

## The Five Literacies Through A Jewish Lens

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The Kabbalah, the vast body of Jewish mystical and esoteric literature, understands the greatest achievement not as transcending the body, but as joining body and spirit together. Symbolically, the Kabbalists imagined the six-pointed Jewish star as one triangle pointing upward—toward heaven, transcendence, and the emptiness of the Infinite—and another pointing downward, toward the earth, immanence, and the endless varieties of experience. The great goal of Kabbalah, which literally means “receiving,” is not to privilege one triangle over the other—to flee the material world in favor of the spiritual one, or vice versa. It is the sacred marriage of the two. (Jay Michaelson, God in Your Body, Intro.)

### Physical

- The Role of Wine - Every Jewish holy time is ushered in by Kiddush or the blessing said over wine. Why wine? How does that create a holy experience? When wine is ingested, unlike any other food, it changes the person. This perspective is aspirational, and is one that we strive to bring to our daily lives
- Identify Action Words - Shema- listening, bowing.....Once learners have identified the embodied language in the prayer, guide them into an enactment of the physical activity that the words convey. Have them sit or stand and pay attention to what it feels like in the body. How does doing so impact their breath? Is it pleasant or unpleasant to be in this position? (*birchot hashachar- zokef kefufim* – straightens the hunched over, as well as the other *brachot* that prayer. ) Then invite them to slowly straighten up and notice how doing so feels different.
- Invite learners to feel prayers in their bodies. Take the *Modeh Ani* prayer, for example. Before reciting the prayer, invite learners to consider the things for which they are grateful. Then, as they say the words *Modeh Ani*, invite them to notice where they feel gratitude in their bodies. Even young children can do this exercise.
- Examine the choreography- How does that help guide you back to the words?

### Mental

- Mantras or Jewish sayings to act as anchors during the day.
- Mindful Seeing - *Brachot* for unusual things; rainbow, thunder, lightning...beautiful and surprising.



## Emotional Literacy

- Blessings (*brachot*) - are the antidote to entitlement. The Talmud encourages each person to find and say 100 brachot each day.
- Create and Write Gratitude Lists – 3 Things a day  
Write a thank you note to someone who has done something nice for you and you have not thanked this person yet (or have not thanked this person sufficiently yet)!

## Social Literacy

- We were once slaves in Egypt...having been there, we are particularly sensitive to the plight of the tired the poor the hungry.
- Abraham Joshua Heschel “praying with our feet”
- Good Sportsmanship - Does God Care Who wins the World Series or Super Bowl? The Jewish Way to Play
- Perspective or Empathy Building - Examine a Biblical character’s actions or decisions. Defend those actions. Include why you think he or she acted in this way. What is noble about those actions.

## Global Literacy

- As God’s partner and Caretakers of our world – We have a responsibility to take care of the world, ecology, wildlife conservation.....
- Practicing Mindfulness in Your Classroom - What are some of the unique opportunities and challenges of the setting in which you will be teaching the practice? For example, teaching *tefillah* in the outdoors at camp is a wonderful opportunity. People are generally more open, inspired, and uninhibited in nature.

On the other hand, teaching in a classroom is itself a challenge because kids associate the space with grades, assessment, achievement, and competition. They may feel unsafe or anxious. If you can, you may want to choose another venue such as an outdoor space or one dedicated to prayer or contemplation. (On the flip side, outdoor spaces are more easily associated with free play and can be a distraction, which may cause your learners to have difficulty settling into a mindfulness lesson, whereas students in a classroom have an existing

expectation for structured learning that needs to be addressed). The ambiance can be changed. A safe space can and must be created! Establish rules for communication and kindness. Move the seats around, dim the lights; each site creates its own challenges and its own advantages!

