

Tzelem Session 2: Transitions

movingtraditions.org/tzelem-session-2-transitions



Objectives

By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

- Recognize various transitions in our lives
- Identify challenges, emotions, and opportunities in transitions
- Explore ways to cope with transitions, including Jewish ritual

Materials:

- Blank piece of paper and pen/markers
- Polleverywhere.com
- Glass of water, bowl, and hand towel
- Candle (and match) that can stand on its own in front of the camera as you speak

Group Leader Prep:

- Create a [Polleverywhere.com](https://polleverywhere.com) account and a world cloud response for Rituals (part 4)
- Email the teens and parents with zoom link and ask teens to bring a two blank pieces of paper + pen/markers, a glass a water, a bowl and a hand towel.

1. Welcome back and check-in (8 mins)

SAY:

Welcome back! At the beginning of every session, we will do a check-in to take the temperature of the room and share something about ourselves. Today, we'll go around and share our name, pronouns, and answer the following question: if you were a kitchen utensil or appliance, what would you be and why? If you'd like, you can draw the kitchen utensil as is or what you would look like as a kitchen utensil (they should draw on the piece of paper that you asked them to bring).

Facilitator's Tip: Give everyone a moment or two to think about how they will respond before taking responses.

After everyone has introduced themselves, **SAY:**

Let's get grounded in our bodies for a moment. I want us to stand up, if you are able, and feel our bodies. Slowly move them around and notice how your toes feel, your knees, shoulders, hands, and any other body part that is connected to you. I want you to pay attention to how you are feeling in this moment. Is there any tension in any specific body part? If so, is there a way to wiggle or move to let it out?

Facilitator's Tip: Instead of or in addition to this movement activity, you might choose to lead one or two of the games you did not get to from the first session, or another game that you enjoy leading with teens.

2. Identifying Transitions (10 mins)

SAY:

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus famously said, "Change is the only constant." This is especially true during adolescence, and it can have particular significance for trans/gender non-conforming, non-binary and queer people.

ASK:

What transitions have you experienced in your life?

Let's take a few minutes as a group to share some events and ideas about transitioning. If you have experienced a transition that someone else says, raise your hand. If you'd like to share your experience, let me know.

Facilitator's Tip: If you have a large group of teens (over eight teens), consider breaking them up into small groups of 3-4 to discuss the question of what transitions they have experienced. Give the groups 10 minutes to share, making sure that each teen gets at least two minutes to talk about their transitions and changes in their life.

If you and your group prefer art activities more than group conversations, consider asking your group to bring construction paper, markers, and collage materials to the gathering and asking participants to draw a map representing 2-5 transitions or turning points they've experienced in their lives. Then provide some time for them to share their maps in a larger group or smaller breakout groups.

If the group needs examples, here are some transitions they might discuss: new school, moving cities, new grades/teachers/friends, gender transitions, coming out, name changes, new seasons, death of a loved one, new siblings/family members, new family structure, new job, coming out about your identity (not only as being queer or non-binary but maybe Jewish or any other label you identify with).

ASK:

What do you notice about the experiences people shared? (What are some similarities and differences? What opportunities do they open up? What do you feel about these? Which of these are private vs. public?)

3. Rituals (16 mins)

SAY:

Many Jews work through transitions through Jewish ritual. Much of Judaism has to do with separation and contrast: holy vs. mundane, pure vs. impure, light vs. dark, etc. Our tradition provides guidance as we move from one state to another. Can you think of any of these rituals?

Use Poll Everywhere to collect responses. Responses that are the same will be larger on the results page. Invite participants to type more than one response and then share your screen with the results page.

Facilitator's Tip: If participants have trouble coming up with rituals, prompt them with some of the following: mikveh immersion, sitting shiva, washing our hands before Shabbat, b'nai mitzvah, Rosh Hashanah and the 10 days following, havdalah, Holidays and their rituals and reimmersion to everyday life after (if they would like to add anything, give them the space to do so).

If you have chosen to light a candle as part of your group, invite participants to bring their attention to the flame. If you haven't lit a candle, we recommend lighting one now.

SAY:

Something that is present in many Jewish transitions is the ritual of lighting candles. Like I shared at the end of our last meeting, the candle is rooted at the wick and appears to be always changing.

ASK:

How do you feel about the candle as a marker of transition? What purpose do rituals serve? Which, if any rituals do you connect to? Which do you think you might like to use in your life to deal with transitions of your own?

SAY:

At this point I want to add something about in-betweenness. In many of the examples we talked about, there is a clear distinction between a “before” state and an “after” state. Because Judaism values separation and distinction, it can leave some of us wondering where we fit in. For example, some of us might not feel like we are transitioning from one thing to another, or that we don’t fit into clear categories. But Judaism also teaches that there is holiness in that in-betweenness and uncertainty. The rabbis teach that twilight, the time in between day and night, is somewhat perplexing. It is not day, and it is not night. It can’t be defined in that way. And yet, they explain that twilight is the holiest time to pray. That liminal space—the grey area, the area in-between—is holy.

ASK:

How does that make you feel and does that give you clarity or comfort?

Facilitator’s Tip: Open a whiteboard for this question for anonymous answers, then ask teens if they’d like to elaborate on their responses. You should also respond as group leader.

4. Creating our own ritual (16 mins)

Have participants get a piece of paper/pen, a glass of water, a large bowl, and a hand towel for handwashing.

SAY:

[As we mentioned already], it can be helpful to mark transitions with a physical action or ceremony. We’re going to try doing our own ritual now with the support of this group as witnesses!

Think about a transition you’re going through now that you would like to honor. It can be something major, or something relatively minor like a new grade. Please grab a piece of paper and a writing implement and answer the following questions (they can give as much information as they would like):

The transition I am about to honor is _____

I am leaving behind _____

I fear _____

I need _____

I hope for _____

I welcome _____

Facilitator’s Tip: Copy and paste the questions into the chat and play soft music in the background. Give about 5 minutes to complete.

SAY:

Now we're each going to share what we wrote. After you're done, you can use your water glass and bowl to wash your hands, signifying this new chapter in your life. Say the word "dibarti" meaning I have spoken. As witnesses, the rest of us will say "shamati" meaning "I have heard" to signify that we hear you and witness and honor this transition. Type the word "shamati" in the chat.

5. Blessing for the Full Rainbow of Our Community / Closing (10 min)

SAY:

We are able to make our own customs and rituals during our Tzelem+ gatherings. As we did last time, let's bless each other and spread the idea of love and community. If you have a custom that you'd like to bring to open or close our gatherings, please let me know!

Invite everyone to look at the candle flame that you lit in front of the camera.

SAY:

When you look directly into the flame, notice how the colors of the rainbow shine through the light. Notice also how the flame's shape and colors reflected within are constantly changing and evolving as the fire remains anchored at the wick. Let's take some time to give thanks for all the colors in the flame that are ours. The colors might represent identities, interests, desires, goals, or something else. Let's also give thanks for those colors we love and those that we aren't so comfortable with, within ourselves and others. All of these colors are a part of the light we are all bathed in, all of them are part of the ways in which we are constantly changing. And as we change, just like the flame is anchored by the wick, we thrive when we are connected supportive people and communities in our lives. I hope that one of these anchoring communities for you will be this Tzelem group.

Each teen will take a turn blessing the others in the group

May you be blessed with the blessings of the light of our ancestors, and may you find the courage to bring all the colors of your own light out into the world.

Optional Hebrew Blessing:

Traditional masculine language:

Barukh atah Adonai eloheynu melekh ha'olam m'shaneh ha- b'ri-ot.

Feminine God language:

Brucha at elohateinu Ruach ha'Olam m'shanah ha- b'ri-ot.

Gender neutral language:

Nevarech et ein hachayim al shinu'i ha- b'ri-ot

Blessed is the One, our G-d, Sovereign of the Universe, who has made all creatures different.

Optional chant:

Ki imkha m'kor ha-yim b'o r-kha nir-eh

Translation: With You is the fountain of life, in Your light we are bathed in light.

SAY:

Our next gathering will be _____ and I hope that if you ever need anything, you reach out to me or your Tzelem-mates.

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