

God: Let's Talk About It.

**Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
School of Education Capstone Project**

**Andi Feldman
Advisor: Adriane Levine**

"To help our students build a relationship with God, we have to be willing to be on a spiritual journey ourselves. It is not easy to talk to children about God, but we must, even if we are uncertain about the way to begin. How do you help your students establish a close relationship with a loving God in the classroom, school and in their daily lives? As teachers we first of all need to think through our own feelings and beliefs about God. We need a context in which to develop our own personal theology and God beliefs." (Teaching About God in the Classroom)

Table of Contents

Title Page	i
Table of Contents	ii
Introduction	1
Brief overview	1
Facilitators	2
A note about language	3
Setting	4
Rationale	6
What’s already out there?	6
Why teach about God?	6
What is it that we should be teaching About God?.....	7
What has to happen first?	8
What does it mean to “know”?.....	10
Parallel journeys	11
More on Professional Learning.....	11
Bibliography.....	14
Annotated Bibliography	16
Desired Results	18
Mission	18
Priority Goals	18
Enduring Understandings	18
Essential Questions	18
Learner Outcomes –KDBB	19
Evidence for Learning	19
Diverse Learners	19
Curriculum Map	20
Lesson One	21
Handout One	27
Lesson Two	29
Handout Two	36
Lesson Three	39

Introduction

Brief Overview

God: Let's Talk About It aims to facilitate Jewish educators in their effort to negotiate their own experiences and struggle with a force greater than themselves. The ultimate goal of the program is to enable teachers to use the experience of their journey to inform how they guide students on their own spiritual journeys. Teachers will be better able to serve as this guide to students having reflected on their own theologies. Theology is central to the Jewish religion. In the introduction to Teaching About God and Spirituality we are reminded that,

God is central to the existence of the Jewish people. The relationship of the Jewish people to God is the focal point of the Torah and the entire Tanach. Halachah, prayer and blessings, Torah study, Shabbat and holiday celebrations, tzedakah, and even the land of Israel, all connect us implicitly to God. Yet, our understanding of and relationship to God is often assumed, rather than examined, enriched, or expanded. (Goodman & Bloomberg, 2002, p.xv).

Conceptions of God lay the foundation of all the lessons we teach in religious school; however, we are rarely intentional about developing personal understandings of our God concepts. This curricular unit serves to make that effort an intentional one in the lives of our teachers and ultimately our students.

The curriculum is designed to take place during a staff retreat in preparation for the start of a new school year. Because the retreat is compulsory for educators, it cannot be assumed that teachers will show the same buy-in as would a self-selecting group. The work we will be asking teachers to do is highly personal and its fulfillment is dependent on a commitment to the retreat's goals. For this reason the first lesson will share the rationale for this project and ask teachers to reflect on the presence of God talk in their classrooms. The following five lessons will encourage teachers to reflect on their personal experiences

and past moments of connectedness. It is my intention that through the process of articulating these moments through various spiritual practices and reflections, teachers will be able to reach a higher level of understanding of their personal theologies than they possessed at the beginning of the retreat.

In the final two lessons teachers will explore how their theological journeys impact the classroom environment and how they can intentionally call upon their experiences in ways that are beneficial to their students. Teachers will create a journal during the retreat that will become integrated into ongoing professional learning in grade level cohorts throughout the year. Additionally, the facilitator of the retreat will conduct an in-service at the end of the school year for all teachers to reflect on their own spiritual journeys and the state of spiritual discourse in their classrooms. Follow up through continued professional learning is crucial to the effectiveness of this program.

Facilitators

Just as teachers are expected to intentionally reflect on their spiritual journeys in order to serve as an example to their students, facilitators should also be engaged in their own process of identifying and articulating their God experiences to serve as an example to the teachers. It is essential that facilitators share the belief that the formation of a personal theology is sacred and need not fit into a certain formula or align with the facilitators' own experience with God.

If possible, it is ideal for religious school directors to model distributive leadership during the retreat. If the school principal or director serves as the sole facilitator of the curriculum, they risk being perceived as the "sage on stage," (Hord, 2009, p.43). Forming a team of leaders that includes teachers who have shown an interest in the subject matter

will empower those teachers as well as others to become leaders in the community. In this framework, the director of the school becomes the “guide on the side,” (ibid, p.43). The use of multiple facilitators will model for teachers that bringing God into the classroom is sacred work that belongs to all of us.

Teaching About God and Spirituality by Robert Louis Goodman and Sherry H. Blumberg (A.R.E. Publishing, Inc.) will serve as a helpful resource to educators who implement this curriculum.

A Note about Language

God language is complicated. The word “God” alone stirs up connotations of societal and childhood images of the Divine. Our limited teaching about God throughout all developmental stages often results in adult teachers who reject or struggle with these conceptions. The use of the word God in this curriculum is not intended to have a singular meaning. God, the Divine, a force greater than ourselves, or a variety of other indicators are all meant to be inclusive of a range of beliefs or struggle with belief. An underlying goal for this project is to expand the notion of what God concept and God belief *can* mean.

Goodman and Bloomberg remind us that such a pursuit is rooted in Judaism. “While God is One, views of God are not monolithic in Judaism. Multiple paths exist to understanding and approaching God,” (Goodman & Bloomberg, 2002, p.xv). For some learners this will be quite obvious, but for others such a notion could be surprising. For this reason, rather than approach this topic through conversations about “what we believe,” the lessons will ask participants to reflect on powerful moments with questions such as “how did you feel, what made that a powerful experience, does this affect how you see yourself in the world?”

It is important that facilitators and teachers have a sense of common God language in their communities. Children will bring conceptions of God with them into the classroom that they have been exposed to from the media, their peers, and their family homes. For example children of interfaith families may bring conceptions of God into the classroom that diverge from the Jewish tradition. It will take further discussion and exploration within the community to determine how to best navigate these conversations.

Setting

The unit is designed for a three daylong religious school staff retreat in preparation for the new school year. The Institute for Jewish Spirituality (2014) explains why the retreat environment offers the optimal setting for this work. “Retreats are the context in which to acquire and establish contemplative spiritual practices. We believe that retreats – as a mini-sabbatical, as a time for renewal – support the development of a spiritual openness and trust necessary for the revival of our synagogues and institutions.” As a prime opportunity to explore new spiritual practices, the retreat will offer various kinds of spiritual practices in addition to the eight curricular lessons throughout the three-day period. Rabbi Mike Comins (2010) reminds us that, “People get to God through God-moments, not God-concepts.” The experiential approach that Comins deems necessary is possible within the immersive retreat setting. The various experiences that include tefilah, meditation, service projects, Torah study, and nature walks will be available to enable and cultivate these God-moments while the curricular lessons offer participants a chance for intentional reflection.

A retreat requires teachers to commit to a significant amount of work time outside of religious school. In order to ensure attendance and fair compensation for teachers, it

would be beneficial to include the retreat in their yearly contracts. If a retreat is not plausible for calendrical or financial reasons, the eight separate sessions could be spread out over eight weekly or monthly professional learning opportunities. While this is possible, it may not be as effective without the experiential component enabled by the retreat.

Rationale

What's already out there?

While God was once an entity unspoken of in most liberal congregations, there have been significant efforts in recent years to bring God back to our people. Several resources exhibit the growing movement to facilitate the cultivation of personal relationships with the Divine. A.R.E. Publishing Inc.'s resource, Teaching About God and Spirituality (2002) offers Jewish educators professional development and classroom resources for bringing God into the classroom. The Union for Reform Judaism's Fall 2010 issue of Torah at the Center presents 15 different articles written by leaders in the movement on the place of God in their personal or professional lives. The Institute for Jewish Spirituality (2014) seeks to help clergy and Jewish leadership become intentional in exploring their own spiritual journeys so that they can lead members of their communities on their own journeys. Such contributions to the Jewish world are significant and essential. However in spite of these important endeavors, mature God conversation has still not made its way into most religious school classrooms.

Why Teach about God?

This unit makes the assumption that helping children reflect on their own experiences with God is beneficial to them. In David Wolpe's Teaching Your Children About God, he asserts that a belief in God gives children a sense of security in a world of unknowns. He teaches that, "What we believe about God greatly affects how we view ourselves, other people, and our world," (Wolpe, 1993, p.4). He stresses that God belief directly influences how we interact with the world. An intentional relationship with

something greater than ourselves has the power to give children comfort and self-confidence both inside and outside the walls of the synagogue (ibid).

Wolpe's explanation is one that would apply to Jews throughout our history and into our future. However Richard Levy highlights why bringing God into the classroom is *more* important to the rising generation of Jews than it ever has been in the past. In a world where information is available as quickly as a question can be entered into a Google search, teachers find it far less relevant to convey facts and figures with their limited classroom time. Levy explains that it is also ineffective. In our modern world a commitment to Judaism is not assumed but must be earned. Other religions and other interests compete for the attention of our students (Levy, 2002).

In response to this reality, Levy writes, "we now have to persuade them and their children, in the few hours they spend with us, that being Jewish is worthwhile –that being Jewish can change their lives. Facts, we know, seldom change lives; profound insights and experiences may. Part of why teaching about God is more important than ever is that if we can help give our students an experience of God, we can help that change take place," (ibid, p.xii). God experience can be transformative. In this way "being Jewish can change their lives." It is essential that in our work as educators we prioritize God moments because these have the potential to positively impact both the personhood of our students and how they perceive their personal relationships with Judaism.

What is it that we should be teaching about God?

Rabbi Rifat Sonsino (2010) points out that while the Reform movement prides itself on celebrating theological diversity, it does not necessarily act on it. We tend to perpetuate only the theistic points of view of our prayer books and Torah. By not enabling students to

express a multiplicity of God concepts, we leave a singular perspective in its place. We teach by not teaching: the absence of diversity suggests uniformity.

Wolpe (1993) illustrates this when he reports that children of the world are exposed to ideas about God and are impacted by those perceptions. It is the responsibility of their trusted adults – in our case, teachers – to guide them through those perceptions in a way that is authentic to each child. If we do not offer them the tools now, they may never have the vocabulary to participate in the discussion. “All children, even those from nonreligious homes, develop images of God. It is our responsibility to help them develop those ideas in a way that is constructive and true both to traditions we value and to what we know about the world. We can tell only what we know and hope they hear what they need,” (ibid, p.26). Wolpe reminds us again that we teach by not teaching. Here the absence of diversity is replaced by a default societal image of God.

What has to happen first?

In order for us to communicate “what we know,” as Wolpe suggests, teachers themselves must have a sense of what *they* know. Mordechai Kaplan teaches, “To answer any difficult question raised by a child, two requirements are necessary: 1. The ability to answer the question to the satisfaction of an adult, and 2. The ability to adapt that answer to a child’s mind in accordance with his age,” (Kushner, 1971, p.117). In other words teachers must be able to articulate their own God experiences, no matter what they are and even if they have no identified belief, in a way that is satisfying to them as an adult, in order to try to communicate their experience with students. What constitutes a God experience cannot be defined for teachers but in contrast must be defined by them.

Kaplan's order is intentional. We cannot assume that answers provided to children should be any less sophisticated than those required of an adult. On the contrary, children deserve answers that are on an adult's level but in the language a child understands. Otherwise we face a generation of adults who received elementary answers that are often unsuitable for their adult sensibilities. Kaplan also highlights the human tendency that the ability to articulate one's ideas is tied to their understanding of those ideas. In a 1994 study, Eliciting Self-Explanations Improves Understanding, Chi, de Leeuw, Chiu, & LaVancher demonstrate through a series of experiments that explanation enhances learning –even self-explanation. When someone explains a concept to himself/herself, s/he has a greater grasp of that concept.

We are asking teachers to engage in this self-explanation with their God experiences. The process begins with personal moments of connected-ness and not with abstract theological concepts. Richard Levy (2002) points out that even the prophets in our sacred texts needed practice in identifying their encounters with God. In the same way, we do not always know when we are having an experience with a higher power or what that experience might mean to us. Such moments are not easy to articulate. At times like these, words seem foreign. How can a limited vocabulary accurately label a transformative experience? Words feel insufficient in this context because they are. We may not be able to narrate the moment. However when we begin to organize the experience through explanation, we have a greater sense of what it means to us. In Wolpe's terms, we have a greater grasp of what we "know."

What does it mean to “know”?

“Knowing” in this case is not absolute certainty –such a state is highly unlikely if not impossible. Rather “knowing” connotes taking part in the journey to articulate one’s own search for God. Wolpe (1993) points out that Israel’s name –to wrestle with God – reminds us that it is the inheritance of the Jewish people to struggle with our God ideas. We each must find our own entry points of connection and they will not/should not look the same as our teachers. Rather teachers must engage in the struggle so that they can communicate their experience with the struggle, and not so that they can *tell* their beliefs to students. It is essential that teachers internalize their role as guides to help students uncover their own beliefs. When one is engaged in the struggle, they do not always have the answers. Sometimes facilitating students on their own journeys, means admitting the dreaded words, “I don’t know.”

In his book When Children Ask About God, Harold Kushner wrote, “I hope that the reader will digest this book and make its answers his own, so that he can speak with personal commitment and authenticity and that the child will be given his father’s answers in his father’s words,” (Kushner, 1971, p.2). Despite Kushner’s male language, his hope applies to all parents and children regardless of gender. Kushner’s work offers answers, his answers, to many of the difficult questions asked by both children and adults. However he charges readers to blend his answers with their own search for God in order to communicate authentically with children. The teacher need not offer Kushner’s answers as fact, rather model for students how they themselves used Kushner’s words to articulate their own experience. Such an example will encourage students to participate in the Jewish tradition of engaging in the struggle.

Parallel Journeys

This engagement occurs when teachers create safe and reciprocal opportunities for God talk. Wolpe (1993) explains, “By opening a dialogue with our children, we can develop a faith that is modern and honest, a faith true to tradition and to the search for God,” (p.2). The development of faith is not a concrete endpoint but an eternally reached for goal. We are always in pursuit of such a faith. Teachers will not complete their journeys through the completion of this curriculum. Rather they will continue to encounter and grapple with God experience through “open dialogue with our children.” Children have the propensity to remind adults of the beliefs that came so simply to them as children (ibid). Through the act of reciprocal dialogue, where both parties benefit from the exchange, students are reminded that their teachers are on a spiritual journey alongside them (Kessler). They learn that the journey is an ongoing one in which they are legitimate and active participants.

More on Professional Learning

Personal experience with the Divine is a difficult topic to broach through a professional learning curriculum. Yet it is a vital one because of the challenge it presents to our students. Shirley Hord (2009) explains that such student struggle should be the determinant for the focus of professional learning. In our schools students are poorly prepared to process spiritual experiences. This is largely because our staff is also not equipped to have these conversations. As Hord suggests, this curriculum guide allows teachers to enhance their own knowledge of the subject for the sake of bettering their students’ understandings (ibid).

However the goals of professional learning extend beyond the appropriateness of

the topic. The establishment of a community – a professional learning community – is a necessary component to creating and maintaining a healthy school environment. In such settings, learning for all faculty members is on going, relevant, and collaborative.

Collaborative learning and the relationship building that occurs on account of it leads to communities where staff feel supported and share in the vision of the school.

Collaborative learning assumes a shared focus, a shared responsibility to learn, and a disciplined approach to acquiring the desired goal. It demands that individuals shed the expert role and adopt a collaborative approach that recognizes the values, knowledge, and expertise of all community members. (Wald & Castleberry, 2000 p.4)

This retreat as a collaborative learning experience highlights that no one teacher or school leader could serve as the “expert” in God experiences. Wald and Castleberry’s explanation that individuals must “shed the expert role,” asks teachers to acknowledge that we are not always the keepers of knowledge. In fact, teaching about a connection to something greater than ourselves requires a certain comfort with the unfamiliar. Teachers must negotiate what it means to teach a subject they cannot always be certain of themselves and that does not necessarily have “right” answers in response to student inquiries. In this way professional development that focuses on God learning inherently requires teachers to “shed the expert role,” (ibid, p.4)

This dynamic also expects teachers to utilize fellow colleagues as resources. Stodolosky, Dorph, and Nemser (2006) collected and analyzed results from a study that measured the professional culture and professional development in Jewish schools. They found that many teachers and faculty persons reported congenial relationships among the staff. In Roland Barth’s (2006) exploration of the nature of relationships among teaching staff, he defines congenial relationships as friendly and pleasant. They comfortably make small talk over lunch but they do not talk teaching strategies. Both Stodolsky et al. (2006)

and Barth (2006) explain that congenial relationships are an important first step yet they are insufficient on their own.

Instead it is collegial (also called collaborative) relationships among teachers that produce a fruitful output. "The knowledge and skills that are generated through collaborative inquiry enriches the knowledge base of the school. From this bank of knowledge and expertise, improved programs and services are born." (Wald & Castleberry, 2000, p4). In these collegial relationships, teachers benefit from the wisdom and experience of their fellow teachers. Here, real dialogue and partnership are possible. As partners, teachers will be able to create learning environments for students that are superior to those they can create on their own. In our Jewish schools we must work far more consciously to establish cultures of collegiality.

During the retreat teachers will focus on their own spiritual journeys. However they will also work in groups with their colleagues to explore the best ways to uncover God in the classroom. It is through these collaborative encounters that we can work to create collegial relationships. Once teachers work together as collaborators, then we will "enrich the knowledge base of the school" and therefore find "improved programs and services" as Wald and Castleberry describe. Better learning for our students is, of course, the ultimate goal of professional development.

In addition to collaboration Lambert highlights one more important component of a professional learning community. "To elevate our work in schools to the level required by a true community, then we must direct our energies and attention toward something greater than ourselves" (Lambert, 2003, p.4). What work fulfills this directive more than enhancing the spiritual lives of our children?

Bibliography

- Barth, R.S., (2006). Improving Relationships Within the Schoolhouse. *Educational Leadership*, 63(6), 8-13.
- Chi, M.T.H., de Leeuw, N., Chiu, M.H, & LaVancher, C. (1994). Eliciting Self-Explanations Improves Understanding. *Cognitive Science* 18. Retrieved from <http://chilab.asu.edu/papers/ChideLeeuwChiuLaVancher.pdf>
- Comins, M. (2010). Put Theology in the Service of God Moments. *Torah at the Center*, 14(1). Retrieved from http://urj.org/kd/temp/93C9CF9F-1D09-6781-A197D505F6BD42EE/TATC_Fall%202010v14n1.pdf
- Goodman, R.L. & Blumberg, S.H (2002). *Teaching About God and Spirituality: A Resource for Jewish Settings*. Springfield, NJ: A.R.E. Publishing, Inc.
- Hord, S.M., (2009). Professional Learning Communities: Educators Work Together Toward a Shared Purpose – Improved Student Learning. *National Staff Development Council*, 30(1), 40-43.
- Institute for Jewish Spirituality (2014). *Sacred Community: Retreat for the Sake of Greater Engagement*. Retrieved from <http://www.jewishspirituality.org/our-spiritual-practices/retreats-as-spiritual-practice/>
- Kessler, R. “The Teaching Presence.” unpublished paper.
- Kushner, H.S. (1971). *When Children Ask About God*. New York, NY: Reconstructionist Press.
- Levy, R.N., (2002). Foreward. Roberta L.G. & Sherry H.B. *Teaching About God and Spirituality: A Resource for Jewish Settings*. (p. xi). Springfield, NJ: A.R.E. Publishing, Inc.
- Sonsino, R. (2010). Implications of Theological Diversity in Reform Judaism. *Torah at the Center*, 14(1). Retrieved from http://urj.org/kd/temp/93C9CF9F-1D09-6781-A197D505F6BD42EE/TATC_Fall%202010v14n1.pdf
- Stodolsky, S.S., Dorph, G.Z., & Nemser, S.F. (2006). Professional Culture and Professional Development in Jewish schools: Teachers’ Perceptions and Experiences. *Journal of Jewish Education*, 72, 91-108.
- Teaching about God in the Classroom. (2003). *V’shinantam: The Union for Reform Judaism National Teacher’s Newsletter*, 3. Retrieved from http://urj.org/learning/teacheducate/publications/newsletter/?syspage=article&item_id=2882
- Wald, P.J. & Castleberry, M.S. (2000). *Educators as Learners: Creating a Professional Learning Community in Your School*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and

Curriculum Development.

Wolpe, D. J. (1993). *Teaching Your Children About God*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company

Annotated Bibliography

Kushner, H.S. (1971). *When Children Ask About God*. New York, NY: Reconstructionist Press.

Kushner writes a guide for parents about how to talk to their children about God. He understands that children are naturally curious about God and so he frames his work based on children's potential inquiries. Kushner addresses questions children pose as a result of life circumstances as well as those that Judaism in particular inspires. Kushner's answers are clear and deliberate which make the book accessible. At the same time it might be tempting to use such decisive statements as an ultimate truth or offered as an indisputable fact to a student. In his introduction Kushner makes clear that he wrote a book that offers his own answers to children about God. Kushner encourages parents to use his answers only as a resource and to amend them in ways that are authentic to the understanding of the parent. In other words, Kushner urges parents to offer children their own answers. Kushner's work is a helpful resource for those using this curriculum because he offers an example of someone who decisively and confidently offers answers to difficult God questions and most importantly does not avoid God conversation but enters into it actively.

Wolpe, D. J. (1993). *Teaching Your Children About God*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company

Wolpe's book expresses a great respect for the role of a child's belief in God and asserts the understanding that children are naturally inclined towards such belief. He explains that it is the job of the adults in a child's life to help that child understand and frame their belief. However it is not the role of the adult to teach the child his/her own belief. The bulk of Wolpe's narrative takes us through various conversations parents might have with their children. Throughout the work, Wolpe keeps a list of discussion questions parents can engage in with children. He also includes various exercises at the conclusion of each section that parents and children can take part in together. These exercises are meant to offer concrete examples for how parents and children can mutually enter into these conversations. Wolpe's narrative and proposed exercises serve as a great guide to parents looking to cultivate an open and exploratory dialogue with their children about belief. Wolpe emphasizes the potential for parent and child to equally learn from one another through this journey.

Goodman, R.L. & Blumberg, S.H (2002). *Teaching About God and Spirituality: A Resource for Jewish Settings*. Springfield, NJ: A.R.E. Publishing, Inc.

Blumberg and Goodman compiled this resource in order to help educators bring God into Jewish educational experiences. The book features many essays to inform the thinking of educators before they integrate these lessons into their classrooms. Many different writers offer insights into the value of teaching about God, the different methods for approaching such teaching, the grounding of Judaism at the heart of the teaching, and an openness to personal theology. The next two sections offer entire curricula and many lesson plans that put the theory of the first section to practice. Specifically the second section of the resource

is dedicated to lessons and special programs designed for educators. This section holds the premise that teachers need a certain comfort with and understanding of their own conceptions of God before they can effectively introduce God conversation into the classroom. The third part of the book contains a wide range of lessons and curricula, ordered by age, that encourage its learners to reflect on the place of God in Judaism and the role of spirituality in their lives. These lessons do not stand alone as lessons about God, rather the God learning is integrated into the other content areas of the curriculum.

Desired Results

The curriculum is specifically created for Temple Shaaray Tefila's (TST) religious school teachers to be instituted at their orientation retreat at the beginning of the school year. For this reason it is essential to examine the mission of TST to ensure that we are in line with the synagogue's goals.

Mission of organization:

The mission of Temple Shaaray Tefila is to provide the means for our congregational community to nurture and to continue its life-long involvement in Judaism by instilling a love of our heritage, a shared connection within the warmth of worship, a devotion to community, and a renewed strength in our Jewish identity.

- We hope to realize this through:
- AVODAH - worship of God in a Reform Jewish congregation that offers its members the fulfillment of meaningful participation in traditional religious ritual.
- CHAVURAH - a community committed to creating a warm and welcoming environment for our congregants' social, educational, ritual, and lifecycle needs.
- TALMUD TORAH - an enlightened program of Jewish learning for all generations.
- TIKKUN OLAM - commitment to the ideals of our Jewish ethical heritage by working to fulfill our responsibilities to our community, our nation, and our world.
- GEMILUT CHASADIM - the pursuit of justice, peace, and deeds of loving-kindness.
- KLAL YISRAEL - strengthening our support of Israel and the Jewish people wherever they live.

Priority Goals

- Learners will find language to begin to articulate their own search for God/something greater.
- The articulated experience will inform the way that the learner helps students explore their own God experiences.

Enduring Understandings

- Jewish educators will be best able to facilitate students on their journeys if educators themselves engage in a personal dialogue with their own range of beliefs.
- God experience is at the heart of the Jewish experience.
- Belief is an impermanent state –the beliefs themselves change over time.
- One does not always have to believe to be on the journey.

Essential Questions

- What does it mean to be on a journey with one's own search for/connection to the Divine?
- How can we as educators serve as guides to our students on their own journeys to find connection with the Divine?

Learner Outcomes: know, do, value/believe, belong (KDBB)

- Know –Learners will know where they are on their own journeys of belief/struggle with belief.
- Do – Learners will be able to articulate their own beliefs/struggle with belief and they will use this experience to assist their students on their own journeys.
- Value/Believe –Learners will explore the notion that their God experience is valid and always in process. Learners will see that their spiritual development is essential for helping their students develop their own sense of spirituality.
- Belong –Learners will engage with colleagues to find common ground through their journey to identify and experience the Divine presence. They will practice creating safe space and methods for bringing these conversations to students.

Acceptable Evidence FOR learning

- Learners will create a lesson plan that integrates God talk into their curriculum at the beginning and end of the retreat to exhibit growth in their ability to bring God into the classroom.
- Teachers create a journal with their own reflection as well as photos or students' work to document three times throughout the year where they engaged students in God conversation that was inspired from their own experience.
- During the end of the year in-service, teachers will be expected to share concrete examples of successes and challenges they faced in their experiences of bringing God talk into the classroom. They will each begin to formulate a rough spiritual autobiography during this time.

Diverse Learners

In order to engage diverse learners, the retreat should be held in a building that is accessible to all participants. This also requires that the nature walk be carefully planned out along a clear path. Activities in the lessons will include various modalities so that learners with different intelligences can all access the material. For example activities will include music, text, movement, tactile experiences, etc.

Curriculum Map

#	Lesson Title	Core Concept
1	Rationale	It is beneficial for students to develop a personal relationship with God.
2	B'tzelem Elohim	Exploring our relationships with B'tzelem Elohim has the power to affect the way we see ourselves in the world.
3	Tefilah in My Own Words	Prayer is a starting point for spiritual experience. For many the language of prayer is both familiar and unexplored.
4	My Story Part 1	"People get to God through God-moments, not God-concepts."
5	My Story Part 2	"People get to God through God-moments, not God-concepts."
6	Language	How we talk about God conveys what we believe about God. We need to be intentional and explicit in the language we use with our students.
7	Application Part 1	Having a sense of where we are on our own spiritual journeys will help us to address students' questions and inquiries about the Divine.
8	Application Part 2	Having a sense of where we are on our own spiritual journeys will help us to appropriately integrate spiritual components into our lesson plans.

Final session takes place at the end of the school year –approximately nine months after the retreat.

9	The End is just the Beginning	Spiritual journeys develop and transform throughout our lives. Bringing God into the classroom is an ongoing process. We can benefit from the wisdom and experience of our fellow teachers.
---	-------------------------------	---

Spiritual Practices
Nature Walk
Silent Meal
Tefilah
Guided Meditation
Service Project
Torah Study
Yoga

Lesson One - Rationale

Relevant Unit Enduring Understanding

Jewish educators will be best able to facilitate students on their journeys if educators themselves engage in a personal dialogue with their own range of beliefs.

God experience is at the heart of the Jewish experience.

Relevant Unit Essential Questions

How can we as educators serve as guides to our students on their own journeys to find connection with the Divine?

Relevant unit KDBB

Belong: Learners will see that their spiritual development is essential for helping their students develop their own sense of spirituality.

Core Concept

It is beneficial for students to develop a personal relationship with God.

Essential Questions

How is a personal relationship with God beneficial to students?

How can educators facilitate students in their search for meaning?

Evidence of Understanding

Learners will articulate in their own words the priority goals of the curriculum.

Learners will infuse an existing lesson from their curriculum with God conversation.

Learning Tasks (2 hours)

00:00-00:10 Open with Niggun

Welcome to this year's staff retreat. We are thrilled to have all of you here with us. This retreat offers us a unique opportunity to spend time getting to know one another and doing important learning and preparation for the new school year. We want to acknowledge that this year's retreat will be different from those in the past. As our opening niggun was meant to suggest, we intend to highlight the spiritual nature of the sacred work we do together. *(Have everyone introduce themselves and what they will be teaching this year. Then break up into groups of four.)*

00:10-00:25 Groups

1. Share name, what you're teaching this year and what inspires you to be a Jewish educator.
2. Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) is a tractate of the Mishna. As its names suggests this tractate offers us mostly ethical lessons. This selection from Pirkei Avot asks us to reflect on the relationship between teaching and wisdom. Study Ben Zoma text below.

בן זומא אומר, איזה הוא חכם--הלמד מכל אדם, שנאמר "מכל מלמד",
השכלתי" (תהילים קיט, צט).

Ben Zoma said: Who is one that is wise? One who learns from every person, as it is said: From all my teachers have I gained understanding (Psalm 119:99).

- Question 1: What does it mean to learn from every person?
- Possible Answers: Each person we encounter has a different perspective from us and we can benefit from being exposed to that perspective –whether it resonates personally with us or not. We cannot begin to understand the world from only one teacher but need a variety of perspectives to gain a well-rounded worldview.
- Question 2: What are the implications of this in the classroom?
- Possible Answers: We learn from our students just as our students learn from us. Our students benefit from the diversity of thoughts and experiences present in the classroom from their classmates.

00:25-00:40 *(Come back together as one group and share key insights from the discussion. Then return to opening niggun.)* We all have the benefit of learning from each other this weekend. We are going to spend this retreat exploring a subject area in which we all have a lot of wisdom to offer and can always benefit from the wisdom of our peers, our teachers and our students. We are going to talk about God in the classroom. *(Group discussion)*

- Tell one story when you experienced God in the classroom.
 - As we hear these stories listen for the role of the educator as well as the content of statement/question/conversation.
- What did you think when you heard this was the theme of the retreat?
 - **Allow space for a discussion of fears and doubts. This is a time to assure teachers that we will be accepting of a range of beliefs and non-belief.**

We expect this range, and also expect that you will show a similar respect and acceptance at all times to your fellow teachers. There might be times when you become uncomfortable or overwhelmed to the point that you need to take a break from our work together. If you need time or a break from the experience, please take it for yourself. We consider this sacred work and ask that you engage yourself to the fullest extent possible.

00:40-01:05 *There are two texts below. Learners will work in chevruta. The pairs will be numbered so that half of the groups study the first text and half of the groups study the second text. After five minutes I will instruct two chevruta to join together, creating a group of four. Both groups will have a chance to read the text they did not study. One chevruta will share the insights of their discussion with the other and vice versa.* David Wolpe offers his theory and practical insights about how to broach this topic with children in his book Teaching Your Children About God. A.R.E. Publishing Inc.'s resource, Teaching About God and Spirituality offers Jewish educators professional development and classroom resources for bringing God into the classroom. The excerpted text is from Richard Levy's foreword to the book.

Text 1: No matter how hard adults try to sympathize with them, part of the child will always feel cut off from the adult world. Children's books constantly explore this theme – the child alone in a world where no one fully understands. Nothing could be more important than to feel that someone always cares and really understands. For a child to believe in God's concern is not an intellectual proposition or a philosophical decision. It is a way of trusting in the goodness of the world. It is a way of asserting that one is not alone. It is to have what is called in Hebrew *bitachon*, "trust," a sense of confidence that runs deep inside because it flows from above. *Bitachon* can help give children a sense of security.
-David Wolpe Teaching Your Children About God

- Question 1: How does Wolpe explain that God belief benefits children? Do you agree?
- Possible Answers: Gives children a sense of security, perhaps helps them feel safe in a world they don't understand, influences how we see ourselves and our role in the world.
- Question 2: How might this play out in the classroom?
- Possible Answers: A classroom can be overwhelming for children –perhaps it would offer students a sense of purpose in the class, point of education is to help students become their best selves –Wolpe suggests that God belief might be a powerful force in that matter.

Text 2: Teachers are no longer satisfied to teach facts or ideas to children or adolescents, and we are no longer just teaching children – or adults – who are committed to being Jewish. If parents come from different religions, or if the parents are indifferent to Judaism, we now have to persuade them and their children, in the few hours they spend with us, that being Jewish is worthwhile –that being Jewish can change their lives. Facts, we know,

seldom change lives; profound insights and experiences may. Part of why teaching about God is more important than ever is that if we can help give our students an experience of God, we can help that change take place. - Teaching About God and Spirituality –foreword by Richard Levy

- Question 1: Why does Levy suggest that teaching about God is beneficial to children? Do you agree?
- Possible Answers: God experience is transformative and transformation is our point –because “being Jewish can change their lives” and because transformation is memorable and worthy –this is our best chance or nurturing committed Jews.
- Question 2: How might this play out in the classroom?
- Possible Answers: The reality that families with different commitments to Judaism plays out in our classrooms daily. We are always searching for ways to access our students. Teachers might suggest practical ways to incorporate these kinds of experiences into the classroom.

(Come back together as one group and share key insights from the discussion. Return to opening niggun.)

01:05-01:25 We are going to look at a brief excerpt from Rachael Kessler’s article “The Teaching Presence.” She spends the article addressing that elusive and impermanent state of teaching we all know well: the feeling of being “on” one day and “off” another. Throughout the article she seeks to identify qualities and states of being that help us to attain that teaching presence –more “on” days.

“Students yearn for a curriculum that invites them to share what matter most to them. Such learning comes alive with connections that bring meaning, higher order thinking skills and motivation. This means entering the territory of heart, community and soul. But in doing so, students are very sensitive to the qualities of their guide. They are reluctant to open their hearts unless they feel their teachers are on the journey themselves – working on personal, as well as curriculum integration.”

- Question 1: What does Kessler say about effective curriculum for students?
- Possible Answers: Curriculum needs to allow for meaning making, it should be personal, and challenging. This connects to the Richard Levy text about moving away from facts towards transformative experiences.
- Question 2: What does this suggest about God curriculum?
- Possible Answers: God curriculum, instead of teaching various theological theories, should allow students to make meaning out of their personal experiences. Kessler suggests that students’ learning will “come alive” in response to this challenging work.

- Question 3: What do you think she means by “the journey?”
- Possible Answers: She defines journey as “-working on personal, as well as curriculum integration.” Our relationships with the curriculum are ever evolving as we redefine what is important to us and how to convey that to the class. Our journeys may not look identical to those of our students but they are both constantly in action and may even overlap at times.
- Question 4: What does this have to do with our role in helping our students form a personal relationship with God?
- Possible Answers: This suggests that students want to see their teachers exploring their own personal relationships with God. In this way we model that the journey is always evolving. We can show that there are no right or wrong answers and by being on the journey with them we have the unique ability to offer them a knowing support.

Over the course of this weekend we will spend a lot of time exploring our personal journeys to discover how they can help us become better teachers to our students.

- Return to Ben Zoma: What does it mean in terms of God learning that the one who is wise learns from every person?
- Possible Answers: We are here to learn from each other, we can learn from our students and they can learn from us, they learn from their peers, when it comes to God learning we have the benefit of experience but not the benefit of knowledge the way we do in other topics.

01:25-01:55

Teachers will now have 30 minutes to work in grade level cohort. Together they will choose a lesson that is to be taught early in the year. Teachers will analyze the spiritual components of the lesson as it exists now. Next teachers will brainstorm and take notes on how they can infuse God conversation into the lesson. They will return to this lesson throughout the retreat and continue to refine it.

01:55-02:00 Return to opening niggun

Sources

Pirkei Avot 4:1 <http://www.on1foot.org/text/mishna-pirkei-avot-41>

Kessler, R. “The Teaching Presence.” unpublished paper.

Levy, R.N., (2002). Foreward. Roberta L.G. & Sherry H.B. *Teaching About God and Spirituality: A Resource for Jewish Settings*. (p. xi). Springfield, NJ: A.R.E. Publishing, Inc.

Wolpe, D. J. (1993) *Teaching Your Children About God*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company

Supplies

Handout (below)

Pirkei Avot 4:1 (translation by on1foot.org)

בן זומא אומר, איזה הוא חכם--הלמד מכל אדם, שנאמר "מכל מלמד",

השכלתי" (תהילים קיט,צט).

Ben Zoma said: Who is one that is wise? One who learns from every person, as it is said: From all my teachers have I gained understanding (Psalm 119:99).

What does it mean to learn from every person?

What are the implications of this in the classroom?

David Wolpe –Teaching Your Children About God

No matter how hard adults try to sympathize with them, part of the child will always feel cut off from the adult world. Children's books constantly explore this theme – the child alone in a world where no one fully understands. Nothing could be more important than to feel that someone always cares and really understands. For a child to believe in God's concern is not an intellectual proposition or a philosophical decision. It is a way of trusting in the goodness of the world. It is a way of asserting that one is not alone. It is to have what is called in Hebrew *bitachon*, "trust," a sense of confidence that runs deep inside because it flows from above. *Bitachon* can help give children a sense of security.

How does Wolpe explain that God belief benefits children? Do you agree?

How might this play out in the classroom?

Richard Levy –Teaching About God and Spirituality

...teachers are no longer satisfied to teach facts or ideas to children or adolescents, and we are no longer just teaching children – or adults – who are committed to being Jewish. If parents come from different religions, or if the parents are indifferent to Judaism, we now have to persuade them and their children, in the few hours they spend with us, that being Jewish is worthwhile –that being Jewish can change their lives. Facts, we know, seldom change lives; profound insights and experiences may. Part of why teaching about God is more important than ever is that if we can help give our students an experience of God, we can help that change take place.

Why does Levy suggest that teaching about God is beneficial to children? Do you agree?

How might this play out in the classroom?

Rachael Kessler –The Teaching Presence

“Students yearn for a curriculum that invites them to share what matter most to them. Such learning comes alive with connections that bring meaning, higher order thinking skills and motivation. This means entering the territory of heart, community and soul. But in doing so, students are very sensitive to the qualities of their guide. They are reluctant to open their hearts unless they feel their teachers are on the journey themselves – working on personal, as well as curriculum integration.”

What do you think she means by “the journey?”

What does this have to do with helping our students form a personal relationship with God?

What would Kessler suggest is your role in facilitating the formation of this relationship?

Lesson Two - B'tzelem Elohim

Relevant Unit Enduring Understanding

Jewish educators will be best able to facilitate students on their journeys if educators themselves engage in a personal dialogue with their own range of beliefs.

God experience is at the heart of the Jewish experience.

Relevant Unit Essential Questions

What does it mean to be on a journey with one's own search for/connection to the Divine?

Relevant unit KDBB

Know –Learners will know where they are on their own journeys of belief/struggle with belief.

Value/Believe –Learners will explore the notion that their God experience is valid and always in process.

Core Concept

Exploring our relationships with B'tzelem Elohim has the power to affect the way we see ourselves in the world.

Essential Questions

How is B'tzelem Elohim understood from ancient to modern texts?

How can B'tzelem Elohim affect how I understand myself?

Evidence of Understanding

Journal Reflections

Learning Tasks (1 hour)

00:00-00:08 Opening

Read Asher Yatzar from Mishkan T'filah

PRAISE TO YOU, Adonai,
 our God, Sovereign 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.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי, רוֹפֵא כָּל בָּשָׂר וּמַפְלִיא לַעֲשׂוֹת.

Baruch atah, Adonai, rofei chol basar umaflia laasot.

So much of our lives and the way that we act in this world is dictated by what we see when we look in the mirror. Amazingly what we see when we look at ourselves one day can be completely different than what we see the next. We take those impressions of ourselves out into the world with us. How we feel about our physical presentation might influence how we carry ourselves, how we perceive a look or comment from a stranger or loved one, or how we respond to a simple question. Over the next hour we're going to take a look at some of our texts and reflect on our perceptions of ourselves and how those perceptions influence the way we interact with the outside world.

Everyone gets a mirror.

Take 1 minute to look at yourself in the mirror. Write down what you see.

00:08-00:15 Genesis 1:26-27

We are now going to look at the text from Genesis 1:26-27. This comes at the end of the creation narrative that explains creation as the genesis of the world in seven days. However it comes before the story of Adam and Eve.

Gen. 1:26 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כִּדְמוּתֵנוּ וַיְרִדּוּ בְרִגְתֵּי הַיָּם וּבַעֲוֹר הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבִבְהֶמְתָּהּ וּבְכָל-הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל-הַרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׁ עַל-הָאָרֶץ:

Gen. 1:27 וַיְבָרֶא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם:

Gen. 1:26 And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth."

Gen. 1:27 And God created man in God's image, in the image of God (b'tzelem Elohim), God created him; male and female God created them.

- Question: After reading these verses, what questions remain about what it means to be b'tzelem Elohim?
- Possible Answers: What does God look like? If we are all created in the image of God then why do we all look different from one another? Why does the text say God created "him" in the male singular but then says "male and female" together?

We are going to look at texts that offer us some answers to some of these questions. Some of these interpretations may offer answers that resonate with you while others do not. It is up to you which ideas from our texts you integrate into your concept of b'tzelem Elohim.

00:15-00:40 Maimonides and Held

Introduce Maimonides then break up into chevruta to study the text. Come back together for the mirror reflection. After the mirror reflection, read the prayer from Siddur Sha'ar Zahav. Then introduce Held before studying the Held text in chevruta. Come back together again for the mirror reflection.

Moses Maimonides, or the Rambam, was born in Spain in the 12th century. He was a medieval philosopher, commentator, and doctor. Maimonides offers a rationalist perspective to our sacred texts. We are going to look at an excerpt from Rambam's work, The Guide for the Perplexed, which offers an interpretation to our Genesis verses.

Moses Maimonides -The Guide for the Perplexed Ch.1 (translation by M. Friedlander)

Some have been of the opinion that by the Hebrew **tzelem**, the shape and figure of a thing is to be understood, and this explanation led [people] to believe in the corporeality [of the Divine Being]...The term **tzelem**, on the other hand, signified the specific form that constitutes the essence of a thing...In [humanity¹] the "form" is that constituent which gives human perception... "In the **tzelem** of God, [God] created him." On this account, i.e. on account of the Divine intellect with which [humanity] has been endowed, [humanity] is said to have been made in the form and likeness of the Almighty, but far from it be the notion that the Supreme Being is corporeal, having a material form.

- Question 1: What understanding of b'tzelem Elohim does Maimonides challenge?
- Possible Answers: Maimonides challenges the notion that tzelem indicates a physical image that we inherit from God.

¹ Original translation says "man" rather than "humanity." The change was made for the sake of gender neutrality.

- Question 2: Instead what does he suggest is the proper translation of the Hebrew word tzelem?
- Possible Answers: He says that tzelem means the “essence” of humanity. He calls that essence “human perception.” He further explains human perception as an inheritance of “Divine intellect.”
- Question 3: According to Maimonides what does it mean to be created in the tzelem of God?
- Possible Answers: It is our knowledge, our awareness of the world around us that we have inherited from God. To be created in the image of God is not a physical likeness but an intellectual one.

How does Maimonides’ interpretation of b’tzelem Elohim affect the way you see yourself? Take 1 minute to look at yourself in the mirror. When you look at yourself this time, consider the Rambam’s notion that being created in the image of God means that we have inherited God’s intellectual features. Have your observations of yourself changed? Do you feel any differently now than you did looking into the mirror earlier? Record your reflections in your journal.

Bring everyone back together by reading the following prayer.

Siddur Sha’ar Zahav

There is vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action. And because there is only one you in all time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium...the world will not have it. It is not your business to determine how good it is, nor how valuable, nor how it compares with other expressions. It is your business to keep it yours clearly and directly, to keep the channel open.

Rabbi Shai Held is a modern philosopher, author, and educator. He currently serves as the dean of Mechon Hadar, an egalitarian yeshiva.

Rabbi Shai Held –Daring to Dream with God

But Judaism does not tell us merely that we are created, but rather also that we are created in the image of God, and are therefore infinitely valuable and beloved of God. To be a serious Jew, then, is to strive to affirm the dignity and value of every person. But it is also to live with an often excruciating tension: On the one hand, Judaism tells us that every human being matters in an ultimate way; but on the other hand, we live with the reality that human dignity is trodden and trampled upon in countless ways — by cruelty and callousness, by illness and disease, by deprivation and desperation, and by pervasive hunger, poverty, oppression and loneliness. The extent of human suffering threatens to reduce our belief in “the image of God” to so much cant and nonsense. It is in the yawning chasm between this foundational assertion of Jewish theology on the one hand, and our daily experience of that assertion’s being not-yet-true on the other, that the covenant between God and Israel is born.

By creating human beings, God has taken an enormous risk — the risk that God will be painfully and repeatedly disappointed. In an act of infinite love, God has chosen to need us. Judaism rises and falls with the insistence that God has entered into a relationship with the Jewish people in which we are called upon to help narrow the enormous gap between the ideal and the real. God's dream is of a world in which human dignity is real and the presence of God is manifest. To be a covenantal Jew is to dare to dream with God.

- Question 1: What does Rabbi Held tell us it means to be created b'tzelem Elohim?
- Possible Answers: To be created in the image of God implies that we are considered very important and are loved by God.
- Question 2: How does his definition obligate us to act?
- Possible Answers: This means that we must treat each person with dignity. If all people are important and loved by God, then we must treat them as such.
- Question 3: What reality challenges this notion?
- Possible Answers: The world as it is often treats people poorly –not with the dignity they deserve. If we are all so important and are loved by God, then why is there so much injustice in the world?
- Question 4: How does Rabbi Held's understanding of covenant relate to being created b'tzelem Elohim?
- Possible Answers: By being in a covenantal relationship with God, Jewish people have the responsibility to narrow the gap between human suffering and human dignity. We are charged to elevate those around us to the high value they deserve. This is the dream of God, that all people will be treated as if they were created in the image of God, and this is the dream of the Jewish people.

How does Held's interpretation of b'tzelem Elohim affect the way you see yourself? Take 1 minute to look at yourself in the mirror. When you look at yourself this time, consider Held's idea that being created in the image of God obligates us to better our world. How might the way you see yourself affect how you act in this world? Record your reflections in your journal.

Quietly ask one of the participants to read the Goldberg poem to bring everyone out of the silence. Then introduce Goldberg and give time for learners to reread the poem and answer the questions.

00:40-00:50 Goldberg

Lea Goldberg (1911-1970), originally from East Prussia, emigrated to Palestine and lived there from 1935 until her death. She is known for her many contributions to Israeli society including her Hebrew poetry.

Lea Goldberg –From my Mother's Home by (translation by Ezra Spicehandler)

From My Mother's Home	מבית אמי / לאה גולדברג
<p>(1) My mother's mother died (2) In the spring of her days. And her daughter (3) Did not remember her face. Her portrait, engraved (4) Upon my grandfather's heart, (5) Was erased from the world of images (6) After his death.</p>	<p>מתה אמה של אימי באביב ימיה. ובתה לא זכרה את פניה. דיוקנה החרוט על לבו של סבי נמחה מעולם הדמויות אחרי מותו.</p>
<p>(7) Only her mirror remained in the home, (8) Sunken with age into the silver frame. (9) And I, her pale granddaughter, who does not resemble her, (10) Look into it today as into (11) A pool which conceals its treasures (12) Beneath the waters.</p>	<p>רק הראי שלה נשתיר בבית, העמיק מרוב שנים במשבצת הכסף. ואני, נכדתה החיוורת, שאינני דומה לה, מביטה היום אל תוכו כאל תוך אגם הטומן אוצרותיו מתחת למים.</p>
<p>(13) Very deep, behind my face, (14) I see a young woman (15) Pink-cheeked, smiling. (16) And a wig on her head. (17) She puts (18) An elongated earring on her ear-lobe, threading it (19) Through a tiny hole in the dainty flesh (20) Of her ear.</p>	<p>עמוק מאוד, מאחורי פני, אני רואה אישה צעירה ורדת לחיים מחיכת. ופאה נוכרית לראשה. היא עונדת עגיל מאורך אל תנוך אזנה, משחילתהו בנקב זעיר בבשר הענוג של האוזן.</p>
<p>(21-22) Very deep, behind my face, the bright goldness of her eyes sends out rays, (23) And the mirror carries on the tradition of (24) The family: (25) That she was very beautiful.</p>	<p>עמוק מאוד, מאחורי פני, קורנת זהובית בהירה של עיניה. והראי ממשיך את מסורת המשפחה: שהיא היתה יפה מאוד.</p>

- Question 1: Who is the narrator of the poem?
- Possible Answer: The granddaughter whose grandmother has died.
- Question 2: How does she remember her grandmother?
- Possible Answers: She analyzes her own features in a mirror that belonged to her grandmother. She sees that her face carries on the memory of her family history. Through this image she remembers her grandmother's wig, her earrings, her youth and her beauty.
- Question 3: How does she see herself?

- Possible Answers: She begins by reporting that she does not look like her grandmother. She also says that her grandmother was very beautiful. It seems that she cannot see her own beauty even though she can see their physical resemblance.

Look into mirror again. What features do you have (if any) that you recognize as inherited? Write down what you see.

00:50-00:59 Group Discussions

We have now looked at ourselves in the mirrors four separate times with four separate directives. First to record whatever we saw, then to look at ourselves as the inheritors of God's intellectual attributes, next as those responsible for bettering our world, and finally as a member of a family whose physical characteristics are passed down through the generations. Return to your groups and address some or all of the following questions:

Did/how did your responses evolve to 'what do you see' when looking at yourself in the mirror? Do you sense a correlation between the way you see yourself and the way you interact with the world? How might this affect our students? Have you begun to think about being God's image (or agent) in the world? What might that teach you about God?

00:59-01:00 Closing Prayer

Facilitator should take notes on some of the comments of how participants' perceptions of themselves or their physical connections to God evolved throughout the lesson. Facilitator can reflect some of those ideas back to the group through prayer. Open with one of the following "May we/ May we be blessed with/I pray that we/ May God give us..." then read some of the comments and close with "and together we say, Amen."

Sources

Frishman, E.D. (2007). *Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur*. New York, NY: CCAR Press

Goldberg, L. "From My Mother's Home." *The Modern Hebrew Poem Itself* (E. Spicehandler trans.). Eds. Stanley Burnshaw, T. Carmi, Susan Glassman, Ariel Hirschfeld, & Ezra Spicehandler. 3rd ed. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, (2003). 133. Print.

Held, S. (2010). Daring To Dream With God. *The Jewish Daily Forward*. Retrieved from <http://forward.com/articles/131500/daring-to-dream-with-god/>

Maimonides, M. (1929) *The Guide for the Perplexed* (M. Friedlander trans. 2nd ed.) London: George Routledge & Sons Ltd.

Tyler, M. & Kane, L. (2009). *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav*. San Francisco, CA: Congregation Sha'ar Zahav.

Supplies

Handout (below)

Mirrors (If mirrors are difficult to acquire, learners may use the cameras on their smart phones or tablets and reverse the lens so that they can see themselves through the device.)

Journals

Writing utensils

Mishkan T'filah

Praised to You, Adonai, our God, Sovereign 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.

ברוך אתה, יי, רופא כל בשר ומפליא לעשות.

Baruch atah, Adonai, rofei chol basar umafli laasot.

Genesis 1:26-27

Gen. 1:26 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כִּדְמוּתֵנוּ וַיְרִדוּ בִדְגַת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל-הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל-הָרֶמֶשׂ עַל-הָאָרֶץ:

Gen. 1:27 וַיְבָרֵא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם:

Gen. 1:26 And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth."

Gen. 1:27 And God created man in God's image, in the image of God (b'tzelem Elohim), God created him; male and female God created them.

After reading these verses, what questions remain about what it means to be b'tzelem Elohim?

Moses Maimonides –The Guide for the Perplexed Ch.1 (translation by M. Friedlander)

Some have been of the opinion that by the Hebrew **tzelem**, the shape and figure of a thing is to be understood, and this explanation led [people] to believe in the corporeality [of the Divine Being]...The term **tzelem**, on the other hand, signifies the specific form that constitutes the essence of a thing...In [humanity²] the "form" is that constituent which gives human perception... "In the **tzelem** of God, [God] created him." ...On this account, i.e. on account of the Divine intellect with which [humanity] has been endowed, [humanity] is said to have been made in the form and likeness of the Almighty, but far from it be the notion that the Supreme Being is corporeal, having a material form.

What understanding of b'tzelem Elohim does Maimonides challenge? Instead what does he suggest is the proper translation of the Hebrew word tzelem? According to Maimonides what does it mean to be created in the tzelem of God?

² Original translation says "man" rather than "humanity." The change was made for the sake of gender neutrality.

Siddur Sha'ar Zahav

There is vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action. And because there is only one you in all time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium...the world will not have it. It is not your business to determine how good it is, nor how valuable, nor how it compares with other expressions. It is your business to keep it yours clearly and directly, to keep the channel open.

Rabbi Shai Held –Daring to Dream with God

But Judaism does not tell us merely that we are created, but rather also that we are created in the image of God, and are therefore infinitely valuable and beloved of God. To be a serious Jew, then, is to strive to affirm the dignity and value of every person. But it is also to live with an often excruciating tension: On the one hand, Judaism tells us that every human being matters in an ultimate way; but on the other hand, we live with the reality that human dignity is trodden and trampled upon in countless ways — by cruelty and callousness, by illness and disease, by deprivation and desperation, and by pervasive hunger, poverty, oppression and loneliness. The extent of human suffering threatens to reduce our belief in “the image of God” to so much cant and nonsense. It is in the yawning chasm between this foundational assertion of Jewish theology on the one hand, and our daily experience of that assertion’s being not-yet-true on the other, that the covenant between God and Israel is born.

By creating human beings, God has taken an enormous risk — the risk that God will be painfully and repeatedly disappointed. In an act of infinite love, God has chosen to need us. Judaism rises and falls with the insistence that God has entered into a relationship with the Jewish people in which we are called upon to help narrow the enormous gap between the ideal and the real. God’s dream is of a world in which human dignity is real and the presence of God is manifest. To be a covenantal Jew is to dare to dream with God.

What does Rabbi Held tell us it means to be created b’tzelem Elohim? How does his definition obligate us to act? What reality challenges this notion? How does Rabbi Held’s understanding of covenant relate to being created b’tzelem Elohim?

Lea Goldberg –From my Mother's Home (translation by Ezra Spicehandler)

From My Mother's Home	מבית אמי / לאה גולדברג
<p>(1) My mother's mother died (2) In the spring of her days. And her daughter (3) Did not remember her face. Her portrait, engraved (4) Upon my grandfather's heart, (5) Was erased from the world of images (6) After his death.</p> <p>(7) Only her mirror remained in the home, (8) Sunken with age into the silver frame. (9) And I, her pale granddaughter, who does not resemble her, (10) Look into it today as into (11) A pool which conceals its treasures (12) Beneath the waters.</p> <p>(13) Very deep, behind my face, (14) I see a young woman (15) Pink-cheeked, smiling. (16) And a wig on her head. (17) She puts (18) An elongated earring on her ear-lobe, threading it (19) Through a tiny hole in the dainty flesh (20) Of her ear.</p> <p>(21-22) Very deep, behind my face, the bright goldness of her eyes sends out rays, (23) And the mirror carries on the tradition of (24) The family: (25) That she was very beautiful.</p>	<p>מתה אמה של אימי באביב ימיה. ובתה לא זכרה את פניה. דיוקנה החרוט על לבו של סבי נמחה מעולם הדמויות אחרי מותו.</p> <p>רק הראי שלה נשתיר בבית, העמיק מרוב שנים במשבצת הכסף. ואני, נכדתה החיוורת, שאינני דומה לה, מביטה היום אל תוכו כאל תוך אגם הטומן אוצרותיו מתחת למים.</p> <p>עמוק מאד, מאחורי פני, אני רואה אישה צעירה ורדת לחיים מחיכת. ופאה נוכרית לראשה. היא עונדת עגיל מאורך אל תנוך אזנה, משחילתהו בנקב זעיר בבשר הענוג של האוזן.</p> <p>עמוק מאד, מאחורי פני, קורנת זהובית בהירה של עיניה. והראי ממשיך את מסורת המשפחה: שהיא היתה יפה מאד.</p>

Who is the narrator of the poem? How does she remember her grandmother? How does she see herself?

Lesson Three - Tefilah in My Own Words

Relevant Unit Enduring Understanding

God experience is at the heart of the Jewish experience.

Belief is an impermanent state –the beliefs themselves change over time.

One does not always have to believe to be on the journey.

Relevant Unit Essential Questions

What does it mean to be on a journey with one's own search for/ connection to the Divine?

Relevant unit KDBB

Do – Learners will be able to articulate their own beliefs/struggle with belief and they will use this experience to assist their students on their own journeys.

Belong –Learners will engage with colleagues to find common ground through their journey to identify and experience the Divine presence. They will practice creating safe space and methods for bringing these conversations to students.

Core Concept

Prayer is a starting point for spiritual experience. For many the language of prayer is both familiar and unexplored.

Essential Questions

How can we derive personal meaning from prayer? How can prayer help us to engage in a relationship with the Divine?

Evidence of Understanding

Written reflections on prayer pages

Learning Tasks (1 hour)

Set up:

For each prayer used, have one piece of Post-it paper or poster board with the question(s) and name of the prayer or blessing at the top of the page. It is recommended that each prayer page also include to words of the prayer or the chatimah so that participants connect their reflections to the words of the prayer itself. Set up posters on the walls of the room(s) in chronological order. If possible, use multiple small rooms with no more than four posters per room. Prayers should be displayed in the order they occur in tefilah. The prayers selected here are from the ma'ariv service. It is highly recommended to have someone playing an instrument (i.e. guitar, piano, flute, etc) that plays familiar settings of

the prayers. If the posters are spread out through several rooms it would be ideal to have one musician per room or multiple musicians who are able to move from room to room playing settings to the liturgy on the wall.

Most groups are too large to begin this tefilah at the same time and at the same point of origin. There will be too much foot traffic that will likely distract from the service and reflective experience. In order to avoid this, the following are a few possibilities depending on the nature of the group, space availability, and time constraints. The service could take place at the end of a break so that participants arrive staggered rather than all at once. Alternatively a staff person could direct small groups into the space every couple of minutes. Otherwise participants could enter different locations so that everyone starts at the same time but not from the same point of origin. In this case, some community members would experience the prayer service out of order.

Service attendees should be given a marker and a brief explanation before entering into the space. This can be done either verbally by a designated staff person or on a written paper posted outside of the room. Tefilah attendees will write their answers to the questions directly on the poster board. They may also respond to the answers of other participants.

The final poster is the Mourners Kaddish. Chairs should be set up at the end of the prayer maze or in a central location where participants can wait after they have completed their prayer cycle. Participants may also return to prayer posters to make additional comments or respond to other comments. While those who finished first are waiting, the designated musicians should play calm settings to closing songs where the community is able to quietly join in. When a critical mass has joined together at the end of the cycle, the tefilah leader will share an iyyun, lead Mourners Kaddish, and end with a closing song. This is a suggested outline for the flow of the service. Alterations can be made to fit the space and suit the prayer community.

Barechu –The Barechu announces the community’s readiness to enter into prayer. What is the value of a verbal communication of readiness? What makes you feel ready to pray?

Ma’ariv Aravim –Ma’ariv Aravim praises God for making the distinction between night and day. What aspects of your life need to be separated?

Ahavat Olam –Ahavat Olam teaches us that through the gift of the Torah we know that God loves the Jewish people. What do you think God loves about our world? What do you think God doesn’t love about our world?

Shema –Shema asks all of Israel to listen to the declaration of the oneness of God. What voices in our world do we need to listen to better? Does God listen to you? If yes, how do you know?

V’ahavta –Through the words of V’ahavta, we announce that we show our love for God by enacting God’s commandments. What do you love about God? How do you show that love? What is difficult about loving God?

Mi Chamocha –Mi Chamocha declares that God redeemed the Israelites by freeing them from the oppressive slavery of the Egyptians. What in our world still enslaves us? What can we do to free each other and ourselves? What is our responsibility to people/ Jews who are not free?

Hashkiveinu –Hashkiveinu asks God to protect our souls during the mysterious nighttime hours and to return it to us in the morning light. In what ways are we vulnerable to the outside world? How do we deal with it?

Avot V’Imahot –Avot V’Imahot praises the God of our ancestors and reminds us of the legacy that our matriarchs and patriarchs established for us. What role do the thousands of years of Judaism before us play into our lives in the present?

G’vurot –G’vurot praises God’s strength and the ability to give life. What strengths do I admire? What ways do I want to be stronger?

K’dushah –Kedusha praises the holy God and God’s holy followers. What makes something/someone holy?

Avodah –Avodah asks God to accept our prayers and reminds us of the centrality of worship in Judaism. What are different ways to have a conversation with God?

Hoda’ah –Hoda’ah is a blessing of gratitude. Why do we thank God for everything? Is there anything we don’t need to say thank you for?

Shalom –Shalom is our prayer of peace. Why is Shalom so challenging? What does that have to do with Hoda’ah (thanksgiving)?

Aleinu –Aleinu is a prayer about the Jews being separate from other peoples –the chosen people. How much do we exclude ourselves and how much does the outside world exclude us? How much do we want to be separate?

Mourners Kaddish –Please list the name of the loved ones you are remembering today and if you would like, share a memory about him/her.

Supplies

Poster board or Post-it paper

Copies of each prayer or chatimah

Markers

Any available instruments