/consequences on the inside cover of their journal.

**What is well-being? & How do I create a life of meaning?:** First play the ending scene of *The Breakfast Club* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQ1QUK8KLH0>). Remind/explain that the students were asked to write an essay telling him who they think they are. Ask students what they thought about the letter they “wrote” to the teacher. Transition into explaining the 5 elements of well-being by saying that just like in the letter, we are all more alike than we are different and that the person with the agency to find meaning in our lives is ourselves. Hand out the copies of *Flourish* (or copies of page 16 for all of the students). Write the 5 elements of well-being on a poster board: positive emotion, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. Brainstorm as a class a definition for each of the five. Compare with the explanations Seligman provides in his book (see handout 0.1 at the end of the lesson).

---

#### CLOSURE (15-20 MIN):

---

Have the students take individual polaroid “selfies.” While they develop, explain to them that they are going to glue the selfies on a page of their journals. Then, they will write the 5 elements of well-being on the page. They will connect these elements with memories or moments that

they felt fit each element and write them down, draw something, etc. When they're done, if there's time, they can each share one of the things they wrote. (see Handout 0.2 for an example of a journal layout)

Next week, I need you to bring in an item that is really important to you right now in your life.

***Note to Teacher: See Handout 0.3 for context for this object and upcoming activity from The Soul of Education by Rachael Kessler. Read this before asking for the objects so you have a better idea of how to answer questions about what kind of objects to bring in. I expect that someone might ask "Does the object have to be Jewish?" I recommend saying that it doesn't have to be Jewish, but it can be Jewish. However, use your discretion.***

HANDOUT 0.1 – MARTIN SELIGMAN’S 5 ELEMENTS OF WELL-BEING

---

Positive Emotion	"...positive emotion; what we feel: pleasure, rapture, ecstasy, warmth, comfort, and the like." (11) "Positive emotion is the rock-bottom of happiness" (13)
Engagement	"...engagement, is about flow: being one with the music, time stopping, and the loss of self-consciousness during an absorbing activity." (11) "You go into flow when your highest strengths are deployed to meet the highest challenges that come your way" (24)
Meaning	"The Meaningful Life consists in belong to and serving something that you believe is bigger than the self, and humanity creates all the positive institutions to allow this: religion, political party, being green, the Boy Scouts, or the family." (12)
Positive Relationships	"Very little that is positive is solitary. When was the last time you laughed uproariously? The last time you felt indescribably joy? The last time you sensed profound meaning and purpose? The last time you felt enormously proud of an accomplishment? Even without knowing the particulars of these high points of your life, I know their form: all of them took place around other people." (20)
Accomplishment	"So well-being theory requires a fourth element: accomplishment in its momentary form, and the 'achieving life,' a life dedicated to accomplishment for the sake of accomplishment, in its extended form." (19)

## HANDOUT 0.2 – JOURNAL PAGE LAYOUT EXAMPLE

---

This is one idea of how you might lay out your journal. It can look less linear, more linear. It can take up multiple pages if you need it to. It can help express your ideas on the page. You can follow this or you can feel free to mix it up! Get creative 😊

Element 1

Element 2

Element 3

Polaroid Picture

Element 4

Element 5

8 *The Soul of Education*

(and among adults) when it comes to defining what makes it possible to speak authentically.

Once the students and teacher have collaboratively established ground rules, they can begin to move toward genuine communication.

### **Games and Symbolic Expression**

Trust builds slowly. After all, I am asking students to begin to dissolve some of the boundaries between their private feelings and the public life of school. Unlike participants in a weekly youth group outside of school, students who encounter this approach as part of the school curriculum are usually required to participate in this group; and they do not escape from the others when the session is over. Whatever happens here will be remembered by the peers they face daily—in math, in history, on the playing field, on the bus home. This is no easy challenge for any of us; it is a delicate process, requiring patience and respect.

A respectful pace and nonintrusive methods honor the mistrust and cynicism teenagers feel about voicing what is really in their hearts. Playful games in the early weeks foster affection, cooperation, and connection in the group. They help students learn as much as possible about others without feeling exposed or invaded. Carefully selected activities invite students slowly, cautiously, playfully to get to know each other.

Each class period, like each semester, has its own rhythm, designed to ease students into and out of a time of sharing honestly about significant teenage issues. A class might begin with a game that brings everyone together quickly through laughter. Or it might open with symbolic expression as students work with a lump of clay or crayons and paper to create a symbol of how they are feeling “right now.” A repertoire of warm-up exercises helps students relax, let go of distractions, and interact with one another in a casual way before being asked to speak before the whole group. Unlike programs that begin with “boundary breakers,” I have learned that respecting the caution, pace, and privacy of each student is what allows them to tell their stories with authenticity and depth.

After the groundwork is laid, students begin to find the comfort or the courage to begin talking about their own lives. Personal storytelling brings a group to life because it ensures that students speak about what they have experienced and know. It gives speakers a sense of authority over their own lives and begins to develop the listener's capacity for empathy. Through their stories, students reveal what in their lives awakens and feeds their souls.

**“Bring in an object that symbolizes something that is really important to you right now in your life,”** I tell a group of high school seniors in Colorado.

“Does the object have to be valuable?” a student asks.

“No, the object is just a symbol. It could be something you cherish, but it can also be a trivial object that symbolizes something important to you right now.”

The students bring their objects in paper bags, so no one will know who brought them. One or two students have forgotten, so I give them crayons and paper to draw their symbol. They all leave the room so I can lay out the objects on a beautiful cloth in the center of the room. When they come back in, no one knows who brought the ring, the book, the cupcake, the exquisitely delicate small box, the stone, the set of keys, the painting, or the locket. One at a time, the students choose an item that intrigues them.

Ryan goes first, picking up the cupcake. “Do I get to eat it, too?” he asks mischievously. Giggles ripple throughout the room. “Who brought this great-looking thing?” He looks around the circle and Karen nods shyly. “What does it mean to you, Karen?” he asks. “What’s the story?”

“One of my friends loves this kind of cupcake,” Karen explains. “Whenever I know she’s down, I go to the one store in town that makes these, and I surprise her with one. I have some very good friends in my life, and those friendships are what’s most important to me right now.”

Other students, when their objects are chosen, talk about surprising gains and disturbing losses in the lives of their families. One student feels blessed and surprised by a rose given her by her stepgrandparents. The next student tells a more typical tale from the divorce wars.

“This is my Dad’s wedding ring,” says Jen, holding up a thick gold band. “I wear it now, since they divorced. He travels a lot, and I worry about him. Wearing the ring on a chain around my neck keeps him close to me. And it reminds me of how precious relationships are and how quickly they can be gone.”

Petra has brought a picture of her family and laid a cross on top of it—a cross she had made herself, carved out of wood, with a lifesaver glued in the center of the cross.

“I became a Christian a few years back. It’s been the most wonderful thing in my life. I can’t tell you what it feels like to know that I’m loved like that. Always loved and guided. By Jesus. And it’s brought our family much closer.”

Tension comes over me as I wonder how the other students will react to religious fervor in the classroom. But what I see in their faces is a relaxed

openness, curiosity, respect. Petra, too, reads the room, and her face brightens with a beautiful smile.

"Guys—it's amazing," she concludes.

Because each story comes straight from the heart, these students are quickly engaged, eager to listen. Many of them are surprised to feel respect for classmates they never knew or wanted to know. Many notice more similarities than they expected. The students become calm when they discover how easy it is to enter the circle and be heard.

Working with 8th and 9th grade students in Oakland, California, Folásadé Oládélé (1998/1999) created a similar approach. "As part of encouraging a sense of spirit in the classroom," says Oládélé, "I helped students develop . . . 'sacred symbols' that exposed more of the students' personal aspirations and desires. Every student performed an oral presentation of his or her symbol to applause and support from the entire group" (p. 65). Telling stories about the symbols they bring with them, students introduce themselves to each other through what they value most in life. Whether it is the objects they bring to represent what is most important in their lives or the clay they mold into a symbol of their feelings, symbols allow students to reveal their emotions *indirectly*. Through such exercises, they have the freedom to explore and express feelings that might otherwise be too private or uncomfortable to put into words this early in the semester.

With seniors, I have found we can quickly build an environment safe enough to invite students to share what is meaningful to them. For younger students, our early discussions circle around friendship and the qualities we look for in a friend. We tell stories about childhood—supporting distance before asking students to reveal the more vulnerable experiences and feelings of the present.

Although symbols are a valuable source of inspiration, nothing elicits stories more powerfully than students' own questions. To find out what is on their minds, we do something radical: We ask them.

---

## LESSON 2: THE 7 GATEWAYS TO THE SOUL

---

---

### SUMMARY OF LESSON:

---

This lesson explores Rachael Kessler's 7 gateways to the soul. By adding this lens to the 5 elements, we take one more step towards understanding the purpose of our learning. This lens will help us look at prayer differently, more personally, more timelessly. By connecting to this lens, we can begin exploring the mystery questions or "big questions" of our lifetimes and the lifetimes of our ancestors.

---

### ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:

---

- Jewish spirituality practices create opportunities for wrestling with life and for moments of transcendence.
- The intersection between Jewish spirituality and well-being connects Jewish spirituality *l'dor v'dor*.
- The intersection between Jewish spirituality and Jewish prayer invites an exploration of deep yearnings and personal meanings.
- The 7 gateways to the soul – the yearning for deep connection, the longing for silence and solitude, the search for meaning and purpose, the hunger for joy and delight, the creative drive, the urge for transcendence, the need for initiation – reflect the yearnings behind Jewish spiritual practice.

---

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

---

- What does it mean to engage the soul?
- What is Jewish about the 7 gateways to the soul?

---

### LESSON GOALS:

---

*As an educator I aim for this lesson to...*

- ...engage learners in the 7 gateways to the soul.
- ...help learners connect spiritual feelings to moments of spirituality.
- ...spark questions about prayer, spirituality, the soul.

---

### OBJECTIVES:

---

*Students will be able to...*

- ...explain one or more of Kessler's gateways to the soul.
- ...talk about a time their soul was nourished.
- ...make connections between Kessler's gateways to the soul and Jewish prayer and/or ritual.

---

### EXPRESSIVE OUTCOMES:

---

*Students will have the opportunity to...*

- ...express a moment their soul was nourished.
- ...build trust and connection amongst class members through a symbolic exercise.

---

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

---

- Journals – 1 for each student (I recommend purchasing quality spiral bound journals – unlined)
  - Poster Board with the 5 elements of well-being on the wall
  - Blank poster board
- 

### LEARNING PLAN:

---

#### SET INDUCTION (10 MIN):

---

As the students arrive, have them place their objects in brown paper bags (have some larger bags handy just in case). You will hand out the objects randomly to other students. Have each student take the object out of the bag. Remind them that these are important objects and should be treated with care and respect. As you go around the circle have each student ask who brought the object and a question about it. After everyone has revealed the importance of their objects explain that this exercise is an example of Rachael Kessler’s work on educating for the soul. Explain that today we will be learning a little bit about the 7 gateways to the soul. In this class we will use these various gateways at times to try to explore our deepest yearnings.

#### MAIN ACTIVITIES (TIME):

---

Hand out the definitions for the 7 gateways to the soul from Rachael Kessler’s *The Soul of Education* (found at the end of this lesson). Have the 7 gateways (without the definitions) written on the blank poster board before the lesson. Read and make sure the students have a basic understanding of the 7 definitions. Tell the students that we are going to spend some time brainstorming together what are some Jewish connections to the 7 gateways to the soul. Tell them that they will add to this poster throughout the year, thinking about what kind of engagement they are experiencing or learning about by exploring Jewish prayer. However, for today, these don’t have to necessarily be Jewish prayers. Rather, list any Jewish ritual, prayer, or cultural aspect that reflects these yearnings. For example, the need for initiation is expressed through the Jewish ceremony of B’nei Mitzvah at the age of 13. This ceremony marks the transition into adulthood, or rather puberty, a new and challenging time full of change. By learning Torah, the adults hope that each b’nei mitzvah will gain the tools and values to guide them during this time. Proceed to brainstorm with the group and write the examples down on the poster next to each gateway. When you’ve reached the end of ideas ask the group: so, what do you think is Jewish about these gateways? Discuss. When you’re finished, hang the poster in the classroom to add to and refer back to throughout the year.

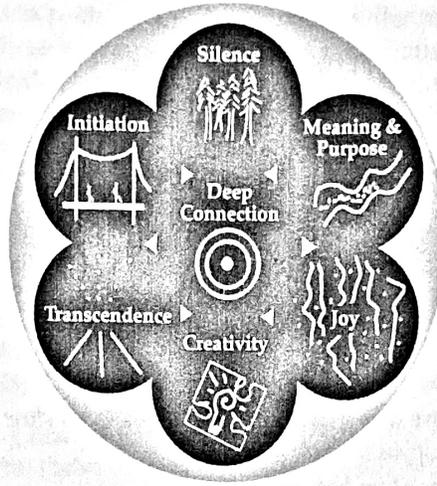
#### CLOSURE (10 -15 MIN):

---

Have the students get out their journals. Tell them to pick one of the gateways they especially identify with and write about a time that they felt their soul was nourished through this gateway. It could be a moment where they felt “in flow,” “in the moment,” or “connected to something bigger.” Give them some time to write these down. Then go around the circle and have each person share. You should make a note of which gateways particularly speak to each student.

FIGURE 1.1

## Seven Gateways to the Soul in Education



**1. The yearning for deep connection** describes a quality of relationship that is profoundly caring, is resonant with meaning, and involves feelings of belonging, or of being truly seen and known. Students may experience deep connection to themselves, to others, to nature, or to a higher power.

**2. The longing for silence and solitude**, often an ambivalent domain, is fraught with both fear and urgent need. As a respite from the tyranny of “busyness” and noise, silence may be a realm of reflection, of calm or fertile chaos, an avenue of stillness and rest for some, prayer or contemplation for others.

**3. The search for meaning and purpose** concerns the exploration of big questions, such as “Why am I here?” “Does my life have a purpose? How do I find out what it is?” “What is life for?” “What is my destiny?” “What does my future hold?” and “Is there a God?”

**4. The hunger for joy and delight** can be satisfied through experiences of great simplicity, such as play, celebration, or gratitude. It also describes the exaltation students feel when encountering beauty, power, grace, brilliance, love, or the sheer joy of being alive.

**5. The creative drive**, perhaps the most familiar domain for nourishing the spirit in school, is part of all the gateways. Whether developing a new idea, a work of art, a scientific discovery, or an entirely new lens on life, students feel the awe and mystery of creating.

**6. The urge for transcendence** describes the desire of young people to go beyond their perceived limits. It includes not only the mystical realm, but experiences of the extraordinary in the arts, athletics, academics, or human relations. By naming and honoring this universal human need, educators can help students constructively channel this powerful urge.

**7. The need for initiation** deals with rites of passage for the young—guiding adolescents to become more conscious about the irrevocable transition from childhood to adulthood. Adults can give young people tools for dealing with all of life’s transitions and farewells. Meeting this need for initiation often involves ceremonies with parents and faculty that welcome them into the community of adults.

## LESSON 3: WHAT IS JEWISH PRAYER?

---

### SUMMARY OF LESSON:

This lesson explores some of the “core” prayers already known to most learners by 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Beginning with a prayer experience, transitioning into attainment of basic terms and names of prayers, and ending in a conceptual exploration, students will begin to get a sense of how to answer the question: “What is prayer?”

### ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:

- Jewish spiritual practices create opportunities for wrestling with life and for moments of transcendence.
- Jewish spirituality trains the brain to notice and wonder about the nature, purpose, and meaning of life.
- Jewish spirituality accesses parts of the psyche that contribute to well-being and flourishing.

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

- What is Jewish prayer?
- What is Jewish spirituality?

### LESSON GOALS:

*As an educator I aim for this lesson to...*

- ...engage learners in their liturgical knowledge.
- ...create an expansive concept of prayer from liturgy on outwards.
- ...spark questions about meaning and connection.

### OBJECTIVES:

*Students will be able to...*

- ...recall some of the core Jewish prayers (ex: the Shema, v’Ahavta, Amidah/silent prayer, etc.)
- ...express what these core prayers are trying to tell them.
- ...explain what Jewish prayer is and how it connects to Jewish spirituality.

### EXPRESSIVE OUTCOMES:

*Students will have the opportunity to...*

- ...experience a Jewish prayer moment.

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

- One prayer book per student (I would encourage the synagogue to purchase a prayer book for each student or encourage students to bring their own prayer book if they own one; however, borrowing the communal prayer books works for each lesson)

- Journals – 1 for each student (I recommend purchasing quality spiral bound journals – unlined)
- Polaroid Camera
- A variety of siddurim for students to use as reference – Mishkan T’filah, Artscroll, Koren Siddur (both regular and Ani Tefila versions), Sim Shalom, etc.

---

#### LEARNING PLAN:

##### SET INDUCTION (10 MIN):

---

Ask the students to close their eyes, do some deep breathing, and then recite the Shema together. Have the students open their eyes and ask them how it felt. Then remind them that the Shema is about listening and being one. Today, we will be exploring what various core Jewish prayers tell us. Tell them that just like the Shema, sometimes the words and the motions we do with them work together to tell us something, sometimes it’s just the words. You should be familiar with most of these prayers and you will have the translations for reference.

##### MAIN ACTIVITIES (TIME):

---

**What is Jewish Prayer?:** Tell the students that we will be exploring prayer and our lives through prayer this year. Explain that this is not about memorizing prayers or pronouncing Hebrew words. This class is about the words of our hearts and minds, the words on the hearts and minds of the real people who wrote our prayers. On a table, have these items (and/or more items that can be used metaphorically) in brown paper bags: ear buds/headphones, a rock, a flashlight, a flower, glasses, a teddy bear, a female figurine/doll, a male figurine/doll, a candle, a lighter. Have each student take one, tell them to think about which Jewish prayer this reminds them of, then when they are ready have them switch with someone. Repeat this a few times. Have them share what they came up with. Now, have each student pick an object/prayer they especially liked or connected to. Have them each look this prayer up in their siddur and fill out the graphic organizer on it (you can group students who choose the same prayer).

***Note to teacher: If the students have trouble coming up with prayers or if they struggle coming up with more than 2-3 prayers lay out 7 siddurim open to these prayers: Ashrei, Barchu, Shema, V’ahavta, Amidah, Aleinu, and Kaddish Yatom. Either assign pairs/groups of students to each prayer or you can have them silently look them over (play some music while they do this) and have people group up based on the prayer they’d like to explore further.***

##### CLOSURE (10-15 MIN):

---

Ask the students to share something they learned that was new today. Have at least 2-3 students share one of their thoughts on what the prayers are “trying to say” to them. Write down “What is Jewish prayer?” on a large post-it or poster board. Ask each student to write an answer to this question as short as one word and as long as a sentence based on the lesson.

HANDOUT 0.5 - PRAYER GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

---

Title:	
Summary:	
What is this prayer telling me?	
What is this prayer asking me?	
What is this prayer saying to God?	
What is this prayer saying about God?	
Who am I saying this prayer to? For?	
What makes this a prayer?	
What questions do you have about this prayer?	
Can you imagine the kind of person who wrote or might want to say this prayer?	

## UNIT 1: I BELIEVE IN THE GOOD THINGS COMIN'

---

In Unit 1, this curriculum guide explores the intersection between Jewish spiritual practice and **positive emotion and the hunger for joy and delight, as described by Seligman and Kessler**. This exploration of this piece of well-being through the lens of spiritual yearnings taps into the positive emotion and hunger for joy and delight in each student. By tapping into each students' yearning for positive emotion and hunger for joy and delight, we delve into the way these yearnings connect to the yearnings behind Jewish liturgy. From prayers of gratitude, to prayers of blessing, to praise, and finally to hope in the face of darkness, each lesson layers on another pathway to positive emotion and fulfilling the yearning for joy. By connecting these prayers to habits of gratitude, blessing, and praise, in partnership with the experiences of the students, this unit begins to develop a toolbox for students to further develop their own well-being and spiritual fulfillment.

---

## LESSON 1: HODA'AH (GRATITUDE)

---

---

### SUMMARY OF LESSON:

---

In this lesson you will go from why gratitude is important even though it might be hard sometimes to connecting gratitude with the prayer *Modeh/ah Ani*. From this, you'll help learners begin their own gratitude practice and give them each a journal in order to craft this. Finally, you'll give them the opportunity to experience a gratitude practice/ritual using the beginning of the *Modeh/ah Ani* prayer and light to symbolize gratitude. The goal is to get students to connect the light and positivity with gratitude; ideally, they will also see that they can create light in the face of darkness.

---

---

### ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:

---

- Jewish spirituality practices create opportunities for wrestling with life and for moments of transcendence.
  - Jewish spirituality accesses parts of the psyche that contribute to well-being and flourishing.
  - The intersection between Jewish spirituality and Jewish prayer invites an exploration of deep yearnings and personal meanings.
  - The 5 elements of well-being – positive emotion, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment – work together through Jewish spiritual practice to create a life of meaning.
  - The 7 gateways to the soul – the yearning for deep connection, the longing for silence and solitude, the search for meaning and purpose, the hunger for joy and delight, the creative drive, the urge for transcendence, the need for initiation – reflect the yearnings behind Jewish spiritual practice.
- 

---

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

---

- Why do Jewish spirituality practices matter?
  - How might Jewish spirituality practices and well-being work together?
  - How does gratitude connect to positive emotion and the hunger for joy or delight?
  - What makes a gratitude practice, like a gratitude journal, a Jewish spiritual practice?
- 

---

### LESSON GOALS:

---

As an educator, I aim for this lesson to...

- ...establish gratitude as a pathway to positive emotion and as a way to fulfill the hunger for joy and delight.
  - ...connect students to gratitude as a practice they might include in their own lives and as a practice that connects them to Jewish spirituality.
  - ...help students develop a gratitude practice grounded in Jewish spirituality.
-

---

### OBJECTIVES:

---

Students will be able to...

- ...explain the connection between gratitude and positive emotion as well as the hunger for joy.
  - ...describe the connection between gratitude and Jewish spirituality and/or Jewish prayer.
  - ...construct a gratitude practice that they can use in and outside of the classroom.
  - ...articulate what they are grateful for and how this connects them to positive emotion.
- 

### EXPRESSIVE OUTCOMES:

---

- Students will have the opportunity to experience a gratitude practice/ritual.
- 

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

---

- One prayer book per student (I would encourage the synagogue to purchase a prayer book for each student or encourage students to bring their own prayer book if they own one; however, borrowing the communal prayer books works for each lesson)
  - One large sized unlined journal per student.
  - Art supplies: pencils, colored pencils, crayons, markers, water colors (and/or whatever you might have available for the journaling activity)
  - One candle and piece of aluminum foil/candle holder per student.
  - TV or laptop to play video from YouTube.
  - Copies of handout for the prayer.
- 

### LEARNING PLAN (~75 MIN):

---

#### SET INDUCTION (10 MIN):

---

Begin by playing them this clip from Star Wars until around the timestamp 1:41:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EJz2FXkZb7g&t=29s> (2 min)

**Explain:** *In Star Wars there's the dark side and light side of the force. Just like using the dark side of the force requires emotions like anger, fear, and hatred, using the light side of the force requires emotions like gratitude, happiness, and love. Using the light side of the force is difficult, just like it can sometimes be difficult to find these positive emotions, but it is also important to our well-being to know how. (1 min)*

**Ask the students the following question,** have them write down an answer, and discuss briefly: (5-7 min)

*Can you think of a time when you were distracted by something that upset you and maybe missed out on something that was good? A time where the bad overshadowed the good?*

**Potential responses:** I was so upset that I lost something that I didn't appreciate the people trying to help me; I was so upset that I didn't get a perfect grade, that I didn't appreciate the positive comments I got from my teacher; I was so upset that I lost the race that I couldn't

appreciate that my team won the meet; I was so angry with my parents that I was in a bad mood for my whole birthday party and didn't have any fun (these can be used as examples if students struggle with response; alternatively, if they struggle, try asking them when a bad mood maybe ruined a nice day)

**Explain:** *In this unit we will be exploring Seligman's positive emotion (refer to poster on wall) and Kessler's hunger for joy and delight (refer to poster). **Today** we will be learning about gratitude practices from Jewish prayers and spiritual practices. Having a gratitude practice doesn't mean that you never feel the negative emotions or that you avoid them; rather, gratitude practices help train your brain, like a muscle, to appreciate the good along with the bad. Basically, gratitude practices help you find well-being. Or, as Yoda might say: Help you find balance in the force, it will.* (1 min)

## MAIN ACTIVITIES

---

### TEXT STUDY (25-35 MIN):

Hand out the prayer books, hand out the prayer resource page (found at the end of this lesson on page 17) for *Modeh/ah Ani* and ask the students to *turn to page 24* (if you're using the complete version of *Mishkan T'filah*) or ask students to *find the page in their prayer book for Modeh/ah Ani* (they may need individual help with this) (3-4 min)

Tell the students: *I am going to read this prayer out loud, line by line, in the Hebrew and the English. We will mostly focus on the English translation.*

Read out loud from the prayer book (the following is the transliteration and translation from *Mishkan T'filah*, feel free to use a different siddur, but remember to read both Hebrew and the translation unless your students are proficient Hebrew readers): *Modeh/Modah ani l'fanecha – I offer thanks to you, Melech chai v'kayam – ever-living sovereign, she-hechezarta bi nishmati b'chemlah – that You have restored my soul to me in mercy, rabbah emunatecha – How great is Your trust.*

Ask the students: *What do you think this prayer is saying and to whom?*

Potential answers: It's saying thank you. It's a prayer thanking God for everything. It's saying how great God is. It's thanking God for our souls. It's thanking God for giving us our souls.

Say to the students: *Yes, so this prayer is saying thanks. It's saying thanks to god for restoring our souls to us every single morning. The author of this prayer believes that our souls go somewhere during sleep and that they might not return without the help of God. The author brings in the idea of trust because it's a two-way street: God entrusts us with souls and we entrust God with our souls at night. Now, take a look at the handout. The first thing you'll see are the key words: thanking or grateful, I, and before you or to you. Then, you'll see a set of questions. Please pair up with the person next to you and answer these questions together. When you're done, we will discuss our answers to the questions. Please be prepared to explain at least a couple of the*

questions. If you have any questions, please let me know. You should spend most of your time on the last four questions. Make sure you get to the last question. You have 20 minutes to work on this. (You should set a timer for 20 minutes and let them know when it's finished. If they aren't done yet, you can give them another 3-5 minutes to finish up. Also, roam around and make sure they're on the right track and ask each pair if they need help a couple of times at least.)

Ask the students: *So, when do people say this prayer?* (call on one student to answer this as this was covered earlier on and should be clear after the text study).

Ask the students: *Why do you think people say this prayer at this particular time of day?* (call on one student to answer this then ask if anyone has anything different. Some students may interpret this question differently; however, you can limit the exploration to 2 answers)

Ask the students: *What does this prayer express about the needs of the author?* (make sure to get a short discussion going about this one and get at least 2 answers)

Ask the students: *What does this prayer express about the fears of the author?* (make sure to get a short discussion going about this one and get at least 2 answers)

Ask the students: *How is the author combatting their fears?* (make sure to get a short discussion going about this one and get at least 2 answers)

Ask the students: *How do you think it might feel to begin the day with this prayer or something like this?* (make sure to get a longer discussion going about this one and get at least 3 answers; ideally, most of the students will share something verbally or with body language/in agreement with someone else)

Say to the students: *Great! So we all agree or most of us think that saying this prayer would help us start our days with positivity, hope...* (list other adjectives that the students used to answer the last question). *Now, in a moment I want us all to choose a journal from this stack. These journals will follow us through the rest of this course in different ways. So, write your name on the inside.*

#### **JOURNAL ACTIVITY:**

Say to the students: *On the table you'll find a variety of art supplies: markers, pencils, colored pencils, water colors (and/or whatever you have available). Please use these to create the cover page of this journal. You should express gratitude in some way through this expression. You can copy the prayer in English or Hebrew, you can write a few things that you are especially thankful for, not just today, but always, like your parents, family, food, shelter. At the beginning of each class in this unit, we will begin with writing down 3 things that you are thankful for in this journal. (10-15 min)*

## CLOSURE (10-15 MIN)

---

Tell the students: *Now, let's all close our journals and get in a circle.* Give each student a candle with a piece of foil around it or aluminum candle holder. Light your candle.

Say to the students: *Now, I want us all to recite in Hebrew or in English the first two verses of the prayer followed by something we are thankful for. For example: Modah ani l'fanecha/I offer thanks to you, Melech chai v'kayam/ever-living sovereign for the opportunity to learn with and learn from all of you this year. Now, I will pass the light, a symbol of my gratitude, to the person on my right and they'll do the same thing: first say the prayer, then pass the light. When we are all done we will blow out the candles.*

Once everyone has had a turn say: *Let's all take a deep breath together breathing in the gratitude and blow out our candles.*

HANDOUT 1.1 - MODEH/AH ANI

---

KEY WORDS

מוֹדֶה    thanking, grateful

אֲנִי    I

לְפָנֶיךָ    before you, to you

WHEN DO PEOPLE SAY THIS PRAYER?

---

WHY DO YOU THINK PEOPLE SAY THIS PRAYER AT THIS PARTICULAR TIME OF DAY?

---

---

---

---

WHAT DOES THIS PRAYER EXPRESS ABOUT THE NEEDS OF THE AUTHOR?

---

---

---

---

WHAT DOES THIS PRAYER EXPRESS ABOUT THE FEARS OF THIS AUTHOR?

---

---

---

---

HOW IS THE AUTHOR COMBATTING THEIR FEARS?

---

---

---

---

HOW DO YOU THINK IT MIGHT FEEL TO BEGIN EACH DAY WITH THIS PRAYER OR SOMETHING LIKE THIS?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## LESSON 2: BIRKOT HASHACHAR (DAWN BLESSINGS)

---

---

### SUMMARY OF LESSON:

---

In this lesson, the set induction morning rush relay race helps students demonstrate the way we normally rush through the day. By slowing down, acknowledging our blessings, and looking at the ways Jewish tradition acknowledges blessings, the students experience the intentionality behind blessing. Ideally, by the end of the lesson, the students are ready to create their own morning ritual and try it out.

---

---

### ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:

---

- Jewish spirituality trains the brain to notice and wonder about the nature, purpose, and meaning of life.
  - Jewish spirituality accesses parts of the psyche that contribute to well-being and flourishing.
  - The intersection between Jewish spirituality and Jewish prayer invites an exploration of deep yearnings and personal meanings.
- 

---

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

---

- What does it mean to feel blessed?
  - What are our everyday blessings?
  - Who decides what a blessing is?
  - What is the difference between blessing and gratitude?
  - What is the difference between a blessing and a miracle?
- 

---

### LESSON GOALS:

---

*As an educator, I aim for this lesson to...*

- ...show students what Jewish prayer has to say about blessings.
  - ...reinforce that Jewish prayers come in all different forms as do blessings.
  - ... connect students to Jewish tradition *l'dor v'dor*.
- 

---

### OBJECTIVES:

---

*Students will be able to...*

- ...define blessing, gratitude, and miracle.
  - ...construct a personal blessing.
  - ...explain the difference between blessing, gratitude, and miracle.
- 

---

### EXPRESSIVE OUTCOMES:

---

- Students will have the opportunity to experience the difference between practices of blessing and gratitude.
-

---

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

---

- Journals
- Prayer books
- Enough copies of blessing sheet, cut out, for each student to choose 1-2 blessings
- Art supplies for journals
- Enough copies of morning ritual worksheet for each student

---

### LEARNING PLAN:

---

#### GRATITUDE PRACTICE (5-7 MINUTES):

---

**Say to the students:** *Before we begin a new lesson, we will write in our journals. Please write down 3 things you are grateful for today. Afterwards, we will recite Modeh Ani together with these things in mind.*

---

#### SET INDUCTION (10 MIN):

---

**Say to the students:** *Today we will begin our new learning with a relay race. I want to see which team does the best job at getting ready for the day. First person has to put on the belt, hat, and will start with their shoes off and put them back on. Second person will pack one of the bags on the table. It HAS to zip shut. Third person will make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.*

Put the students into groups by counting them off into groups of three (if there's not an even group of three, you can split the tasks differently or have some students share a leg of the race) Remind the first student in the relay race to: *begin with your shoes off.*

**Say:** *You will begin on the count of three. 1, 2, 3, GO!!!*

**Say:** *Who feels like this resembles in any way their morning routine? Does it feel similar? Raise your hand if you see the connection.*

**After you clean up and settle back in say:** *Today we will be learning about blessings. Particularly blessings that were written to say in the morning. Blessings are a way we can stop and do something with intention, to make a seemingly normal daily act holy. Blessings are a way we can slow down the morning rush and focus on appreciating the moment rather than the speed at which we get ready. (Now, pass out their journals)*

---

### MAIN ACTIVITIES

---

#### JOURNAL & DISCUSSION (25 MIN):

**Say to the students:** *I'd like you to take a minute and think about the last time you felt blessed and acknowledged this blessing. Remember, blessings are moments when we experience something we feel is holy. (5 min)*

**Say to the students:** *Now, I'd like you to write down something you feel is a blessing in your life. (5 min)*

**Ask the students:** Can someone share a blessing with the class? (call on 2-3 students) (3-6 min)

**Ask the students:** Can someone share something that they are thankful for today? Something that you wrote at the beginning of class. (call on 1-2 students) (3-6 min)

**Say to the students:** Blessings and gratitude or thankfulness feel similar, but in Jewish prayer there are distinct differences. Blessings focus on things from nature, on the ways our bodies work, on things that we see God or a higher power in. Next, we will look at a prayer that is a part of *Birkot HaShachar* which are the blessings written to say each morning as you wake up. (1 min)

### TEXT STUDY (PASS OUT THE PRAYER BOOKS) (35-40 MIN)

**Say to the students:** *Turn to page 36 (in the complete Mishkan T'filah, otherwise in other prayer books this will be in the morning service under Birkot haShachar). First, I'd like us to read through the blessings. I'll begin and we will all read one blessing each until we get to the end on page 40. (6-10 min)*

**Say to students:** *These prayers are meant to be recited as you are waking up in the morning. Some people used to say these as they performed each of these actions, or related actions, as they got ready in the morning. On the table you'll find cutouts of each blessing. Next, we will each choose at least one blessing that we especially connect to. Maybe one you think would be nice to think about in the morning. In our journals, we will glue the blessing or blessings we chose and write down why we chose it. Feel free to use the art supplies to decorate your page. (10-15 min)*

**After the students are finished...Say to the students:** *Now, I'd like each of us to share a blessing you chose, why you chose it, and how you think it might feel to say this blessing or think about what this blessing says in the morning (10-15 min)*

---

### CLOSURE (10 MIN)

**Say to the students:** *Earlier we did a relay race mimicking getting ready for the day. Now that we've explored the morning blessings I'd like us to think about the difference between waking with blessings, or waking up with intentional morning routine and rushing out the door. Think of a time you really took your time in the morning and let yourself experience each moment. How does this feel different from racing out the door? Write down a sentence or two in your journal about this. (give them time to write) Would anyone like to share briefly? (5 min)*

**Hand out the morning routine worksheet found at the end of this lesson and say:** *This is a tool to develop a morning routine. While prayer can be an integral part of creating this routine, I believe what we can learn more than anything about Birkot Hashachar is the way an intentional morning ritual can change the rest of our day. Please fill this out, and I encourage you to try this routine once this week and report back next class on how it went. (5 min)*

## HANDOUT 1.2 - BIRKOT HASHACHAR CUTOUTS

<i>BLESSED ARE YOU, ADONAI OUR GOD, RULER OF THE UNIVERSE, WHO HAS GIVEN THE MIND THE ABILITY TO DISTINGUISH DAY FROM NIGHT.</i>	<i>BLESSED ARE YOU, ADONAI OUR GOD, RULER OF THE UNIVERSE, WHO GIVES STRENGTH TO THE WEARY.</i>
<i>BLESSED ARE YOU, ADONAI OUR GOD, RULER OF THE UNIVERSE, WHO OPENS THE EYES OF THE BLIND.</i>	<i>BLESSED ARE YOU, ADONAI OUR GOD, RULER OF THE UNIVERSE, WHO REMOVES SLEEP FROM THE EYES, SLUMBER FROM THE EYELIDS.</i>
<i>BLESSED ARE YOU, ADONAI OUR GOD, RULER OF THE UNIVERSE, WHO FREES THE CAPTIVE.</i>	<i>BLESSED ARE YOU, ADONAI OUR GOD, RULER OF THE UNIVERSE, WHO MADE ME IN THE IMAGE OF GOD.</i>
<i>BLESSED ARE YOU, ADONAI OUR GOD, RULER OF THE UNIVERSE, WHO LIFTS UP THE FALLEN.</i>	<i>BLESSED ARE YOU, ADONAI OUR GOD, RULER OF THE UNIVERSE, WHO HAS MADE ME FREE.</i>
<i>BLESSED ARE YOU, ADONAI OUR GOD, RULER OF THE UNIVERSE, WHO STRETCHES THE EARTH OVER THE WATERS.</i>	<i>BLESSED ARE YOU, ADONAI OUR GOD, RULER OF THE UNIVERSE, WHO HAS MADE ME A JEW.</i>
<i>BLESSED ARE YOU, ADONAI OUR GOD, RULER OF THE UNIVERSE, WHO STRENGTHENS OUR STEPS.</i>	<i>BLESSED ARE YOU, ADONAI OUR GOD, RULER OF THE UNIVERSE, WHO GIRDS ISRAEL WITH STRENGTH</i>
<i>BLESSED ARE YOU, ADONAI OUR GOD, RULER OF THE UNIVERSE, WHO CLOTHES THE NAKED.</i>	<i>BLESSED ARE YOU, ADONAI OUR GOD, RULER OF THE UNIVERSE, WHO CROWNS ISRAEL WITH SPLENDOR.</i>

HANDOUT 1.3 - MORNING ROUTINE WORKSHEET

---

*WHAT TIME DO YOU USUALLY WAKE UP?*

*PICK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING TO DO AS SOON AS YOU WAKE UP (CIRCLE IT):*

*DRINK A GLASS OF  
WATER.*

*DO SOME  
STRETCHES*

*SAY A BLESSING*

*WRITE IN A  
JOURNAL*

*NEXT, PICK SOMETHING ACTIVE TO DO (CIRCLE IT):*

*GO FOR A 10 MIN  
WALK.*

*DO 10 MIN OF  
YOGA.*

*DO 10 MIN OF  
STRETCHING.*

*DANCE TO YOUR  
FAVORITE TUNES  
FOR 10 MIN.*

*NEXT, PICK A WAY TO CELEBRATE YOUR MORNING RITUAL (CIRCLE IT):*

*WRITE IN JOURNAL.*

*1-2 MIN  
CELEBRATION  
DANCE.*

*SAY A BLESSING.*

*THANK YOURSELF  
IN THE MIRROR.*

*HOW MANY MORNINGS PER WEEK COULD YOU START DOING THIS?*

---

## LESSON 3: ASHER YATZAR (BLESSING FOR OUR BODIES)

---

---

### SUMMARY OF LESSON:

---

From the prayer *Asher Yatzar* to Naomi Levy's "A Prayer for the Body" to a meditation calming the body, this lesson aims to help students appreciate their physical presence. In addition, hopefully they'll see that the tools provided can help them increase their well-being.

---

---

### ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:

---

- Jewish spirituality trains the brain to notice and wonder about the nature, purpose, and meaning of life.
  - Jewish spirituality accesses parts of the psyche that contribute to well-being and flourishing.
  - The intersection between Jewish spirituality and Jewish prayer invites an exploration of deep yearnings and personal meanings.
- 

---

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

---

- Why does Jewish tradition ask us to bless our bodies?
  - Are all bodies blessings?
  - What spiritual practices can help us appreciate our bodies?
- 

---

### LESSON GOALS:

---

*As an educator, I aim for this lesson to...*

- ... help students see that all bodies are beautiful.
  - ... help students develop a spiritual practice of blessing and showing gratitude for their bodies.
- 

---

### OBJECTIVES:

---

*Students will be able to...*

- ...construct a ritual and/or blessing for appreciating their bodies.
  - ...name a body image issue.
- 

---

### EXPRESSIVE OUTCOME:

---

- Students will have the opportunity to experience a spiritual moment of recognizing the blessing of our bodies.
- 

---

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

---

- One prayer book per student (I would encourage the synagogue to purchase a prayer book for each student or encourage students to bring their own prayer book if they own one; however, borrowing the communal prayer books works for each lesson)
  - One large sized unlined journal per student.
-

- Art supplies: pencils, colored pencils, crayons, markers, water colors (and/or whatever you might have available for the journaling activity)
- Copies of the text study for each student
- Copies of the meditation and blessing for each student
- Printed color pictures of popular figures in the media for teens (actors/actresses, musicians, political figures, athletes, Jewish celebrities) – at least 10 images

---

#### LEARNING PLAN:

---

#### GRATITUDE PRACTICE (5-7 MINUTES):

---

**Say to the students:** *Before we begin a new lesson, we will write in our journals. Please write down 3 things you are grateful for today. Afterwards, we will recite Modeh Ani together with these things in mind.*

---

#### SET INDUCTION (15-20 MIN)

---

**Before class print and put up the pictures around the room (see materials list for description)**

**Say to the students:** *In a moment, I will put on some music and you will walk around the room looking at the photos on the walls. Each of you will get a pad of post-it notes and a pen or marker. I want you to all walk around once just looking at the photos. You will have 3 minutes to do this. Then, I will let you know to walk around a put a post-it on the images with whatever it brings to mind. For example, you might write “this person looks happy” or “This person is beautiful.” Please put a post-it on at least 3 images. You will have 3 minutes to do this. Finally, I want you to go around and read what other people wrote on their post-its. Then we will all sit down together.*

**Hand out the post-its and pens/markers**

**Start playing the song:** “You are Enough” by Sleeping at Last (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LX3lvwks7NU>) – this song is exactly 3 minutes so each round you will play it again and it will serve as a timer. Tell the students: *Please begin walking around the room. Remember, this round is looking only. Really look, like you’re at a museum. Take in the images. Start thinking about what you might write in the second round.* (3 min)

**Tell the students:** *It’s time for round 2. Remember, this time you will write a reaction on a post-it and stick it on the image. Do this for at least 3 images.* (3 min)

**Tell the students:** *Now, for the final round. Walk around and try to read as many of your classmates’ responses as you can.* (3 min)

**Have everyone sit down. Ask the students:** *What did that feel like? What was one thing you or someone else wrote that especially struck you? Were there any images you liked or didn’t like?* (5-10 min)

*Say: Today we will be talking about the blessing of our bodies and looking at what Jewish prayer has to say about this.*

---

## MAIN ACTIVITIES

---

### TEXT STUDY:

**Pass out the prayer books. Say:** *Please turn to page 32 (if you're using the complete Mishkan T'filah, if not have them go to whichever page has the Asher Yatzar prayer). Would someone please read the translation below the Hebrew starting with "Praise to you, Adonai..."? (have one of the students read the prayer in English). At the end, say: "let us all say, Amen"*

**Pass out text study sheet (found at the end of this lesson) and explain:** *You'll see on this sheet both the prayer we just read and a contemporary prayer written by Naomi Levy about blessing the body in the morning. Please pair up with someone, read both versions together, and answer the questions on the page. I'll walk around in case you have any questions. You have 15 minutes to complete this (15-20 min) (at 15 min, check in and if they need more time you can give them up to 5 min more)*

**Ask the students:** *Who would like to share your answer for the first question?*

**Ask the students:** *Who would like to share your answer for the second question?*

**Ask the students:** *Who would like to share your answer for the third question?*

**Ask the students:** *Who would like to share your answer for the bonus question?*

**Explain:** *So, this blessing in our prayer books is traditionally said after the first time you use the restroom in the morning. After all, our bodies digest our food all night without us doing anything and turn what could be an incredibly painful process into one we often forget is always happening. Alternatively, the Naomi Levy blessing calls us to be thankful for all the ways in which our bodies work or don't work.*

---

## CLOSURE

---

Lead Meditation found at the end of this lesson (from *Increasing Wholeness: Jewish Wisdom & Guided Meditations to Strengthen & Calm Body, Heart, Mind & Spirit* by Rabbi Elie Kaplan Spitz)

**First ask the students to:** *sit and focus on their breath for a few breaths with their eyes close.*

*Then, say: Make sure you are seated comfortably. You should feel your sit-bones on the floor and like theirs a string running from your tailbone to the top of your head. Rest your hands on your knees either facing down or up.*

**Next, use the handout found at the end of this lesson to lead the meditation.** Remember, read slowly and clearly. Between each action or visualization make sure to give a pause in order to give students the chance to really be present in each part of the meditation. Maybe practice this once or twice at home yourself or with a colleague to make sure you are reading it in a calm voice and at a good pace.

When you're done, hand out the sheet with the meditation and prayer on it.

**Say to the students:** *Please look at the bottom of the page for the end of the blessing we recited earlier. Let's recite it together in Hebrew and then English. Thank you, please take these handouts home and remember you can always use this meditation and these prayers yourself.*

## HANDOUT 1.4 - BLESSINGS FOR OUR BODIES

---

### *ASHER YATZAR (1)*

Blessed are You, Adonai,  
our God, Ruler of the universe,  
who formed the human body with  
skill  
creating the body's many pathways  
and openings.  
It is well known before Your throne of  
glory  
that if one of them be wrongly  
opened or closed,  
it would be impossible to endure and  
stand before You.  
Blessed are You, Adonai, who heals all  
flesh, working wondrously.

### *A PRAYER FOR THE BODY – NAOMI LEVY*

Thank You, God, for the body You have given me.  
Most of the time I take my health for granted. I  
forget how fortunate I am to live without pain or  
disability, how blessed I am to be able to see and  
hear and walk and eat. I forget that this body of  
mine, with all its imperfections, is a gift from You.

When I am critical of my appearance, remind me  
God, that I am created in Your holy image. If I  
become jealous of someone else's appearance,  
teach me to treasure my unique form.

Help me, God, to care for my body. Teach me to  
refrain from any action that will bring harm to  
me. If I fall prey to a self-destructive habit, fill me  
with the strength to conquer my cravings.

Lead me to use my body wisely, God. Guide my  
every limb, Go, to perform acts of compassion  
and kindness.

I thank You, God, for creating me as I am. Amen.

- 
1. *WHAT DO YOU THINK ASHER YATZAR IS BLESSING? (BE SPECIFIC, IT MIGHT BE MORE THAN ONE THING):*
  
  2. *WHAT IS "A PRAYER FOR THE BODY" BLESSING? (BE SPECIFIC, IT MIGHT BE MORE THAN ONE THING):*
  
  3. *WHAT IS COMMON BETWEEN THESE TWO PRAYERS? WHAT IS DIFFERENT?*

---

<sup>1</sup> From Mishkan T'filah with some edits to the English translation by Andrea McNellis.

## HANDOUT 1.5 - MEDITATION FOR OUR BODIES<sup>2</sup>

---

Close your eyes. Breathe out all anxiety. Breathe in calm. Breathe out all judgment, and breathe in trust. Breathe out all distraction, and breathe in steady focus.

Bring your attention to your feet. Curl your toes and release them, thereby intensifying your attention. Feel a soft but firm rubber ball rolling back and forth across the bottoms of your feet.

Become aware of the massage sensations. Feel a release of the tension stored in your feet as it eases out through your toes.

Focus on your calves, then knees, then thighs. Inhale slowly and become aware of any sensations, any tension. Breathe in and out as you scan this area of your body. Exhale and allow your muscles to relax as tension slips away.

Focus on your stomach. Feel it rising as you inhale and sinking as you exhale. Become aware of this rhythm. Breathe easily and feel deep calm, while remaining attentive.

Become aware of your left hand and arm. In your mind, tighten your left hand and release.

Tighten and release again, seeing tension easing away through your fingers. Repeat with your right hand and arm.

Now move your focus from your arms to your chest. With each breath, feel it rising and falling. Become aware of any tension in your chest and release it on each out breath.

Move your awareness to your neck and then to your jaw. Tighten your jaw and release. Mentally massage your jaw as if with your fingers, finding the tension soothed. Move your fingers to the temples of your face and massage your temples, releasing tension. Scan your face for any other tension and breathe it out.

See a beam of light descending from directly above you, traveling down the center of your head, through your spine, and spreading out through all parts of your body. See the light descending through your lower abdomen, down your thighs, and flowing into the earth. The light penetrates every cell of your body, healing and soothing. The light also surrounds you, like an aura, holding you, creating a deep sense of safety. Fully relax while remaining awake. Breathe in and out, feeling calm and whole.

Know that this place of peacefulness is accessible to you. You can always pause and return to this sensation of deep calm and wholeness. Take another moment to just savor the ease that you feel. You will now slowly begin your return to the place where you began. Count from five to one backwards and slowly open your eyes. Take your time to readjust. Pause and feel deep calm as you look around the room and reorient yourself to wakefulness.

**Blessing:** *Baruch atah Adonai, rofeh chol basar umafli laasot.* Blessed are You Adonai, who heals all flesh, working wondrously. Amen.

---

<sup>2</sup> From *Increasing Wholeness: Jewish Wisdom & Guided Meditations to Strengthen & Calm Body, Heart, Mind & Spirit* by Rabbi Elie Kaplan Spitz

---

## LESSON 4: MIZ'MOR SHIR (PSALM)

---

---

### SUMMARY OF LESSON:

---

From “reach out and tap someone,” to studying Psalm 150, to writing our own Psalms, to praising ourselves, this lesson is all about praise for God, others, and self. This lesson is about getting from indirect praise, to more direct praise, to very direct self-praise.

---

---

### ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:

---

- Jewish spirituality trains the brain to notice and wonder about the nature, purpose, and meaning of life.
  - Jewish spirituality accesses parts of the psyche that contribute to well-being and flourishing.
  - The intersection between Jewish spirituality and Jewish prayer invites an exploration of deep yearnings and personal meanings.
- 

---

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

---

- What does it mean to praise someone?
  - What does it mean to praise God?
  - How can praise help us increase our well-being?
- 

---

### LESSON GOALS:

---

- As an educator, I aim for this lesson to show students how important praise is, both praise for others and praise for ourselves.
- 

---

### OBJECTIVES:

---

*Students will be able to...*

- ...explain what praise and what prayers of praise do.
  - ...name something that they would like to praise someone else for, maybe praise God for.
  - ...name something that they'd like to praise themselves for.
- 

---

### EXPRESSIVE OUTCOMES:

---

*Students will have the opportunity to...*

- ...experience a moment of praise from and for others.
- 

---

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

---

- One prayer book per student (I would encourage the synagogue to purchase a prayer book for each student or encourage students to bring their own prayer book if they own one; however, borrowing the communal prayer books works for each lesson)
  - One large sized unlined journal per student.
-

- Art supplies: pencils, colored pencils, crayons, markers, water colors (and/or whatever you might have available for the journaling activity)
- One candle and piece of aluminum foil/candle holder per student.
- Copies of Template for Psalms
- One copy of the “tap someone” handout

---

**LEARNING PLAN:**

**GRATITUDE PRACTICE (5-7 MINUTES):**

---

**Say to the students:** *Before we begin a new lesson, we will write in our journals. Please write down 3 things you are grateful for today. Afterwards, we will recite Modeh Ani together with these things in mind.*

**SET INDUCTION – “REACH OUT AND TAP SOMEONE” (10-15 MIN)**

---

**Say to the students:** *Please sit down in a circle with everyone facing the outside of the circle. You can start facing inwards to create the circle, but everyone should turn around once you are in a circle.*

**After they’re in the circle say:** *Please raise your hand if you’d like to volunteer for the first round of this game. I need 2 volunteers (this will depend on the size of your class, if you have an especially large class, you might need more, or if your class is especially small, you may only need 1 volunteer)*

**Gather in the center of the circle with the volunteers and say:** *Now everyone needs to put their heads down and close their eyes. I’m going to read out different statements and then we will go around the circle and tap people on the shoulder or head if we think it applies to them. You may not get tapped for each and every statement, but don’t worry, everyone always gets tapped in each round. After the first round of statements, I’ll pick new volunteers so everyone gets a chance to both be tapped and tap someone. Okay, now put your heads down and close your eyes.*

**Quietly and quickly give these instructions to the volunteer(s):** *Okay, so make sure to be honest and spread out your “touches.” Be gentle and stick to shoulders or the top of the head.*

**Use the handout at the end of this lesson** for sample statements and run this activity for as many rounds as you can within the time constraint. Try to give everyone a chance to touch someone and be touched.

**Leave a few minutes at the end to debrief and say:** *Now, everyone sit down in the circle, turn around, and open your eyes. I’d like for a few people to share how that felt please.*

## MAIN ACTIVITIES

---

**Text Study:** Praising God & *B'tzelem Elohim* (**Pass out prayer books here**) (10-15 min)

**Say to the students:** *Please turn to page 55 (if you're using the complete Mishkan T'filah, if not make sure to look up the page ahead of time for Psalm 150:1-6; this can also be found in a Tanakh). Can I have a volunteer to read the translation of this prayer? (have a student read the translation of Psalm 150 and afterwards hand out the worksheet)*

**Ask the students:** *What is this prayer saying to us? (if they need prompting you can ask more specifically: Is this prayer hoping for something? Speaking to something or someone? Why is this prayer praising this thing or person?)*

**Say to students:** *In the Torah, in the story of the creation of the first person, we are told that we were created *b'tzelem Elohim* or in the image of God. In this prayer we praise God, but keep in mind that we are created in the image of God.*

Journal (pass out their journals again here if you've collected them from the gratitude practice earlier)

**Say to the students:** *Using what we've learned from Psalm 150 I'd like you to write a Psalm in a similar format. This Psalm should either be about praising yourself or someone else or God. Each Psalm should begin with "Hallelujah" on the first line, then write 6 lines beginning with "Praise so-and-so" or "Praise yourself," then end with "Let all that breathes praise so-and-so/yourself," and finally end with one last "Hallelujah." I'll pass out a worksheet (you can find this at the end of this lesson) so you can refer to that and Psalm 150 itself, but you should write these in your journals either directly or after you draft it on the worksheet. If you'd like to decorate the page or use the art supplies to help visualize your praise, feel free. (20 min)*

**After they are done say:** *Thank you so much for creating your own Psalms, would anyone like to share? (10-15 min)*

## CLOSURE

---

**Tell the students:** *Now, let's all close our journals and get in a circle. Give each student a candle with a piece of foil around it or aluminum candle holder. Light your candle.*

**Say to the students:** *Now, I want us all to say something we would like to praise ourselves for. Then, we will all respond with a Hallelujah and we will pass the light. For example: I praise myself for working so hard today and this week to be my best self. Hallelujah. Now, I will pass the light, a symbol of my praise, to the person on my right and they'll do the same thing: first say the prayer, then pass the light. When we are all done we will blow out the candles.*

**Once everyone has had a turn say:** *Let's all take a deep breath together breathing in the praise and blow out our candles.*

## HANDOUT 1.6 - REACH OUT AND TAP SOMEONE

---

### *REACH OUT AND TAP SOMEONE WHO:*

1. Checks in with you when you really needed it
2. You trust
3. Taught you something new
4. Surprises you in a good way
5. Reminds you that you're valuable and worthy
6. Helped you with something

### *REACH OUT AND TAP SOMEONE WHO:*

7. Doesn't know how amazing they are (but should!)
8. You think is a leader
9. You still want to get to know better
10. You just enjoy being around
11. You are proud of for being themselves
12. You are excited to see every week

### *REACH OUT AND TAP SOMEONE WHO:*

13. Helps you believe in yourself
14. You can always go to when you need to talk
15. Made you more excited about being Jewish
16. Works really hard
17. You'd always pick to be on your team
18. Makes a positive difference in our community

### *REACH OUT AND TAP SOMEONE WHO:*

19. You're excited to keep learning from/with
20. You know has what it takes to change the world
21. Gives it their all
22. Who is a good listener?
23. You have deep respect for
24. Challenges you

### *REACH OUT AND TAP SOMEONE WHO:*

25. is creative
26. You believe in
27. You wouldn't complain about being stuck on a desert island with
28. You think is brave
29. Makes religious school class better
30. You are always excited to see when you walk into a room

HANDOUT 1.7 - PSALM WORKSHEET

Hallelujah! (For Yourself)	
Praise yourself in...	
praise yourself in...	
Praise yourself for...	
praise yourself for...	
Praise yourself with...	
praise yourself with	
Let all that breathes praise yourself Hallelujah!	

Hallelujah! (For Someone else)	
Praise _____ in...	
praise _____ in...	
Praise _____ for...	
praise _____ for...	
Praise _____ with...	
praise _____ with	
Let all that breathes praise _____ Hallelujah!	

---

## LESSON 5: K'RIAT SHEMA AL HA'MITAH (THE BEDTIME SHEMA)

---

---

### SUMMARY OF LESSON:

---

From relating to our fears and bedtime habits, to the bedtime Shema and its blessings, the students will gain an understanding of ancient and modern fears or barriers to sleep. We will go from sleep as something to fear, or as something we *have* to do, to something that is a *hesed* (kindness) bestowed by God.

---

---

### ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:

---

- Jewish spirituality practices create opportunities for wrestling with life and for moments of transcendence.
  - Jewish spirituality trains the brain to notice and wonder about the nature, purpose, and meaning of life.
  - Jewish spirituality accesses parts of the psyche that contribute to well-being and flourishing.
  - The intersection between Jewish spirituality and well-being connects Jewish spirituality *l'dor v'dor*.
  - The intersection between Jewish spirituality and Jewish prayer invites an exploration of deep yearnings and personal meanings.
- 

---

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

---

- Why did someone write a special version of the Shema that we say in bed right before we go to sleep?
  - How did the author of the bedtime Shema feel about sleeping at night?
  - What can we learn from the first two passages of the bedtime Shema?
  - What can we learn from Hashkiveinu?
  - How can you guard your sleep?
- 

---

### LESSON GOALS:

---

- As an educator, I aim for this lesson to help students identify barriers they have to good sleep and recognize the wisdom expressed through the bedtime Shema about this.
- 

---

### OBJECTIVES:

---

*Students will be able to...*

- ...explain what the bedtime Shema is generally.
  - ...connect the bedtime Shema to their own sleep routines (or lack thereof).
  - ...articulate what the author of the prayers we looked at that are a part of the bedtime Shema was trying to say, what they feared.
  - ...name the things they need to guard their sleep from.
- 

---

### EXPRESSIVE OUTCOMES:

---

- Students will have the opportunity to experience a moment of silence, a moment of true rest.

---

#### MATERIALS NEEDED:

---

- One prayer book per student (I would encourage the synagogue to purchase a prayer book for each student or encourage students to bring their own prayer book if they own one; however, borrowing the communal prayer books works for each lesson)
- One large sized unlined journal per student.
- Art supplies: pencils, colored pencils, crayons, markers, water colors (and/or whatever you might have available for the journaling activity)
- White board, large post-its, or poster board.
- Copies for the whole class of the beginning of the Bedtime Shema from the Koren prayer book
- Copies for the whole class of the bedtime routine worksheet.
- Copies for the whole class of the final prayer/meditation for this unit.

---

#### LEARNING PLAN:

---

#### GRATITUDE PRACTICE (5-7 MINUTES):

---

**Say to the students:** *Before we begin a new lesson, we will write in our journals. Please write down 3 things you are grateful for today. Afterwards, we will recite Modeh Ani together with these things in mind.*

---

#### SET INDUCTION (11-15 MIN)

---

Begin by playing them this clip (**49 seconds long**) from Star Wars: [https://youtu.be/91\\_G8iaokk8](https://youtu.be/91_G8iaokk8)

**Ask the students:** *Think about something you fear, rational or irrational. What is it? Why do you fear it? What other feelings does it trigger? (give them a few minutes to think) Now, would someone be willing to share their fear? (call on 1-3 people) (5-6 min)*

**Ask the students:** *What happens when we can't name our feelings? What happens when we deny our fears? Does it just go away? Or does it come back? Just think about this for a few minutes and write a sentence or two in your journal. (5 min)*

**Say to the students:** *Today, we will be discussing the bedtime Shema and bedtime rituals. Just like Aniken in the video, we all have fears or feelings or other things that we try to hide from others or ourselves. But, just like Yoda and the Jedi Council, our brains don't really let us get away with that. Sometimes these feelings or fears create bad habits or spill over into our dreams. Today I want us to figure out what the author of the bedtime Shema may have intended and what we can learn from it. (1 min)*

## MAIN ACTIVITIES (30-45 MIN)

---

### **Hareini & Hamapil Hevli (pass out source sheet found at the end of this lesson) (20-25 min)**

**Say:** *These prayers were compiled to be said in bed right before you go to sleep. This is the first page of 5 pages in this particular siddur of blessings, the Shema and its blessings, and concluding prayers arranged to be said before bed. Would someone please begin reading the first paragraph in English on the right side that starts with "I hereby forgive..."? (2 min)*

**Ask:** *What is this prayer trying to tell us? Why do you think this is the first prayer in this section of the prayer book? (get 2-3 responses) (5 min). Would someone please begin reading the second paragraph in English on the right side that starts with "Blessed are You, Lord our God.."? (2 min)*

**Ask:** *What do you think this prayer is trying to tell us? What fear is the author expressing? Why praise God for sleep? (get 2-3 responses) (5 min)*

**Say:** *In ancient times, this fear of sleep, of where the soul goes and how it comes back, of what might happen in the middle of the night, was a barrier to sleep. These prayers were a way to help name this feeling and help the one reciting them feel protected. (1 min)*

**Ask:** *What do you think are modern barriers to sleep? (get as many responses as possible and write them on the board or on a large poster/post-it sheet) (5-10 min)*

### **Creating a Bedtime Routine (play either the Craig Taubman Hashkiveinu, the Dan Nichols version, or whichever is your favorite on YouTube during this activity) (10-17 min)**

**Hand out the bedtime routine worksheet and say:** *This is a tool to develop a bedtime routine. While prayer can be an integral part of creating this routine, I believe what we can learn more than anything about the bedtime Shema is the way an intentional bedtime ritual can help guard us from the barriers to sleep, help us appreciate sleep. Please fill this out, and I encourage you to try this routine once this week and report back next class on how it went. (5-7 min)*

**Say:** *Now, at the bottom of the page, in the blank space, add other ways you think you might be able prepare yourself or your room for bed. What are some bad habits you currently have? Name them here. Which of them do you think is the biggest barrier? Which is the smallest? Pick one to change. (5-10 min)*

## CLOSURE (10-15 MIN)

---

Final Meditation on the priestly blessing:

**Say:** *There's blessing found in the bedtime Shema that is referred to as the Priestly Blessing. Please take a seat on the floor with a straight back. Put your hands on your knees either facing up*

*or down. Take a deep breath and close your eyes. Follow your breath. Don't try to change it. Just follow it in and out for a few moments.*

**Continue with the resource sheet for this prayer/meditation found at the end of this lesson.**

**Say at the end:** *Now open your eyes slowly and return to the present.*

**Ask them:** *What do you think this blessing has to do with sleep? What might it have to do with your own sleeping habits?*

**Say:** *During this unit we've been talking about pathways to joy and positive emotion (refer back to posters). As we transition into our next unit on engagement and I'd like us to carry these blessings with us.*

**Ask:** *What have you learned during this unit that connects back to Kessler and Seligman? (refer back to posters and handouts) What in Jewish prayer helps us connect to our hunger for joy and the element of positive emotion?*

קריאת שמת על המיטה - 405

**קריאת שמת על המיטה-**

הייתי מחולק לך מי שהתבשר והמת איתו או שחטא כנגדך, בין בנפשו בין במטותו בין בכבודו בין ברבך אשר לך בין באפם בין בקצרו בין בשוגג בין בכוזר, בין בקרור בין במעשהו, ולא יענש שום אדם במקומו.

**ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו מלך העולם  
המפיל חבל שנתה על עינינו ותנוּבָה על עַפְפוֹנוּ,  
והוֹרֵנוּ וְרָצוּן מִלְפָּנֶיךָ, יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ  
שְׁתַּשְׁכַּחְנוּ לְשָׁלוֹם וְתַעֲמִידֵנוּ לְשָׁלוֹם  
וְאֵל יִבְרַחְנוּ רַעֲיוֹנֵנוּ וְחַלְלוֹת רַעֲיוֹנוֹ וְהַדְּחוּם רַעֲיוֹנֵנוּ.**

**BUK TEFILLA • תפילה • ביאור תפילה**

**הפיל חבל שנתה על עינינו** - *Shema before sleep* at night. The Gemara (Berachot) says that, separate from what one said in *Mishiv*, one should recite the first paragraph of the *Shema* again because of its reference to the timing of its recitation, namely, **בְּקִיבוֹךְ**, when you lie down. As a result there is a special recitation of the *Shema* which is said just before one nods off to sleep. In addition, the Gemara elsewhere (*Berachot*) mentions a blessing that should be said upon going to sleep. At its core then, the bedtime *Shema* consists of a blessing and the recitation of the *Shema*, all of the other paragraphs, representative prayers that are an expansion of one's request for protection during the night.

**BUK TEFILLA • תפילה • ביאור תפילה**

**הפיל חבל שנתה על עינינו** - *Who makes the bonds of sleep fall on my eyes.* Here it sounds like sleep is something cast upon you against your will. Some of us would like to stay up all night if we could, but the blessing assures us that sleep is a *hevel* provided by Hashem for the benefit of our bodies and our souls. Alternatively, young children have a fear of the dark, as their imaginations run wild about the dangers. As adults, we often have our own fears and trepidations about the day prior about the night and day ahead. Sleep is cast upon us to teach us that the dark is to be embraced before the dawn of a new day. Compare the text above with the text of the blessing that we say in the morning.

**ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו מלך העולם  
המבשר שנתה מבתי העטרה בנפשונו.**  
Blessed are You, Hashem our God King of the Universe, who removes sleep from my eyes and slumber from my eyelids.

SHEMA BEFORE SLEEP AT NIGHT • 404

**SHEMA BEFORE SLEEP AT NIGHT<sup>1</sup>**

I hereby forgive anyone who has angered or provoked me or sinned against me, physically or financially or by failing to give me due respect, or in any other matter relating to me, involuntarily or willingly, inadvertently or deliberately, whether in word or deed: let no one incur punishment because of me.

**ברוך** Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe, who makes the bonds of sleep fall on my eyes,<sup>2</sup> and slumber on my eye-lids. May it be Your will, LORD my God and God of my fathers, that You make me lie down in peace and arise in peace. Let not my imagination, bad dreams or troubling thoughts disturb me.<sup>3</sup>

**HILKHOT TEFILLA • הלכות תפילה**

**הפיל חבל שנתה על עינינו** - *Who makes the bonds of sleep fall on my eyes.* There are two traditions regarding the sequence of the recitation of the *Shema* and the blessing. Which should be recited first? Which should be one's final prayer before drifting into sleep? Interestingly, the *Mishnah Berurah* suggests that it is up to each individual to decide according to one's own level of fatigue – if you don't think you can stay awake long enough to say the blessing say it first, otherwise leave it for the end. Each of us leaves our consciousness of the previous day and the presence of God in our lives in our own way. Also interesting is that unlike almost all other prayers, this one is in the singular, perhaps because it takes place at a most intimate and personal moment in our day.

**BUK TEFILLA • תפילה • ביאור תפילה**

**הפיל חבל שנתה על עינינו** - *Who makes the bonds of sleep fall on my eyes.* We say a blessing on it because sleep is something that man needs. The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 6) teaches that *veh'men'ha tov me'af'and God saw that it was very good*) is a reference to sleep. With it, man is able to get up in the morning and pursue *to'lah* (*Abudraham*) is this a statement of fact or of thanks? Let not my imagination, bad dreams or troubling thoughts disturb me. One's imagination to the core at night causing one to wake up startled, confused and ill at ease, and subsequently leaving one as tired if not more so than when one went to sleep. We pray that our sleep is restful and refreshing

HANDOUT 1.9 - BEDTIME ROUTINE WORKSHEET

---

*WHAT TIME DO YOU USUALLY GO TO BED?*

*PICK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING TO DO BEFORE BED:*

<i>STOP USING ALL ELECTRONICS 30-60 MIN BEFORE BED</i>	<i>STOP USING SMART PHONE AT LEAST 30-60 MIN BEFORE BED</i>	<i>NO WATCHING TV OR VIDEOS FOR 30-60 MIN BEFORE BED.</i>	<i>READ A BOOK FOR 30 MIN BEFORE BED.</i>
--	---	---	---

*NEXT, PICK ANOTHER THING TO DO BEFORE BED:*

<i>MEDITATE FOR 5-10 MIN.</i>	<i>DO 10 MIN OF YOGA.</i>	<i>DO 10 MIN OF STRETCHING.</i>	<i>WRITE IN YOUR JOURNAL FOR 5-10 MIN</i>
-------------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------------	---

*NEXT, PICK A WAY MAKE YOUR ROOM MORE SLEEP FRIENDLY:*

<i>REMOVE TV</i>	<i>MAKE YOUR ROOM AS DARK AS POSSIBLE</i>	<i>REMOVE CELL PHONE (GET AN ALARM CLOCK INSTEAD)</i>	<i>SPRAY SOME LAVENDER ON YOUR PILLOW.</i>
------------------	---	---	--

*HOW MANY NIGHTS PER WEEK COULD YOU START DOING THIS?*

## HANDOUT 1.10 - PRIESTLY BLESSING/MEDITATION<sup>3</sup>

---

Breathe out. Feel deep calm as the following blessings are bestowed on you:

*Yevarekhekha Adonai veyishmerekha* – “May God bless you and protect you” by providing physical and emotional well-being. May God bless you with possessions and protect those possessions from both thieves and from corrupting you.

*Ya'eir Adonai panav eilekha vichuneka* – “May the light of God’s face be upon you and deal graciously with you,” strengthening your intellect and intuition, and may you use all your God-given talents to illuminate those around you.

*Yisa Adonai panav eilekha veyaseim lekha shalom* – “May God turn God’s face to you and place upon you peace.” May you know that God loves you and turns toward you compassionately. Embraced by the Divine Presence, may you taste inner peace, combining all your facets into wholeness and holiness. May you walk forward in God’s light with delight. Amen.

---

<sup>3</sup> From *Increasing Wholeness: Jewish Wisdom & Guided Meditations to Strengthen & Calm Body, Heart, Mind & Spirit* by Rabbi Elie Kaplan Spitz

## UNIT 2: GOD AND MYSTICISM AND MOVEMENT, OH MY!

---

This unit will explore **Seligman’s Engagement & Accomplishment as well as Kessler’s Urge for Transcendence & Creative Drive**. This unit will focus on Jewish prayerful pathways into wrestling with the “big questions.” This includes pathways through nature, god or higher power, creativity, music, and movement. Through Jewish spiritual practices, we dive into creative expression deeply as a way to connect to one’s soul. We look at accomplishment and the natural human drive to succeed. We connect this all back to transcendence. From exploring Jewish conceptions of God; to the mysticism and movement in the *Kedushah*; to the connection of prayer with nature in *Kiddush Levana*; to the different settings, movements, and practices attached to *Adonai S’fatai Tiftach*; we look from inside the siddur, out to ourselves, and towards our community, to show us how to connect prayer to our natural drives and needs.

---

## LESSON 1: GOT GOD?

---

---

### SUMMARY OF LESSON:

---

From our siddurim to important modern Jewish thinkers to our own intuition, we explore who and what this God might be that our ancestors, and Jews today, pray to. We explore what wisdom Jewish prayers have to offer about God and what our own experiences tell us about God. We will discuss our own ideas about who, what, or how God works in the world with an openness to all perspectives.

---

---

### ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:

---

- Jewish spirituality practices create opportunities for wrestling with life and for moments of transcendence.
  - The intersection between Jewish spirituality and well-being connects Jewish spirituality *l'dor v'dor*.
  - The intersection between Jewish spirituality and Jewish prayer invites an exploration of deep yearnings and personal meanings.
- 

---

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

---

- Who or what is God?
  - When was a moment that I felt I experienced God?
  - How do my prayers and God interact or not?
- 

---

### LESSON GOALS:

---

*As an educator I aim for this lesson to...*

- ...help students figure out what or who God is to them.
  - ...get students to think about different ways to conceive of God.
  - ...give students a taste of Jewish thought.
- 

---

### OBJECTIVES:

---

*Students will be able to...*

- ...explain who or what they do or do not believe in as "God."
  - ...describe more than one kind of God concept.
- 

---

### EXPRESSIVE OUTCOMES:

---

- Students will have the opportunity to experience prayer in the framework of their own God concept.
- 

---

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

---

- One prayer book per student (I would encourage the synagogue to purchase a prayer book for each student or encourage students to bring their own prayer book if they own one; however, borrowing the communal prayer books works for each lesson)
-

- Art supplies: pencils, colored pencils, crayons, markers, water colors (and/or whatever you might have available for the journaling activity)
- 1 journal per student

---

LEARNING PLAN:  
GRATITUDE PRACTICE

---

**Say to the students:** *Before we begin a new lesson, we will write in our journals. Please write down 3 things you are grateful for today. Afterwards, we will recite Modeh Ani together with these things in mind.*

---

INTRODUCTION TO THE UNIT

---

Last unit we looked at Seligman’s positive emotion and Kessler’s hunger for joy and delight (refer to the posters on the wall with definitions). This unit we will move on to look at Seligman’s Engagement & Accomplishment as well as Kessler’s Urge for Transcendence & Creative Drive. Have the students refer back to their journal entries on the introductory unit and the posters on the wall to recall their previous learning on this.

---

SET INDUCTION (7-10 MIN):

---

Raise your hand if you’ve ever experienced God or felt connected to some kind of God or higher power. You might think of this as feeling connected to something bigger than yourself (ex: a team, the world, your family). Raise your hand if you’ve ever questioned God or struggled with the idea of a higher power. Maybe you’ve struggled with connecting to anything bigger (ex: a team, the world, your family). Next, open your journal and write down a quick description of a time you felt this connection and/or a time you’ve struggled with it: where were you, what was unique about this moment, were you alone or with other people, what were you doing, etc.

---

MAIN ACTIVITY (25-35 MIN):

---

**Who is your God?**

Ask the students, when you pray the Shema, or the Amidah, or a silent prayer, who or what do you pray to? Think about this for a minute and then raise your hand. Feel free to look at the words of these prayers to help you figure out your answer (get out the siddurim here if it’s helpful). Also, if you’re not sure if you believe in “God” per se, what is something bigger than yourself that you believe in. Ask students to share and generate a list on the board. Get the students thinking creatively: what is the name of their God? Who is their God? Does their God have a gender? Does God have to be human-like? Can God be in connection or metaphor?

**God Shopping:**

Before you begin put the God quotes/images **found at the end of this lesson** up around the room or lay them out around a large table. Put on some background music and give the students each a pack of post-its and a pen/marker. First, tell them they will be doing 2 rounds of this and that each round will last 10-15 minutes. The first round will be initial reactions written on post-its and put around each quote. In this round, please ask any clarifying questions you may have. Some of

these quotes are difficult to understand. In the second round, please respond to the reactions of your classmates. When you are done, gather together, and ask the students to share what was especially impactful to them about one of the quotes. Ask the students what they liked or really disliked.

---

#### CLOSURE (10-15 MIN):

This lesson we've learned about our own conceptions of God, a higher power, or something else that makes us feel connected to something bigger. Now, I want us all to close our eyes and think about your own God concept again. Has it changed? Today we've heard a lot of ideas, from within and without this classroom. There are so many more God concepts in Jewish thought possible, including your own and the ideas from your classmates. Please jot down a few ideas you especially found impactful from your classmates, the quotes, or even a thought that came to you after these activities. When you're done, please share one new idea about God that has now made you think in a new way about God or a higher power. How does that change prayer for you?

## HANDOUT 2.1 - GOD QUOTES

---

“I think that imagination is a very powerful instrument, a sacred faculty, so I don’t mind if people accuse me of imagining God when I am davening or doing spirit journey work. I would rather assume that God isn’t talking to me directly, and rely on my imagination, than worry about whether God is talking to me. If God really wants to make God’s self clear, then I’m sure God will do that.” – Rabbi Jill Hammer, PhD

“I don’t know whether we can ever verify whether something is a product of our imagination or reality. God is invisible. It isn’t a question that concerns me. If I feel a response from God, I see that as a response from God. Since my soul is intimately tied up with God, if I feel something in my soul, it is real.” – Rabbi Richard N. Levy, DD (Doctor of Divinity)

“The letters of the name of God in Hebrew are *yod*, *hay*, *vav*, and *hay*. They are frequently mispronounced *Yahveh*. But in truth they are unutterable. Not because of the holiness they evoke, but because they are all vowels and you cannot pronounce all the vowels at once without risk respiratory injury. This word is the sound of breathing. The holiest Name in the world, the Name of the Creator, is the sound of your own breathing” – Rabbi Lawrence Kushner

“If the feminist objections to Jewish God language were confined to the issues of gender, the manipulation of pronouns and creation of female imagery would fairly easily resolve the difficulties described...while feminist criticisms of traditional language begin with gender, they come to focus on the deeper issue of images of God’s power as dominance.” – Judith Plaskow

“The conception of God as cosmic Process has been subjected to considerable misunderstanding and misplaced resentment, as though it constituted a complete break with the traditional, or conventional, idea of God. Not only has its validity or truth been attacked but its very claim to being religious in character and compatible with prayer and worship has been challenged. Many an ill-informed critic has even charged that conception with being atheistic. What are life, knowledge, goodness, if not processes? They are certainly not beings or entities. Since God is life, knowledge, goodness, what else can He be but Process?” – Mordecai M. Kaplan

“Thus, unlike scientific thinking, understanding for the realness of God does not come about by way of syllogism...by a thinking that proceeds from concept to concept, but by way of insights. The ultimate insight is the outcome of *moments* when we are stirred beyond words, of instants of wonder, awe, praise, fear, trembling and radical amazement; of awareness of grandeur, of perceptions we can grasp but are unable to convey, of discoveries of the unknown, of moments in which we abandon the pretense of being acquainted with the world, of *knowledge by in-acquaintance*. It is at the climax of such moments that we attain the certainty that life has meaning, that time is more than evanescence, that beyond all being there is someone who cares.” – Abraham Joshua Heschel

“Extended, the lines of relationships intersect in the eternal You. Every single You is a glimpse of that. Through every single You the basic word addresses the eternal You...Men have addressed their eternal You by many names...But all names of God remain hallowed – because they have been used not only to speak of God but also to speak to him” – Martin Buber



Franz Rosenzweig's Star of Redemption – God, People, and World CONNECTED through Revelation, Redemption, and Creation.

---

## LESSON 2: *KEDUSHAH* (HOLINESS) – MYSTICISM, ANGELS, AND MORE!

---

---

### SUMMARY OF LESSON:

---

Using the prayer in the daily *Amidah*, the *Kedushah*, we look at the ways Jewish prayer incorporates mysticism as a way to reach towards holiness, towards God. Imagining Jacob's ladder as a conception of prayer, we think about what changes in our prayer when we pray in this framework. From mysticism to angels and their role in Jewish prayer, to an outreach towards transcendence with our movements, we use the *Kedushah* to re-imagine Jewish prayer and transcendence.

---

---

### ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:

---

- Jewish spirituality practices create opportunities for wrestling with life and for moments of transcendence.
  - Jewish spirituality trains the brain to notice and wonder about the nature, purpose, and meaning of life.
  - Jewish spirituality accesses parts of the psyche that contribute to well-being and flourishing.
  - The intersection between Jewish spirituality and Jewish prayer invites an exploration of deep yearnings and personal meanings.
- 

---

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

---

- Why do we move in Jewish prayer?
  - What is Jewish mysticism? (and what's with angels and prayer?)
- 

---

### LESSON GOALS:

---

As an educator I aim for this lesson to...

- ...help students expand their ideas of Jewish prayer.
  - ...show students a Jewish mystical kind of cosmology.
  - ...expose students to the Jewish yearning for transcendence in prayer.
- 

---

### OBJECTIVES:

---

Students will be able to...

- ...connect the yearning for transcendence to Jewish prayer.
  - ...describe the *Kedushah* as an example of a Jewish prayer demonstrating a yearning for transcendence.
  - ...explain what Jacob's ladder has to do with Jewish prayer.
  - ...name the *Zohar* as an important text for Jewish mystics.
- 

---

### EXPRESSIVE OUTCOMES:

---

Students will have the opportunity to...

- ...experience movement paired with the *Kedushah* in an attempt at engagement or transcendence.
-

---

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

---

- One prayer book per student (I would encourage the synagogue to purchase a prayer book for each student or encourage students to bring their own prayer book if they own one; however, borrowing the communal prayer books works for each lesson)
  - Art supplies: pencils, colored pencils, crayons, markers, water colors (and/or whatever you might have available for the journaling activity)
  - 1 journal per student
  - Handouts at the end of the lesson (copies for each student)
- 

### LEARNING PLAN: GRATITUDE PRACTICE

---

**Say to the students:** *Before we begin a new lesson, we will write in our journals. Please write down 3 things you are grateful for today. Afterwards, we will recite Modeh Ani together with these things in mind.*

---

### SET INDUCTION (10 MIN)

---

Play this YouTube clip from 0:50-2:40: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OMSkavUrzHM>

This connection and infinite feeling, whether you've felt it in love or with family or winning a great sports game, this feeling is what we mean when we say transcendence. Write the word "transcendence" on the board. Ask students to come up and write down one or two words related to this word or that might help us understand what the word means. After everyone sits down, ask one student to read the definition from the handout found at the end of this lesson. Quickly discuss the definition compared with or in addition to the student responses on the board.

### MAIN ACTIVITIES

---

Explain that transcendence, or psychological engagement, is a natural human yearning. In our teen years you might experience this when you accomplish something big, if you take a risk, when you feel connected socially. Ask for some examples of this. It's the same reason why some teens might seek some dangerous forms of a "high" in order to feel this. Ask for some examples of this (not personal ones).

Today we explore a prayer that embodies this yearning in movement called the *Kedushah* along with the Jewish mysticism that goes along with it. Together, pray using the English translation of the *Kedushah* found on the prayer handout at the end of this lesson, this includes the "choreography."

Write this question on the board: When have you ever felt connected to something bigger than yourself? Have you ever felt infinite? In awe or wonder of something...maybe something in nature? Have each student answer this in their journals.

Using the prayer handout as a guide, each student should write their own *Kedusha* in honor of a personal moment of transcendence. It can be as simple as replacing God with the moment of transcendence in the prayer or students can get more creative with the structure.

---

#### CLOSURE

**Ask the students:** After exploring our own personal transcendent experiences and the definition of transcendence I want us to think about what transcendence means to you. What do you think transcendence is? Why do we seek it out? Going around the room, get an answer from each student. If you have time, ask them how this might be connected to the movement in the *Kedushah*.

## HANDOUT 2.2 – TRANSCENDENCE RESOURCE

---

Transcendence: the quality or state of being transcendent

Transcendent:

**1a:** exceeding usual limits: SURPASSING

**b:** extending or lying beyond the limits of ordinary experience

**c:** *in Kantian philosophy:* being beyond the limits of all possible experience and knowledge

**2:** being beyond comprehension

**3:** transcending the universe or material existence — compare IMMANENT sense 2

**4:** universally applicable or significant the antislavery movement ... recognized the *transcendent* importance of liberty— L. H. Tribe



---

## LESSON 3: KIDDUSH LEVANA

---

---

### SUMMARY OF LESSON:

---

Building on the previous lesson, this lesson explores transcendence through nature by looking at Kiddush Levana. This prayer, perhaps more than other prayers, embodies transcendent yearning through natural phenomena. By connecting this prayer to experiences of transcendence tied to nature, we find another way to reach towards something bigger.

---

---

### ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:

---

- Jewish spirituality practices create opportunities for wrestling with life and for moments of transcendence.
  - Jewish spirituality trains the brain to notice and wonder about the nature, purpose, and meaning of life.
  - Jewish spirituality accesses parts of the psyche that contribute to well-being and flourishing.
  - The intersection between Jewish spirituality and Jewish prayer invites an exploration of deep yearnings and personal meanings.
- 

---

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

---

- How does nature help us access the feeling of transcendence? (or “radical amazement”)
  - How does nature connect us to God?
- 

---

### LESSON GOALS:

---

As an educator I aim for this lesson to...

- ...expose students to a novel kind of Jewish prayer.
  - ...show students the way Jewish prayer connects to nature.
  - ...help students see a connection between transcendence, God, and nature.
- 

---

### OBJECTIVES:

---

Students will be able to...

- ...explain what *Kiddush Levana* is and name another prayer in Jewish liturgy that connects us to nature.
  - ...express an experience of transcendence or deep engagement connected to nature.
  - ...connect nature to God.
- 

---

### EXPRESSIVE OUTCOMES:

---

Students will have the opportunity to...

- ...experience Jewish prayer in nature.
- 

---

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

---

- One prayer book per student (I would encourage the synagogue to purchase a prayer book for each student or encourage students to bring their own prayer book if they own one; however, borrowing the communal prayer books works for each lesson)
- **Highly encouraged** to do part of this lesson in an outside space in the evening (OR to bring a little bit of nature into the classroom instead)

---

#### LEARNING PLAN:

---

#### GRATITUDE PRACTICE:

---

**Say to the students:** *Before we begin a new lesson, we will write in our journals. Please write down 3 things you are grateful for today. Afterwards, we will recite Modeh Ani together with these things in mind.*

---

#### SET INDUCTION (10 MIN):

---

Think about a time that you were in nature. Maybe this was in the ocean, in the woods, in a desert. Think about how you felt. Did you feel awe? Transcendence? Connection? Fear? Name that feeling internally and write it down. Ask a few people to share about their nature experience.

---

#### MAIN ACTIVITY

---

**Main Activity (20-30 min):** Go outside in the evening (the darker, the better) OR turn out the lights and play this on a laptop or TV: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eHYRRky3kEw>. Bring copies of *Kiddush Levana* found at the end of this lesson, some form of lights (lanterns, real candles, electric candles), and blankets. Have the students pair up and read through the translation making special note of the *keva* (any movements or instructions) found with the translation. Ask each pair to share something that they appreciate about this service, something that stood out to them, and something that they're curious about (I appreciate...I notice...I wonder...). Turn out the lights. Have the students lie down on the blankets looking towards the sky (or sitting in a relaxed position looking at the TV/laptop). Lead the students in *kiddush levana* in English (they will have to get up for parts of it). Give them space to lie back down and look at the moon and stars for a minute or two afterwards (or the TV – you could lead them in a short silent meditation with the nature sounds in the background as well).

---

#### CLOSURE (10-15 MIN)

---

Sit in a circle outside with some light on again. Go around the circle and have each student share something they will take away from this experience. Tell them that in this unit we've been learning about spiritual elements through prayer, but also about what gives life meaning. Our reflections on nature and transcendence have been about meaning and engagement (point to the Seligman poster) as much as they've been about Jewish spiritual practice. With this in mind, open your journals and begin to jot down a few ideas of what gives your life meaning. When do you feel engaged the most? Maybe even transcendent? What makes your heart race or helps

you feel in the moment? Is there something you've done where you are so focused you tune out everything else?





ויהי ראון מלְפָנֶיךָ יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, לְמַלְאֵת פְּגִימוֹת הַלְבָנָה  
 וְלֹא יִהְיֶה בָּהּ שֵׁם מַעֲוֵיט. וְיִהְיֶה אִוֵּר הַלְבָנָה כְּאוֹר הַחֲמָה וּכְאוֹר  
 שִׁבְעַת יָמֵי בְרֵאשִׁית כְּמוֹ שֶׁהָיְתָה קֹדֶם מַעֲוֵיטָהּ. שְׁנֵאֲמַר: אֲחֻשְׁעִי  
 הַמְּאֹדֶת הַמְּגֹלְלִים: וְתִתְקַם בְּנִי מִקְרָא שְׂפָתַי: וּבְקִשׁוֹ אֲחֻיִּיהוּ  
 אֱלֹהֵיהֶם וְאֵת דְּרוֹד מִלְכָּם: אָמֵן.

לְמַנְעַח בְּנִיגֻנֹת, מִזְמוֹר שִׁיר: אֱלֹהִים יִדְבְּרֵנוּ וְיִקְרְבֵנוּ, יָאֵר פְּנֵינוּ אֲתֵנוּ  
 כְּלָה: לְדַעַת בְּאֵרָאן דְרִבְקָה בְּקִלְגֹּזִים וְיִשׁוּעָתְךָ: יוֹדוּךָ עַמּוּם אֱלֹהִים,  
 יוֹדוּךָ עַמּוּם כָּלִים: יִשְׁמְחוּ וְיִדְבְּרוּ לָאָמִים, כִּי־תִשְׁפֹּט עַמּוּם מוֹיֶשֶׁת,  
 וְלְאֻמּוֹם בְּאֵרָאן תִּגְדָּתִים סָלָה: יוֹדוּךָ עַמּוּם אֱלֹהִים, יוֹדוּךָ עַמּוּם כָּלִים:  
 אֲרָאן נִתְמַד וְיִבְלָה, יִכְרַכְנוּ אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהֵינוּ: וְיִכְרַכְנוּ אֱלֹהִים, וְיִדְרֹאוּ  
 אֹתוֹ כְּלִי־אֶפְסֵי־אֲרָאן:

The service continues with *Yitzi* (page 381) and *Kaddish* (page 385) followed by *Maariv* below.

All sing:  
 טובים מאורות שִׁבְרָא אֱלֹהֵינוּ  
 יָצִים בְּדַעַת בְּבִיחָה וּבִדְשִׁבְלָה  
 כְּתָ וּגְבוּרָה נִתָּן בְּתָם  
 לְהַיּוֹת מוֹשְׁלִים בְּקִרְבֵּי תַבְּלָה  
 מְלֵאִים זֵיו וּמְפִיקִים נִגְוָה  
 נִאֲוָה זֵיוִם בְּכָל הָעוֹלָם  
 שְׂמֵחוּם בְּצִאתָם וְשִׁשִׁים בְּבוֹאֵם  
 עוֹשִׂים בְּאֵימָה רָאוֹן קוֹנֵם  
 פֶּאֶר וְכִבְדוֹ נִתְנַגֵּם לִשְׁמוֹ  
 צְהִלָּה וְרִנָּה לִזְכָּר מְלִכּוֹתוֹ  
 קָרָא לִשְׁמֵשׁ וְיִזְרַח אוֹר  
 רָאֵה וְהִתְקִין צוּרֵת הַלְבָנָה.

May it be Your will, LORD my God and God of my ancestors, to  
 make good the deficiency of the moon, so that it is no longer in its  
 diminished state. May the light of the moon be like the light of the  
 sun and like the light of the seven days of creation as it was before it  
 was diminished, as it says, "The two great luminaries." And may there  
 be fulfilled for us the verse: "They shall seek the LORD their God, and  
 David their king." Amen.

For the conductor of music. With stringed instruments, a psalm. Ps. 67  
 A song. May God be gracious to us and bless us. May He make His  
 face shine on us, Selah. Then will Your way be known on earth, Your  
 salvation among all the nations. Let the peoples praise You, God; let all  
 peoples praise You. Let nations rejoice and sing for joy, for You judge  
 the peoples with equity, and guide the nations of the earth, Selah. Let  
 the peoples praise You, God; let all peoples praise You. The earth has  
 yielded its harvest. May God, our God, bless us. God will bless us, and  
 all the ends of the earth will fear Him.

The service continues with *Aleinu* (page 381) and *Maariv's Kaddish* (page 385) followed by *Good are the radiant stars* below.

All sing:  
 טובים Good are the radiant stars our God created;  
 He formed them with knowledge,  
 understanding and deliberation.  
 He gave them strength and might  
 to rule throughout the world.  
 Full of splendor, radiating light,  
 beautiful is their splendor throughout the world.  
 Glad as they go forth, joyous as they return,  
 they fulfill with awe their Creator's will.  
 Glory and honor they give to His name,  
 jubilation and song at the mention of His majesty.  
 He called the sun into being and it shone with light.  
 He looked and fashioned the form of the moon.

---

## LESSON 4: ADONAI S'FATAI TIFTACH – MUSIC AND MOVEMENT

---

---

### SUMMARY OF LESSON:

---

In this lesson we directly explore the question of how Jewish liturgical practices deal with approaching God in prayer: through music (or chanting), with intention, and with movement. Through an exploration of *Adonai S'fatai Tiftach*, we learn about how Jews prepare for spiritual moments, what kind of emotions Judaism associates with this experience, and how precious this experience is to Jewish liturgists.

---

---

### ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:

---

- Jewish spirituality practices create opportunities for wrestling with life and for moments of transcendence.
  - Jewish spirituality trains the brain to notice and wonder about the nature, purpose, and meaning of life.
  - Jewish spirituality accesses parts of the psyche that contribute to well-being and flourishing.
  - The intersection between Jewish spirituality and Jewish prayer invites an exploration of deep yearnings and personal meanings.
- 

---

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

---

- Before whom do we stand?
  - What does it mean to create space for God?
  - What does it mean to have respect for God? (perhaps as opposed to or connected to fear)
- 

---

### LESSON GOALS:

---

As an educator I aim for this lesson to...

- ...help students grapple with how they might make space for God.
  - ...show students how Jewish prayer deals with setting an intention.
  - ...help students explore a conception of God found at the beginning of the Amidah and think creatively about interpretations of this God concept.
- 

---

### OBJECTIVES:

---

Students will be able to...

- ...articulate a way they might make space for God.
  - ...explain a conception of God reflected at the beginning of the Amidah.
  - ...reflect on their own concept of God in connection with the beginning of the Amidah.
- 

---

### EXPRESSIVE OUTCOMES:

---

Students will have the opportunity to...

- ...experience the beginning of the Amidah as a moment of both *keva* and *kavannah*.
-

---

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

---

- One prayer book per student (I would encourage the synagogue to purchase a prayer book for each student or encourage students to bring their own prayer book if they own one; however, borrowing the communal prayer books works for each lesson)
  - One large sized unlined journal per student.
  - Art supplies: pencils, colored pencils, crayons, markers, water colors (and/or whatever you might have available for the journaling activity)
- 

### LEARNING PLAN:

---

#### GRATITUDE PRACTICE:

---

**Say to the students:** *Before we begin a new lesson, we will write in our journals. Please write down 3 things you are grateful for today. Afterwards, we will recite Modeh Ani together with these things in mind.*

#### SET INDUCTION (10 MIN)

---

Play a version of Adonai S'fatai Tiftach that you like (or use this one: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BvzxiUt-d60>) and ask the students to doodle on a blank page of their journal as they listen to the prayer. Ask them about how that felt and have a few students share. Tell them afterwards that today we are going to connect music, movement, intention, and prayer through the introduction of the Amidah.

#### MAIN ACTIVITY (20-30 MIN)

---

Pass out the Amidah handout found at the end of the lesson. Ask the students what they know about the introduction of the Amidah (or whichever name of the prayer they are familiar with): Where does it happen in the service? Do we sit or stand? What movements go with this prayer, specifically with this opening line?

Ask students to read through the page, especially the commentary, and underline anything they are confused about. After they are done, explore the questions they have about the underlined material. Next, ask the students to highlight anything they really appreciate or like about the commentary or prayer itself. After they are done, have each person share one appreciation. Next, have each student circle anything that sticks out to them and write any further questions that they might have or ideas about the things they circled. Discuss these last notations they made. Now, ask them to create their own version of this page in their journal with their own commentary and directions; they should include commentary from the siddur that they liked (and you could look at other versions of this in different siddurim as resources).

Play different versions of the Adonai S'fatai Tiftach in the background or other Jewish music. Tell them they can get creative with this page of prayer by drawing, adding their own prayer, thinking about who or what they are praying to. Finally, ask them all to pray their version of the Adonai S'fatai Tiftach, with the movements and intentions they have chosen.

### CLOSURE (5-10 MIN)

---

Sitting in a circle ask the students how it felt to pray their version of Adonai S'fatai Tiftach. Discuss what felt different from the usual experience, why, and what they might change if they were to do it again.

### MYSTERIES COUNCIL (10 MIN)

---

We've been exploring big ideas about God, spirituality, and engagement in this unit. It's time to introduce the mysteries council. The mysteries council is about exploring questions you have about life, God, and everything in between. I've handed out slips of paper. Please write at least one question pondering the mysteries about the self/about you (what keeps you up at night?) on the slip of paper and put it in this jar before we leave. Here are some examples of questions: What is normal? How do I know I'm normal? Why do I feel so alone? (Note: see the second handout for examples that might help you understand this particular part of the mysteries questions)

These questions will be anonymous. If you're not sure about your question, ask me and I'll help you with it. Next week, at the end of class, we will add more questions.

**Note to teacher:** See handout on the "mysteries council" at the end of this lesson. This will help you going forward with understanding this regular part of the class. You will be collecting these questions throughout the rest of Unit 2 and 3. In the concluding unit you will read them in a ritual-like activity.

**THE AMIDA**

*There are three formats of the Amida offered in this Siddur. The Amida of Shaḥarit includes commentary; in the Amida of Minhā (on page 280) one may add one's own commentary; the Amida of Ma'ariv (on page 360) is in the traditional form.*

*The Amida until "in former years" on page 192, is said standing with feet together. The Amida is said silently, following the precedent of Hannah when she prayed for a child (1 Sam. 1:13). If there is a minyan, it is repeated aloud by the Leader. Take three steps forward, as if formally entering the place of the Divine Presence. At the points indicated by ♪, bend the knees at the first word, bow at the second, and stand straight before saying God's name.*

**O LORD, open my lips,<sup>BA</sup> so that my mouth may declare Your praise.**

Ps. 51

**BIUR TEFILLA • ביאור תפילה**

**אֲדֹנָי, שִׁפְתַי תִּפְתָּח** – O LORD, open my lips.  
This is actually a verse from *Tehillim*, (51) recited by King David in the wake of his sin with Batsheva. Knowing that Hashem does not want sacrifices or ritual offerings empty of heartfelt emotion or a change in one's behavior, he asks that Hashem help him to open his mouth in sincere prayer.

Other approaches to this verse include:  
*Forgive me, Hashem, so that my prayer will be acceptable.* (Rashi)

*Help me, Hashem, so that I may pray with kavana so that my prayers will be accepted. In effect, this is a prayer for proper prayer.* (Rabbeinu Yona)

*Help me, Hashem, to feel dependent enough upon You to want to pray out of a true sense of need.*

*Help me, Hashem, to feel other people's sense of sorrow and pain, without my having to actually suffer these, so that I may pray to You out of a true sense of need.* (Rabbi Tzaddok of Lublin)

**ANI TEFILLA • אני תפילה**

**אֲדֹנָי, שִׁפְתַי תִּפְתָּח** – O LORD, open my lips.  
A rabbi was seen coming late to shul on a regular basis, despite the fact that he was also regularly seen up and about from the time

of sunrise early in the morning. When asked what he was doing during all of that time, he responded: "I pray that I may be able to pray."  
**Pray for a moment before you pray.**

At about the fourth or fifth week of the course, when the beginnings of trust emerge, we ask our students to anonymously write their personal mysteries.

“Please write about what you wonder about when you cannot sleep at night,” we suggest, “or when you’re walking alone to the school bus, or when you’re jogging on the track. What do you worry about? or feel curious about? or feel afraid or excited about? What are your questions about yourselves, about others, about life itself?”

We *never* ask students to speak aloud about their private mysteries. Only if this process is completely *anonymous* are students safe. Only then will we hear the truth. If you as the teacher are familiar with students’ handwriting, you might give the original papers to a colleague to type before reading them.

The promise of *complete anonymity* in our mysteries questions frees students to have a rare glimpse into the hearts of their peers; they are always surprised and greatly relieved by the common concerns they find there.

Gary Comstock, a professor of leadership development and chaplain at Wesleyan University, also uses anonymous writing to elicit unusual depth and honesty. He gives his students a topic or a question, hands out index cards, and asks them to write anonymously what feels most important to them about the theme. Comstock (personal interview, 1999) believes that “authority never really breaks down” in the classroom, “even if I’m the nicest person in the world. Students still need to express some things with utter safety—not just because of how I’d react but also their peers. There are things people are ready to own and others they must process first before being ready to own.”

From the inner city, from small towns, and from affluent suburbs, I have collected thousands of questions from students in 7th through 12th grades. The range is broad, but more impressive are the patterns of yearning and confusion that appear again and again.

Let us listen first to a few “mysteries about myself” from high school seniors:<sup>3</sup>

- ∞ *Why am I so angry?*
- ∞ *Why am I so alone?*
- ∞ *Why do I feel scared and confused about becoming an adult? What does it mean to accept that this is my life and I have responsibility for it?*

<sup>3</sup>All questions in italic format are anonymous “mysteries questions” from students in public and private schools across the United States.

- ⌘ *Why am I not pretty like my sister is?*
- ⌘ *How do I know I'm "normal"?*
- ⌘ *What is normal?*

When asked to ponder their mysteries about other people and about life or the universe, seniors ask questions like these:

- ⌘ *Why do people hate others—black, white, Hispanic?*
- ⌘ *Why do people do drugs?*
- ⌘ *Will my brother have the same temper/addictions as my father?*
- ⌘ *Will we ever have a woman or a black president?*
- ⌘ *How do people who love you hurt you? Why?*
- ⌘ *Why do people tire of life?*
- ⌘ *What is our purpose in life?*
- ⌘ *How do I know the world around me is safe, in existence, and not going to end any minute?*

Younger students have already begun this search. In 9th and 10th grade, they chew on questions like these:

- ⌘ *What do people think about me?*
- ⌘ *How does one determine sexuality? Are there symptoms? Is it a decision or a natural given—are you stuck with it or is it a choice?*
- ⌘ *Why can't I trust people who are trustworthy and not trust people who aren't?*
- ⌘ *Why am I so heartless to so many people?*
- ⌘ *Why is it so hard to get along with others at this age? Why? Why? Why?*
- ⌘ *Why have we ruined our earth?*
- ⌘ *I wonder who is God, or if there is God? If there is a God, why is there so much Bad on Earth?*
- ⌘ *Does it hurt to die?*

With questions ranging from the mundane to the profound, 7th and 8th grade students also reveal the challenging dilemmas of adolescence:

- ⌘ *Am I so annoying and so unfriendly that some people ignore, act mean, or talk behind my back—I don't want anyone to hate me.*
- ⌘ *Why do I have to make myself look nice for other people? Why can't I just act like myself and not have to impress anybody?*
- ⌘ *When do I get tall?*
- ⌘ *What is it like to be old?*

- ∞ *Why don't I always get along with my parents?*
- ∞ *Why do boys always like stuck-up girls?*
- ∞ *How do you know if you love a boy or girlfriend? What is a good time to loose [sic] virginity?*
- ∞ *What happens when you're pressured into sex?*
- ∞ *Why don't my parents trust me?*
- ∞ *Why are people so cold in taking care of our planet?*
- ∞ *How come people kill other people?*
- ∞ *Where do we go when we die?*

These “mysteries questions” allow us to refine our curriculum to respond personally to each group. By doing so, student concerns become central to the curriculum, not peripheral or irrelevant.

The following week, we read aloud *all* the questions—completely unedited and uncensored. We read them in a ceremonial way with honor and respect. When their questions are read back in their entirety, students are stunned by the depth and wisdom of their peers. They always express relief that they are not alone. This public, respectful witnessing of their personal mysteries is a turning point for each group.

“So now are you going to answer all of them?” a student will often joke. In this humorous way, they reveal their awareness that most of these questions do not call for answers, certainly not by a classroom teacher in a public school.

“If we are to open up the spiritual dimension of education, we must understand that spiritual questions do not have answers in the way math problems do,” writes Parker Palmer (1998), one of the first contemporary writers to write about the role of spirituality in education. “Giving one another The Answer is part of what shuts us down. When people ask these deep questions, they do not want to be saved but simply to be heard; they do not want fixes or formulas but compassion and companionship on the demanding journey called life” (p. 8). Palmer also acknowledges that “our real questions are asked largely in our hearts because it is too risky to ask them in front of one another.”

As I have tried to understand what encourages the spiritual development of students, anonymous, heartfelt questions have been a vital tool. These questions give us as teachers immediate access to the wonder, worry, curiosity, fear, and excitement that burns inside our students.

---

## LESSON 5: SHEHECHIYANU

---

---

### SUMMARY OF LESSON:

---

We finish this unit with our first mysteries council exploration of questions, with a connection between our accomplishments and our losses with God, and with an exploration of what it means to put the light in our lives next to the darkness. This lesson helps tie together the first two units and wrap up the more direct exploration of Seligman’s engagement and accomplishment. We will explore transcendence again and connect it with especially happy occasions (accomplishment) and especially difficult occasions (loss, disappointment, etc.).

---

---

### ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:

---

- Jewish spirituality practices create opportunities for wrestling with life and for moments of transcendence.
  - Jewish spirituality trains the brain to notice and wonder about the nature, purpose, and meaning of life.
  - Jewish spirituality accesses parts of the psyche that contribute to well-being and flourishing.
  - The intersection between Jewish spirituality and Jewish prayer invites an exploration of deep yearnings and personal meanings.
- 

---

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

---

- Why do we often connect to God or feel more transcendent during especially amazing or especially difficult moments?
  - What does it mean to bless both the good and the bad?
  - What makes life mysterious?
- 

---

### LESSON GOALS:

---

As an educator I aim for this lesson to...

- ...help students connect accomplishment and positive occasions with transcendence.
  - ...help students see the connection between mysteries and transcendence.
  - ...get students to think about the universe and their place in it.
- 

---

### OBJECTIVES:

---

Students will be able to...

- ...discuss mysteries questions and connect them to their lives.
  - ...explain why we bless light and darkness.
  - ...explain their feelings around accomplishment.
  - ...connect thankfulness with transcendence.
- 

---

### EXPRESSIVE OUTCOMES:

---

Students will have the opportunity to...

- ...experience a “mysteries council.”
-

---

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

---

- One prayer book per student (I would encourage the synagogue to purchase a prayer book for each student or encourage students to bring their own prayer book if they own one; however, borrowing the communal prayer books works for each lesson)
  - One large sized unlined journal per student.
  - Art supplies: pencils, colored pencils, crayons, markers, water colors (and/or whatever you might have available for the journaling activity)
  - Candles and candle holders (enough for each student).
- 

### LEARNING PLAN:

---

### GRATITUDE PRACTICE:

---

**Say to the students:** *Before we begin a new lesson, we will write in our journals. Please write down 3 things you are grateful for today. Afterwards, we will recite Modeh Ani together with these things in mind.*

### SET INDUCTION (10-15 MIN)

---

Start with playing this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=srzvRyIZoZw>. Afterwards, ask them to think about a time when they succeeded at something. It might be a huge accomplishment. It might be a time where they worked really hard and it paid off. Tell them to write it down in their journal. Afterwards, ask 2-3 students to share.

### MAIN ACTIVITIES (20 MIN)

---

Begin by passing out the handout found at the end of this lesson. Explain that these are blessings we say for really good moments and really bad moments in life. Just like we bless the good, we bless the bad. However, there's a difference between the way the different blessings are structured. Do you notice what this is? (The difference is that for the good we bless God for doing the good or helping us be alive for the good while for the bad we bless God in God's judgement) Why do you think this is? (No real "right" answer. However, if they struggle with this explain that these prayers are telling us something about how the people who wrote them felt about God. That when good things happen, we must give thanks to something bigger than ourselves and when bad things happen we want to try to find acceptance of whatever in the universe led to that event. Accepting God's judgement is a way of doing this. Think of the stages of grief/loss).

Now, light a candle for yourself. Ask the students, how can we make the light from this candle shine brighter? (Turn off the light) Think about the candle as a metaphor for blessings. What does it tell us about blessings that they shine brighter with some darkness? (No right answer. However, if they struggle you can say that it shows us that we need both in order to appreciate them) Now, hand out the rest of the candles and candle holders. Ask one student at a time to light their candles. Leave a little space between each student. At the end, ask them what they noticed when their friends lit their candles (it got lighter). If we apply the same metaphor, what does this mean? (No right answer. Could be a connection to sharing blessings with the community and/or that the more blessings we have the starker the contrast between the light

and dark and/or that we can bring our lights to friends when they feel like they're in the dark). Have the students set aside the candles.

---

#### CLOSURE (10 MIN)

---

This unit we've been talking a lot about God, transcendence, and engagement (point to the appropriate posters on the wall). When we accomplish something we might feel transcendent, when we experience disappointment we might grasp for a connection or a reason for this difficult moment. How does accomplishment help you understand transcendence in a new way?

---

#### MYSTERIES COUNCIL (10-15 MIN)

---

Ask students to ponder mysteries about other people, life, the universe (as opposed to self). They can write more than one question and ask more questions about the self. Remind them that these are anonymous. Add them to the jar. Each student should add at least one question (refer back to handout 2.6 if you need guidance on how to frame this/examples of questions).

### ברכות שונות

- Upon (a) eating seasonal fruits of a new season for the first time;  
 (b) purchasing a new garment of significant value to the wearer (e.g., a new suit or dress);  
 (c) performance of a seasonal *mitzvah*; or (d) deriving significant benefit from an event  
 (if others also benefit, the blessing הטוב והמטיב — see below — is substituted):

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
 שֶׁהַחַיִּינוּ וְקִיָּמְנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזֶמֶן הַזֶּה.

Upon hearing unusually good news which benefits both oneself and others:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַטּוֹב וְהַמְטִיב.

Upon hearing unusually bad news:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, רֵיַן הָאֲמָת.

Upon donning a new garment of significant value to the wearer (e.g., a new suit or dress):

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, מְלַבֵּשׁ עֲרָמִים.

### VARIOUS BLESSINGS

- Upon (a) eating seasonal fruits of a new season for the first time;  
 (b) purchasing a new garment of significant value to the wearer (e.g., a new suit or dress);  
 (c) performance of a seasonal *mitzvah*; or (d) deriving significant benefit from an event  
 (if others also benefit, the blessing 'Who is good and does good' — see below — is substituted):

*Blessed are You, HASHEM, our God, King of the universe,  
 Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season.*

Upon hearing unusually good news that benefits both oneself and others:

*Blessed are You, HASHEM, our God, King of the universe,  
 Who is good and does good.*

Upon hearing unusually bad news:

*Blessed are You, HASHEM, our God, King of the universe,  
 the true Judge.*

Upon donning a new garment of significant value to the wearer (e.g., a new suit or dress):

*Blessed are You, HASHEM, our God, King of the universe,  
 Who clothes the naked.*

### UNIT 3: IS ONE THE LONELIEST NUMBER?

---

This unit will focus on **Seligman's Positive Relationships & Meaning** and explore **Kessler's Yearning for Deep Connection, Yearning for Initiation, Search for Meaning and Purpose, as well as Silence and Solitude**. This unit will develop a sense of community and delve into what spiritual practices say about community and its importance in Judaism. It will show the difference between communal practices and individual practice. In this unit, through Jewish spiritual prayer practices, we grapple with particular and universal, solitude and loneliness, healing and loss, lament and forgiveness.

---

## LESSON 1: COMMUNAL PRAYERS

---

---

### SUMMARY OF LESSON:

---

From the *mi she'beirach* for an Aliyah, to the *mi she'beirach* for healing, to the blessing for surviving danger, to prayers for the state of Israel, we explore the role of communal blessings during the Torah service.

---

---

### ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:

---

- Jewish spirituality practices create opportunities for wrestling with life and for moments of transcendence.
  - Jewish spirituality trains the brain to notice and wonder about the nature, purpose, and meaning of life.
  - Jewish spirituality accesses parts of the psyche that contribute to well-being and flourishing.
  - The intersection between Jewish spirituality and well-being connects Jewish spirituality *l'dor v'dor*.
  - The intersection between Jewish spirituality and Jewish prayer invites an exploration of deep yearnings and personal meanings.
- 

---

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

---

- Why do we say these blessings in front of the community with the Torah scroll out?
  - What is special about this kind of communal blessing? (as opposed to praying together during other parts of the service)
  - How do these prayers both help create and maintain community?
- 

---

### LESSON GOALS:

---

As an educator I aim for this lesson to...

- ...expose students to prayers previously unknown or less studied.
  - ...help students think creatively about prayer and community.
  - ...highlight the role of communal prayer in Judaism and Jewish spiritual practice.
- 

---

### OBJECTIVES:

---

Students will be able to...

- ...describe a few Jewish communal prayers.
  - ...write their own Jewish communal prayer.
  - ...explain a few reasons why these prayers are said in front of the community while the Torah is out.
  - ...note the difference between this type of communal prayer, parallel prayer, and individual prayer.
- 

---

### EXPRESSIVE OUTCOMES:

---

Students will have the opportunity to...

---

- ...lead a moment of communal prayer amongst their peers.

---

#### MATERIALS NEEDED:

---

- One prayer book per student (I would encourage the synagogue to purchase a prayer book for each student or encourage students to bring their own prayer book if they own one; however, borrowing the communal prayer books works for each lesson)
- One large sized unlined journal per student.
- Art supplies: pencils, colored pencils, crayons, markers, water colors (and/or whatever you might have available for the journaling activity)

---

#### LEARNING PLAN:

---

#### GRATITUDE PRACTICE:

---

**Say to the students:** *Before we begin a new lesson, we will write in our journals. Please write down 3 things you are grateful for today. Afterwards, we will recite Modeh Ani together with these things in mind.*

---

#### SET INDUCTION (10 MIN)

---

**Write the question on the board:** What are ways we can show up or help individuals or families in our community in times of need? What are different types of times of need? Are they all sad? Happy? Neutral? Ask everyone to spend a few minutes writing a response in their journals. Afterwards, they will all share something they wrote.

---

#### MAIN ACTIVITIES (20-30 MIN)

---

**(If possible, do this part of the lesson in a prayer space and get the Torah out)**

Open Mishkan T'filah to the first communal prayer of the Torah service on page 108 (if in another siddur, you'll start with the *mi she'beirach* for an *Aliyah*). Explain that today we will be looking at communal prayers, specifically: the *mi she'beirach* for an *Aliyah*, the *b'racha* for a *gomel*, the *mi she'beirach* for healing, and a prayer for the state of Israel.

Have everyone gather around the Torah (or *chumash*) and explain that the Torah helps the community be present for not only those in the room, but those outside of the room. That just like receiving the commandments at Mt. Sinai connects all of us, so does this Torah, handwritten, the same way, for hundreds of years.

Have one student read the English translation of the *mi she'beirach* for an *Aliyah* and insert a classmate's English name. Explain that an *Aliyah* is an honor and that it is an opportunity to be seen and blessed by the community in the presence of Torah. Ask them what they think the prayer is trying to tell them.

Next, ask if anyone in the class knows someone who is ill, whether physical illness or mental illness. Have one student recite the *mi she'beirach* in English for healing inserting the names of those who are ill. Ask them why they think this prayer is here, and why we recite the names.

Point out that it is customary to include the parents of the person who is ill. What does that tell us about this prayer?

Next turn to the *b'racha* for the *gomel*. Explain what a *gomel* is and ask if anyone present is a *gomel*. If there isn't someone, have a classmate fill in and perform the *b'racha* in English. Lead a discussion around this prayer and finally turn to the prayer for Israel.

**(Note to teacher:** A *gomel* is someone who has “survived a dangerous situation.” Traditionally this was a person who just came back from a sea journey, completed a land journey, recovered from a major illness, was released from captivity. In modern times this also can include a variety of life-threatening situations)

At the end, explain that over time, as we've learned, prayers are changed and are added, like the one for Israel. Ask them to use one of the prayers in the community prayer section as a template to write their own new community prayer in their journals. Everyone should share their prayer.

---

#### CLOSURE

**Closure (10-15 min):** Ask each student to share one new thing they learned this lesson. Finish by reciting the *shehechyanu* together.

---

#### MYSTERIES COUNCIL (10-15 MIN)

Ask students to ponder mysteries about being a teenager. They can write more than one question and ask more questions about the self, life, the universe. Remind them that these are anonymous. Add them to the jar. Each student should add at least one question (refer back to handout 2.6 if you need guidance on how to frame this/examples of questions).

---

## LESSON 2: T'SHUVA AND S'LICHA

---

---

### SUMMARY OF LESSON:

---

From *t'shuva* and *s'licha* in the daily *Amidah*, to *tachanun*, we will explore how Jewish liturgy helps us grapple with repentance and forgiveness in our day-to-day. We will ask ourselves what these prayers of true wrestling, of self-accounting and *heshbon ha'nefesh*, are trying to tell us about the meaning of life.

---

---

### ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:

---

- Jewish spirituality practices create opportunities for wrestling with life and for moments of transcendence.
  - Jewish spirituality trains the brain to notice and wonder about the nature, purpose, and meaning of life.
  - Jewish spirituality accesses parts of the psyche that contribute to well-being and flourishing.
  - The intersection between Jewish spirituality and Jewish prayer invites an exploration of deep yearnings and personal meanings.
- 

---

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

---

- What are these prayers for repentance and forgiveness trying to tell us?
  - Why do you think we pray for repentance before we pray for forgiveness?
  - What is *Tachanun* trying to tell us?
- 

---

### LESSON GOALS:

---

As an educator I aim for this lesson to...

- ...expose students to Jewish liturgical thought related to repentance, forgiveness, and communal/individual *heshbon ha'nefesh* through *tachanun*.
  - ...help students think about the connection between repentance, forgiveness, and *heshbon ha'nefesh* with justice and mercy.
  - ...show students a way to wrestle with communal and individual guilt.
- 

---

### OBJECTIVES:

---

Students will be able to...

- ...explain the basics of 3 prayers focused on repentance and forgiveness.
  - ...express some kind of connection between repentance or forgiveness and the meaning or purpose of life.
  - ...create their own version of a reckoning of their soul, a reckoning between themselves and God (and/or between themselves and something bigger).
- 

---

### EXPRESSIVE OUTCOMES:

---

Students will have the opportunity to...

- ...experience a moment of self-reflection and communal forgiveness.
-

---

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

---

- One prayer book per student (I would encourage the synagogue to purchase a prayer book for each student or encourage students to bring their own prayer book if they own one; however, borrowing the communal prayer books works for each lesson)
  - One large sized unlined journal per student.
  - Art supplies: pencils, colored pencils, crayons, markers, water colors (and/or whatever you might have available for the journaling activity)
- 

### LEARNING PLAN:

---

### GRATITUDE PRACTICE:

---

**Say to the students:** *Before we begin a new lesson, we will write in our journals. Please write down 3 things you are grateful for today. Afterwards, we will recite Modeh Ani together with these things in mind.*

---

### SET INDUCTION (10 MIN)

---

How often do Jews ask for repentance or forgiveness? Raise your hand if you think once a year (once a month, once a week, every day, etc.) Explain that it depends on the Jew and their community. Some Jews never read this kind of liturgy, some Jews repent and ask for forgiveness once a year, and so on.

In the daily prayers there are opportunities for individual repentance and forgiveness in the *Amidah* and a special morning service called *Tachanun* which can be said most days.

Ask the students what do they think is most powerful? Asking God for forgiveness as often as possible or only when you feel like you need to or maybe a combination of the two? Have them write this answer down in their journals.

---

### MAIN ACTIVITIES (20-30 MIN)

---

Open up the siddurim to the second and third middle blessings of the *Amidah* (in Mishkan T'filah page 84). Read together the translation of the blessing for repentance. Ask someone to look up the definition of repentance. Explain that we say this blessing right before asking for forgiveness teaching us that we have to feel regret or feel that we've done wrong in order to return to God and ask for forgiveness.

Can you think of a situation when you said sorry and meant it? Did it feel that way? What about a time that you didn't mean it? (have 2-3 students share). The words of these prayers are telling us something important about how we ask for forgiveness and say sorry.

Pass out the Naomi Levy handout found at the end of this lesson that includes the "Wrongdoing and Repair" prayer and "A Prayer for the Strength to Forgive." Pair up the students, ask them to both read both sheets, then have one student read "A Prayer After Wrongdoing" and the other

respond with “A Prayer for the Strength to Forgive” (swap and repeat). How are these prayers similar and different from the ones found in our siddur?

Now, read them to one another like you mean it. Does that change how you see the prayer? Tell them that traditionally during the prayer asking God for forgiveness we beat our chest at the words “sinned” and “transgressed.” Ask them to add movements to the Naomi Levy “A Prayer After Wrongdoing” and “A Prayer for the Strength to Forgive.”

---

#### CLOSURE (5-10 MIN)

Sit in a circle. Now that we’ve had a chance to reflect on repentance and forgiveness I want you to write one thing down in your journal that you might do differently in the future when you need to ask for forgiveness or forgive someone.

---

#### MYSTERIES COUNCIL (10-15 MIN)

Ask students to ponder mysteries about being a teenager. They can write more than one question and ask more questions about the self, life, the universe. Remind them that these are anonymous. Add them to the jar. Each student should add at least one question (refer back to handout 2.6 if you need guidance on how to frame this/examples of questions).

*Prayers for Living Up to the Best in Our Souls*

*A Prayer After Wrongdoing*

**I**wish I could take it back, God. I wish I could turn back the clock and do it all differently. This time I would listen to my conscience. This time I would think before I acted. This time I would pray for Your guidance.

But I can't erase the past. All I can do is regret the choice I made. I was selfish. Now I will have to suffer the consequences of my actions.

Give me the courage, God, to admit I was wrong and apologize. I will have to find a way to repair the damage I have done. I will have to learn to act with integrity, compassion, and honor.

Forgive me, God, for not living up to the best in myself. Give me strength to endure my guilt and humiliation.

You have blessed me with so many gifts, God; help me to realize them. Please don't leave me, God; don't give up on me, be with me. Let me know You are near. Amen. ✦

*Prayers for Living Up to the Best in Our Souls*

*A Prayer for the Strength to Forgive*

**S**omeone close to me hurt me. I have good reason to be angry. I want him to suffer for the pain he caused me. But how long should I hold on to my anger? I can see now that by hardening my heart I am punishing myself as much as him.

Soften my heart, God; teach me compassion. Show me how to accept his apology, how to forgive him, how to trust him once more.

Help us repair our relationship, God. Heal our pain. Help us to wipe away the resentments and the hurt.

Restore us, God, to the way we were before. Lead us back to laughter, to kindness, and to love. Amen. ✦

---

## LESSON 3: AMIDAH – SILENCE & SOLITUDE VS. LONELINESS

---

---

### SUMMARY OF LESSON:

---

We look once again back at the Amidah in order to differentiate between loneliness and silence and solitude. From creative silent prayer alone, to private prayer, to parallel prayer, we explore the benefits of solitude and reflect on loneliness.

---

---

### ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:

---

- Jewish spirituality practices create opportunities for wrestling with life and for moments of transcendence.
  - Jewish spirituality trains the brain to notice and wonder about the nature, purpose, and meaning of life.
  - Jewish spirituality accesses parts of the psyche that contribute to well-being and flourishing.
  - The intersection between Jewish spirituality and well-being connects Jewish spirituality *l'dor v'dor*.
  - The intersection between Jewish spirituality and Jewish prayer invites an exploration of deep yearnings and personal meanings.
- 

---

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

---

- Are we ever alone?
  - What does it mean to embrace silence and solitude?
  - What gifts can solitude bring?
- 

---

### LESSON GOALS:

---

As an educator I aim for this lesson to...

- ...show students the benefits and meaning that can come from intentional solitude.
  - ...help students grapple with loneliness and self-awareness.
  - ...show students ways to incorporate intentional solitude into their lives and help them think about how often they are actually truly lonely.
- 

---

### OBJECTIVES:

---

Students will be able to...

- ...name the Amidah as a prayer that shows us how to pray in solitude in a group.
  - ...explain the differences between solitude, loneliness, and literally being alone.
  - ...develop a practice of self-care around solitude.
- 

---

### EXPRESSIVE OUTCOMES:

---

Students will have the opportunity to...

- ...experience a moment of silence and solitude.
-

---

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

---

- One prayer book per student (I would encourage the synagogue to purchase a prayer book for each student or encourage students to bring their own prayer book if they own one; however, borrowing the communal prayer books works for each lesson)
  - One large sized unlined journal per student.
  - Art supplies: pencils, colored pencils, crayons, markers, water colors (and/or whatever you might have available for the journaling activity)
- 

### LEARNING PLAN:

---

### GRATITUDE PRACTICE:

---

**Say to the students:** *Before we begin a new lesson, we will write in our journals. Please write down 3 things you are grateful for today. Afterwards, we will recite Modeh Ani together with these things in mind.*

---

### SET INDUCTION

---

With their journals out ask the students to be quiet and doodle, write, or just day dream while you play some music. Do this for 5-7 minutes. At the end ask the students to reflect on how that felt: What did that feel like? How often do they do something like this? Would they like to do this more? Did they like it?

**Note to teacher:** I highly recommend incorporating this activity (without the reflection every time) into class after a break time if they have one OR as a break between activities if you have time. This can help your students refocus on the task at hand. I've also used this at the end of a lesson if I finish quicker than intended. Adolescents these days don't often give themselves tech-free non-social time. It can be refreshing for them.

---

### MAIN ACTIVITIES (20-30 MIN)

---

Explain that during the *Amidah* there is a "silent" section that you can use to say the middle *b'rachot* and/or say your own personal prayer. Even though you are surrounded by other people, just like the earlier activity, this is a chance to have a moment of silence and solitude. What does it tell us that Jewish tradition tells us to do these three times each day? Discuss.

Next, we are going to play a game called solitude or not? (3 sets of instructions for three tables found at the end of this lesson should be set out ahead of time) Split them into groups of three and start each group at a different station. They will switch every 4 minutes. At the first station they'll all play on their phones for 4 minutes at the same table. At the second table they won't be allowed to talk, but they can interact. At the third table they will be given the instruction that they can talk but no one can look at each other.

Come back together and discuss how the different tables felt. How were they different from the first activity? How are they similar or not from praying the middle section of the *Amidah* where

some people are praying their own prayer, praying the same thing, or some might talk with one another?

---

#### CLOSURE

---

**Closure (10-15 min):** Take 3-5 minutes and ask each student to write down something in their journal that they will do this week to bring intentional silence and solitude into their lives. Have each person share what they wrote. Tell them that the following week we will all check in and see how we did.

---

#### MYSTERIES COUNCIL (10-15 MIN)

---

Ask students to ponder mysteries about aloneness and loneliness. They can write more than one question and ask more questions about the self, life, the universe. Remind them that these are anonymous. Add them to the jar. Each student should add at least one question (refer back to handout 2.6 if you need guidance on how to frame this/examples of questions).

---

## LESSON 4: KADDISH YATOM

---

---

### SUMMARY OF LESSON:

---

In this lesson, we will explore the different ways Kaddish Yatom is used in community and what it tells us about loss, community, and our responsibility toward one another. We will also explore what kind of God is found in Kaddish Yatom and how this informs how we approach grief, loneliness, and loss.

**Note to teacher:** Be sure to be aware of any losses your students have gone through and your own. This lesson might bring up some difficult feelings for your student or for you. Be open and honest with yourself and I highly recommend tailoring this lesson based on your knowledge of your class and yourself. You may want to talk to a supervisor or another teacher about how to manage this best with your class.

---

### ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:

---

- Jewish spirituality practices create opportunities for wrestling with life and for moments of transcendence.
- Jewish spirituality trains the brain to notice and wonder about the nature, purpose, and meaning of life.
- Jewish spirituality accesses parts of the psyche that contribute to well-being and flourishing.
- The intersection between Jewish spirituality and well-being connects Jewish spirituality *l'dor v'dor*.
- The intersection between Jewish spirituality and Jewish prayer invites an exploration of deep yearnings and personal meanings.

---

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

---

- What is the purpose of *Kaddish Yatom*?
- Are we ever alone?

---

### LESSON GOALS:

---

As an educator I aim for this lesson to...

- ...show students that even in the face of loss and grief, Jewish prayer is here to remind us that we are not alone.
- ...help students understand an often-confusing prayer.

---

### OBJECTIVES:

---

Students will be able to...

- ...explain what *Kaddish Yatom* is about.
- ...connect *Kaddish Yatom* with community building.
- ...explain why some communities all stand during *Kaddish Yatom* and why in some only the mourners stand and why in some it's some combination of the two.

---

### EXPRESSIVE OUTCOMES:

---

Students will have the opportunity to...

- ...help one another feel seen.

---

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

---

- One prayer book per student (I would encourage the synagogue to purchase a prayer book for each student or encourage students to bring their own prayer book if they own one; however, borrowing the communal prayer books works for each lesson)
- One large sized unlined journal per student.
- Art supplies: pencils, colored pencils, crayons, markers, water colors (and/or whatever you might have available for the journaling activity)

---

### LEARNING PLAN:

---

#### GRATITUDE PRACTICE (5-10 MIN):

---

**Say to the students:** *Before we begin a new lesson, we will write in our journals. Please write down 3 things you are grateful for today. Afterwards, we will recite Modeh Ani together with these things in mind.*

---

### SET INDUCTION (10 MIN)

---

Write this question on the board: Have you ever experienced loss? What was it like? What were things that helped? What were things that didn't help? Give students 5-7 minutes to write and ask if anyone wants to share (no one has to share, but give them the opportunity).

---

### MAIN ACTIVITIES

---

Take out the siddurim and find *Kaddish Yatom* (found on page 598 in *Mishkan T'filah*). Ask the students to read the English translation to themselves silently. While they are reading write these questions on the board: What did you notice? What is this prayer about? Did anything about the translation of this prayer surprise you? What do you like? Not like?

Once they are done, you will read the English translation out loud to them. Have them answer the questions in their journal after this.

Then, pass out the Naomi Levy "Memorial Prayer" found at the end of this lesson). Ask the students to read the prayer to themselves silently. After they are done, read the prayer out loud to them. Then, add these questions to the board: What is different between this prayer and *Kaddish Yatom*? Why do you think we don't say something more like this to memorialize a loss? (keep these questions up from the previous prompt: What did you notice? What is this prayer about? What do you like? Not like?)

Ask students to share some of their answers about both prayers.

Next, pass out the handout from *Making Prayer Real* found at the end of this lesson. Have one student read the first paragraph. Then discuss these questions: Does this help you understand *Kaddish Yatom* in a different way? If we are sharing our grief with God, why do we bless God?

Now, have all the students stand and recite the *Kaddish Yatom* and then have all of them sit while you recite it alone. Explain that in some communities the whole community stands with the mourner (which you are role-playing) and in other communities only the mourner stands. Which one of these promotes better community building and support? Are either of them better? What might feel or be different about either practice?

---

#### CLOSURE

Think about that time you experienced a loss. How could you have shared that with your community to get support? With God?

Was there anything that anyone did that helped? How did they know or find out about your loss?

---

#### MYSTERIES COUNCIL (10-15 MIN)

Ask students to ponder mysteries about life, death, and mortality. They can write more than one question and ask more questions about the self, life, the universe. Remind them that these are anonymous. Add them to the jar. Each student should add at least one question (refer back to handout 2.6 if you need guidance on how to frame this/examples of questions).

### *A Memorial Prayer*

I haven't forgotten you, even though it's been some time now since I've seen your face, touched your hand, heard your voice. You are with me all the time.

I used to think you left me. I know better now. You come to me. Sometimes in fleeting moments I feel your presence close by. But I still miss you. And nothing, no person, no joy, no accomplishment, no distraction, not even God, can fill the gaping hole your absence has left in my life.

But mixed together with all my sadness, there is a great joy for having known you. I want to thank you for the time we shared, for the love you gave, for the wisdom you spread.

Thank you for the magnificent moments and for the ordinary ones too. There was beauty in our simplicity. Holiness in our unspectacular days. And I will carry the lessons you taught me always.

Your life has ended, but your light can never be extinguished. It continues to shine upon me even on the darkest nights and illuminates my way.

I light this candle in your honor and in your memory. May God bless you as you have blessed me with love, with grace, and with peace. Amen. ✧

HANDOUT 3.3 – “COPING WITH LOSS” EXERCISES FROM *MAKING PRAYER REAL*  
(CONTRIBUTED BY RABBI ANNE BRENER)

---

**PRACTICE 19**

**Give It to God**

Often there is no solution to the problems and dilemmas that we face in life. It is not in our power to cure a disease; we cannot change a difficult or troubled person; sometimes we have little or no ability to resolve a challenging situation. In these circumstances, when our hearts are heavy with grief or anger or frustration, it often feels as if we are holding up the world all by ourselves. But we need not carry our burdens alone. We can share our troubles with friends, and we can turn to God.

1. In a comfortable position, close your eyes. Sense in your body the pain of your situation. Be with it. No doubt, memories will come into your mind—of a past incident, a suffering friend, a difficult situation. Instead of letting them go as in other meditations, sit with the image and feel it resonate in the body. Watch it with compassion for yourself and others.
2. Try to visualize the feeling. You might see a color, or perhaps an image that symbolizes your pain or grief. Sit with this to make sure it feels right. Your initial image might give way to a more appropriate one.
3. When you are ready, ask God to share this with you. (If you feel tightness or constriction, consider doing this exercise at a later time.) Much as our ancestors raised their sacrifices at the Temple in Jerusalem, take your situation or the image symbolizing it, and with words of prayer, offer it to God. For example, “Please, God, take this struggle and share with me the anguish it causes.”
4. In your mind’s eye, you might visualize two hands holding the idea or image and raising it upward.
5. Express your feelings to God.
6. You might conclude with a song, such as *oseh shalom*, or a blessing, such as *shomea tefillah* (see practice 11).

---

## LESSON 5: MYSTERIES COUNCIL

---

---

### SUMMARY OF LESSON:

---

This lesson will begin with helping students come up with more “mysteries” questions. We will proceed to read all of the questions gathered in the jar in a ritual-like setting. From these questions we will be able to connect about the purpose and meaning of life, the search for meaning, the yearning for deep connection, etc. These questions will help spark a new level of depth for this course in a way that will hopefully deepen the bond of this cohort.

---

---

### ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:

---

- Jewish spirituality practices create opportunities for wrestling with life and for moments of transcendence.
  - Jewish spirituality trains the brain to notice and wonder about the nature, purpose, and meaning of life.
  - Jewish spirituality accesses parts of the psyche that contribute to well-being and flourishing.
  - The intersection between Jewish spirituality and well-being connects Jewish spirituality *l’dor v’dor*.
  - The intersection between Jewish spirituality and Jewish prayer invites an exploration of deep yearnings and personal meanings.
- 

---

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

---

- What is the human condition?
  - What is a Jewish prayer for me?
  - What is ritual?
- 

---

### LESSON GOALS:

---

As an educator I aim for this lesson to...

- ...broaden the concept of Jewish prayer and ritual for students.
  - ...help the students explore the human condition from their own questions and questions written by their peers.
  - ...emphasize the importance of acknowledging the mysteries of our lives.
- 

---

### OBJECTIVES:

---

Students will be able to...

- ...name a big question that they are curious about.
  - ...connect the big questions to Jewish prayer.
  - ...define Jewish prayer and ritual for themselves.
- 

---

### EXPRESSIVE OUTCOMES:

---

Students will have the opportunity to...

- ...experience a unique ritual around the mysteries questions.
-

---

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

---

- One prayer book per student (I would encourage the synagogue to purchase a prayer book for each student or encourage students to bring their own prayer book if they own one; however, borrowing the communal prayer books works for each lesson)
  - One large sized unlined journal per student.
  - Art supplies: pencils, colored pencils, crayons, markers, water colors (and/or whatever you might have available for the journaling activity)
- 

### LEARNING PLAN:

---

### GRATITUDE PRACTICE:

---

**Say to the students:** *Before we begin a new lesson, we will write in our journals. Please write down 3 things you are grateful for today. Afterwards, we will recite Modeh Ani together with these things in mind.*

---

### SET INDUCTION (5-10 MIN)

---

If you could ask God one question, what would it be? Write it down in your journal. You might find it helpful to write more than one and pick from the list, you might only want to write one down. If you don't believe in God, imagine there was one opportunity to ask someone or something who knows everything a question. Whatever works for you, use your imagination.

---

### MAIN ACTIVITY (20-30 MIN)

---

**Mysteries Council:** Now, you have one last chance to add questions to our mysteries jar. Afterwards we will read them. Give the students 5-7 minutes to add question(s).

Next, sit down in a circle and begin reading the questions. Have someone turn off the lights. For each question you read, light a candle (I recommend using tea lights and getting something that you can set them on). Read them slowly and carefully. Students should be quiet and respond "amen" after each question. When you are done, ask each student to share either a question that stood out for them or a new question that came to mind that they are pondering. Each student will light a candle. Explain that the combined light of the candle represents unveiling our deepest questions and wonderings. When we can do this, we can see one another more clearly and add light to the world.

Next, sing the *Shehechyanu* in Hebrew and read the translation in English (from a previous handout).

### CLOSURE (10-15 MIN)

---

Write these questions on the board: How did that feel? What is one takeaway? What question or questions are you still pondering? Did any of the questions surprise you?

Ask the students to turn to a partner and share their answers to each question with one another.

*Note to the teacher: Keep all the questions, you will use these in the concluding unit. Before the last session create a collage of these to hang in the classroom. It should include all the questions, even if there are repeats. This will be a poster that you will refer back to in the last class and a way to honor the hard work the students and you have done all year.*

## CONCLUSION: THIS IS MY FIGHT SONG

---

In this unit we will explore this question more in depth: What is Jewish prayer trying to say to us? This unit will help each student gather and understand their new understandings from the year of learning.

---

## LESSON 1: THIS IS MY FIGHT SONG

---

---

### SUMMARY OF LESSON:

---

In this lesson we will wrap up the year emotionally and reconnect to our learnings from the year. Students will look back at their work and look forward to how they might share this. We will once again explore the question: What is Jewish Prayer?

---

---

### ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:

---

- Jewish spirituality practices create opportunities for wrestling with life and for moments of transcendence.
  - Jewish spirituality trains the brain to notice and wonder about the nature, purpose, and meaning of life.
  - Jewish spirituality accesses parts of the psyche that contribute to well-being and flourishing.
  - The intersection between Jewish spirituality and well-being connects Jewish spirituality *l'dor v'dor*.
  - The intersection between Jewish spirituality and Jewish prayer invites an exploration of deep yearnings and personal meanings.
- 

---

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

---

- What is Jewish prayer?
  - How do Jewish prayers connect me to my ancestors?
  - What do Jewish prayers contribute to well-being or say about well-being?
- 

---

### LESSON GOALS:

---

As an educator I aim for this lesson to...

- ...help students review and process their learning over the year.
  - ...bring students back to some of the overarching ideas of the learning.
  - ...help students see the big picture of well-being, Jewish spirituality, and Jewish prayer.
- 

---

### OBJECTIVES:

---

Students will be able to...

- ...name what they did this year that stood out.
  - ...connect their learning with the big ideas of the learning.
  - ...explain what Jewish prayer includes/means to them.
  - ...express a connection between well-being and Judaism.
- 

---

### EXPRESSIVE OUTCOMES:

---

Students will have the opportunity to...

- ...experience a closing ceremony.
-

---

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

---

- One prayer book per student (I would encourage the synagogue to purchase a prayer book for each student or encourage students to bring their own prayer book if they own one; however, borrowing the communal prayer books works for each lesson)
  - One large sized unlined journal per student.
  - Art supplies: pencils, colored pencils, crayons, markers, water colors (and/or whatever you might have available for the journaling activity)
  - Collage of questions (created between last lesson and now by the teacher)
- 

### LEARNING PLAN:

---

### GRATITUDE PRACTICE:

---

**Say to the students:** *Before we begin a new lesson, we will write in our journals. Please write down 3 things you are grateful for today. Afterwards, we will recite Modeh Ani together with these things in mind.*

### SET INDUCTION:

---

Go through your journal. Pick a page or activity or something that you wrote this year that stands out. It could be something you especially connected to, a practice that you've already incorporated into your life or hope to incorporate into your life, a prayer you wrote that you are especially proud of, something you want to share with other people.

Have each student share what they picked.

### MAIN ACTIVITIES:

---

Put the collage of their questions on the table. Give them an opportunity to look them over.

Ask them: How do these connect with Jewish prayer? (if they need prompting to explore this question remind them that a lot of the Jewish prayers we explored are trying to tell us something) Have them write down an answer in their journal. Discuss as a class.

Ask them: How do these connect with well-being? Have them write down an answer in their journals and then share with a partner.

Ask them: How do these connect with Jewish spirituality? Have them write down an answer in their journals. Go around and see if anyone wants to share.

Set out different siddurim, other books of Jewish prayers or poetry, their collage, and their journals on a table. Ask them to look at all the items on the table (but don't go through the journals). Think about this question: What do they all have in common? Discuss.

Next, if they don't include this in their answers tell them that these all represent Jewish prayers. Because Jewish prayers are the big questions, our deepest ponderings, our expressions of gratitude, our yearnings and fears.

#### CLOSURE:

---

Frame and hang up the collage. Make sure it is dated for this class and has their names on it.

End with a blessing of gratitude (something personalized for you and your students ideally). Congratulate your class for completing this year of learning. Ask each student to share one thing that they will use from class over the summer: a practice, a prayer, an activity, etc. Send them home with their journals (and siddurim if you got them these).

I would recommend sharing some sweet treat with your students at the end of this class following the Jewish tradition that learning Torah should be sweet as honey.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

- ArtScroll. *The Complete ArtScroll Siddur*. Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1984.
- Borowitz, Eugene. *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought*. Springfield: Behrman House, Inc., 1995.
- CCAR. *Mishkan T'filah*. New York: CCAR Press, 2007.
- Comins, Rabbi Mike. *Making Prayer Real*. Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2010.
- Dani. 2017. <<https://www.paulkipnes.com/my-teen-journey-to-mental-health/>>.
- Daniel J. Siegel, M.D. *Brainstorm*. TeacherPerigee, 2015.
- Efron, John, et al. *The Jews: A History*. Upper Saddle River: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009.
- Greninger, Nicole. "Believing, Behaving, Belonging: Tefillah Education in the 21st Century." *Journal of Jewish Education* (2010): 379-413.
- Harris, Ben. *Minyans for meditation, artists and doubters: How Jewish day schools are reimagining daily prayer*. 25 September 2019. <[https://www.jta.org/2019/09/25/united-states/minyans-for-meditation-artists-and-doubters-how-jewish-day-schools-are-reimagining-daily-prayer?fbclid=IwAR34sMzpQNU\\_rGS03qxWhnel4wbjWXuuLpnIRhnrQIIU-ZkSGKjrjreUTseo](https://www.jta.org/2019/09/25/united-states/minyans-for-meditation-artists-and-doubters-how-jewish-day-schools-are-reimagining-daily-prayer?fbclid=IwAR34sMzpQNU_rGS03qxWhnel4wbjWXuuLpnIRhnrQIIU-ZkSGKjrjreUTseo)>.
- Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *God in Search of Man*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Girous, 1955.
- Jewish Lights Publishing. *The Jewish Lights Spirituality Handbook: A Guide to Understanding, Exploring & Living a Spiritual Life*. Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001.
- Kessler, Rachael. *The Soul of Education*. ACSD, 2000.
- . *The Soul of Education: Helping Students Find Connection, Compassion, and Character at School*. Alexandria: ASCD, 2000.
- Kipnes, Rabbi Paul. *Teen Mental Health: Rolling Darkness into Light*. 20 February 2018. <<https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/teen-mental-health-rolling-darkness-into-light/>>.
- Levy, Naomi. *Talking to God*. New York: Doubleday, 2002.
- Miller, Lisa. *The Spiritual Child: The New Science on Parenting for Health and Lifelong Thriving*. New York: Picador, 2015.
- November, Michelle and Rabbi Paul Kipnes. *Jewish Spiritual Parenting: Wisdom, Activities, Rituals, and Prayers for Raising Children with Spiritual Balance and Emotional Wellness*. Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2015.
- People, Nahko and Medicine for the. *Black as Night*.
- Sacks, Jonathan. *The Jonathan Sacks Haggada*. Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2013.
- Sacks, Rabbi Lord Jonathan and Rabbi Dr. Jay Goldmintz. *The Koren Ani Tefilla Weekday Siddur*. Jerusalem: Koren Publishers Jerusalem, 2014.
- Seligman, Martin E.P. *Flourish*. New York: ATRIA, 2011.
- . *Flourish*. New York: Atria Paperback, 2013.
- Spitz, Rabbi Elie. *Increasing Wholeness: Jewish Wisdom & Guided Meditations to Strengthen & Calm Body, Heart, Mind & Spirit*. Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2015.