

If I Am Not For Myself, How Can I Be For Others?

An 8-Session Unit in Cultivating Self-Care Practices

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“Rabbi Yisrael Salanter said: “One can possess broad Talmudic knowledge and be a fountain of deep penetrating analysis and yet he does not deserve to be considered a true *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar. If he has not allowed his Torah knowledge to refine his character and restructure his personality, he is an *am haaretz*, common person, who happens to know how to learn.”

- Adapted from Pirkei Avos / Ethics of the Fathers Treasury¹

Introduction and Rationale:

The world of the 21st century moves at an almost frantic pace. Many of us are inundated with responsibilities, appointments, and schedules that keep us busy. We are so consistently inundated with thoughts of what meeting, what phone call, or what email we need to address next that it is easy to slip into autopilot. Throughout our day we are bombarded with notifications and alerts, whether at work or at home. Our minds drift from one concern to another without regard for the activities in which we are involved. Often one can leave home for work, only to arrive without recalling the trip. Other times we can set out on a small activity, move into another room, and not remember the purpose of which we set out. Life moves so quickly that it is all too easy to slip in to a dream-like-state where one works without being aware of their life around them. This is a reality that is compounded when one works in a leadership position. This curriculum is intended to help bring balance to the lives of its participants by waking us to the world that surrounds us. Over the course of 5-6 hours this curriculum is designed to remind us of the importance of self-care, and balance in our lives.

Since the beginnings of modernity the line between work and home has slowly been blurred. Since the Digital Revolution of the 1980's and the boom in use of personal electronics, we have seen rapid advancements in communication technology. Today our society, and the communication of its members, has truly become mobile and constantly

¹ Rabbi Moshe Lieber, *Pirkei Avos Treasury*, (New York, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1995), 51.

in contact. People are accessible at any time and in any location. There are entire businesses that exist for the sole purpose of increasing the mobility, and accessibility of the workforce.

It is impossible to deny that mobility has brought many improvements to our lives and to the global marketplace. Many employees embrace the flexibility offered by mobility.² However, this increased accessibility has had negative impacts on our lives. These developments have made it acceptable, or even reasonable, for people, companies, and organizations to expect their employees to be reachable and available at all hours of every day.

Take for example a recent experience: The day before her wedding, I watched a bride spend large parts of her morning fielding trivial work calls and emails. Over the course of the morning, as guests arrived, it was easy to sense her exasperation every time her phone sounded. Due to the ease of communication it seemed reasonable to her employer to send a quick message, as it would not take much time. This is because we live in a culture that prides productivity at any cost. This is in direct contradiction to one of our most central ideas as Jews, and Jewish professionals.

Deeply embedded in Judaism is the principle that there is finite amount of time we should dedicate to our own work. The very first concept we learn in the *Torah*, the Five Books of Moses, is *Shabbat*, holy and sacred rest. Our story of creation in Genesis 1 builds until God has finished creating the world. When all the work of creation is completed, then God creates rest, *Shabbat*, the seventh day. For millennia, the institution

² Forrester Consulting, *The Expanding Role of Mobility in the Workplace: A Custom Technology Adoption Profile Commissioned by Cisco Systems*. (Cambridge, MA: Forrester Research Inc., 2012), https://www.cisco.com/web/solutions/trends/unified_workspace/docs/Expanding_Role_of_Mobility_in_the_Workplace.pdf.

of a Sabbath, a day of rest, has been a part of Jewish practice. According to our sacred texts, and their rabbinic interpretation *Shabbat* and *Shmita*, the rules requiring a sabbatical year for the fields, are divinely commanded. They are a part of the Jewish ideal use of the Holy Land, and were a part of the predominant culture under the Judean Kings. Rabbinic tradition dedicated countless pages to generating laws that allowed fields to remain fallow, and give the earth a chance to regenerate. This is true not only on the large scale of weeks, months, and years, but there are moments to be set aside, according to tradition, each day for reflection and spiritual refreshment: daily prayer.

It is not only a spiritual matter. Many Jewish professionals agree that periods of rest are beneficial to us physically, mentally, and spiritually. Intellectually we understand that without periods of rejuvenation we cannot hope to be our best selves. However, this is not the predominant culture in many organizations. Instead many staff members, senior staff members, and leadership are so committed to serving the populations in which they work that they are willing to sacrifice their wellbeing. When this is the outlook of the leadership it can easily become the prevailing culture of the entire organization including part-time, and volunteer staff.

This work culture, especially in Jewish organizations, is unsustainable. In recent years, some programs have begun to address this issue and seek to help clergy and other professionals develop a balance between work and life. In existence already are programs such as the Jewish Communal Leadership Development Program at the Institute for Jewish Spirituality. Additionally some corporate training programs focus on finding balance in life, and medical schools offering resources to their students for the benefit of

their wellbeing³. However, I have yet to find a program for organizational leadership, rooted in Judaism and available to the public. Therefore this curriculum addresses a different audience and is designed to enable individuals to set aside time for self-care and to seek a balance between work and life. As participants come to understand the necessity and practicability of self-care practices, they will integrate them into their lives. This will help develop a healthier and happier professional staff, and it is the added hope of the designer that through the individual growth of members of the leadership team, the culture of the organization will improve as leadership and staff morale improves.

³ Nancy Solomon, "Kinder, Gentler Med School: Students Less Depressed Learn More," *St. Louis University*, March 26, 2014. Accessed April 18, 2014. <http://www.slu.edu/rel-news-slavin-med-ed-325>.

Design Principles:

In order to successfully implement this program it is important to be aware of several of the design principles that greatly influenced the development of this unit. They are: *bichvod l'adam* – respect of the individual, *bichvod l'zman* – respect for time, and *bichvod l'b'chirah* – respect for choice.

***Bichvod l'adam* – With Respect for the Individual**

Each and every one of us is an individual with varied needs, experiences and desires. Therefore, over the course of the eight sessions, totaling six hours, the cohort will be exposed to a variety of practices and exercises so that each person may continue to explore what might bring balance to their life. This curriculum has been designed to take into consideration that some of the suggested practices might be discomforting to participants, as individuals have varied experiences and comfort levels with some of the recommended activities, such as *kashrut*, Jewish dietary restrictions or other habits around food and the body, engagement in Jewish text study or other intellectual pursuits, and searching different expressions of spirituality. Therefore it is important to create a safe environment for the cohort to work with one another. They must feel as though they can speak their truth. Their decision must be respected should they choose to opt out or modify a specific practice, if they find it too discomforting.

It is critical to note that this curriculum is rooted in Jewish traditions. The designer acknowledges that there may be staff members within the leadership of the congregation (or Jewish communal organization) that are not Jewish. Should this be the case, they should still be encouraged to participate in this unit. While fully acknowledging its Jewish roots, for their own personal practice and development of self-

care habits, they should be encouraged to use whatever resources they find most meaningful to them.

***Bichvod l'zman*– With Respect for Time**

This professional development unit has been developed to focus on self-care as a necessity for living a healthy and balanced Jewish life. There are strong influences on this curriculum from the burgeoning movement of mindfulness practices, but this is not a unit on mindfulness. The curriculum designer does not claim to have expertise in mindfulness, or those areas of self-care, but is a developing Jewish professional committed to finding balance in his own life. Therefore, he has consulted with professionals and experts in the field in order to develop a thoughtful and meaningful curricular unit that can benefit its participants.

One principle of mindfulness on which this unit is developed is that we may actually “gain” time in our day when we awaken ourselves to how we are using our time. For example, by taking only five to fifteen minutes each morning to meditate and settle the mind, the rest of the day may be used to its most full potential. Results are often not seen immediately, and are more often experienced as a result of cumulative practice. Therefore, this curriculum is designed to expose participants to a variety of exercises, and provide opportunities for experimentation. This requires that the sessions take place over an extended period of time.

Understanding the real-world demands of an organizational setting, this curriculum uses a flipped classroom model, meaning that there will be assigned readings to be completed by participants before a session, so that the forty-five minute sessions

can be focused on experimenting with exercises or practices. The background readings are not required for members of the cohort to participate in learning, but can deepen their understanding of materials that are beneficial to developing personal practices. However, in order for the facilitator to serve as a prepared and effective guide, the Recommended Readings are required of him or her. Additionally, as previously mentioned, the habits taught in this curriculum have a cumulative benefit. It is, therefore, necessary for participants to practice these activities in the days between sessions. Participants will be asked to find a *chevrutah*, study partner, with whom they can be in consistent contact throughout the sessions for guidance and reflection. It is recommended that one week after each session, the facilitator send a reminder notification to participants to check in with their *chevrutah* as a support system and opportunity for reflection.

It is important to note that the individual sessions only comprise six hours of “classroom” instruction together as a cohort. However, because this unit is designed to promote balanced living, it is highly encouraged, if not necessary, for participants to have an opportunity to experiment with their selected practices during the workday. It is additionally important, in order for this project to be successfully implemented in each person’s life, that they have a personal commitment to experiment with a variety of practices outside of work hours. The amount of time dedicated is a matter of personal choice, but the benefits of a unit such as this are only experienced based on the amount of work one is willing to put into it.

***Bichvod l’b’chirah*– With Respect for Choice**

A liberal Jewish perspective defines Judaism and Jewish practice in this curriculum. This means that the individuals taking part in the activities have the responsibility to come their own conclusions as to how to enact these practices. This is important to consider, especially when it comes to concepts of *Shabbat*, *Kashrut*, text study, and prayer. These concepts can be understood differently in various Jewish communities. This course is intended to be an exploration of a variety of rituals and practices with the explicit understanding that each person will develop their own path.

This curriculum has been created for use in congregations, day schools, or religious schools. Ideally it is a part of faculty and staff professional development, unfolding over the course of two to four months, depending on the setting. It is readily adaptable and suitable for use in other settings such as confirmation or post-confirmation classes, adult education classes, or a series of programs at a college Hillel.

This curriculum is intended to be adaptable to varied settings. Its design also allows for the facilitator to modify the specific sessions if they have expertise, knowledge, or can locate a specialist that might bring in additional self-care practices. Additionally, if there is a member of the cohort who has expertise or experience in a specific area this curriculum covers this could be a wonderful opportunity to encourage them to help facilitate its implementation. It should be remembered that this curriculum is to be taught from a Jewish perspective.

Since this curriculum is intended to cultivate a life of balance, serious study, experimentation, and practice in these areas should continue once the course has completed. Therefore members of the cohort might continue in this relationship with the facilitator or chevrotah, and at regular intervals continue to mentor one another. Should

participants choose to engage in further study, and practice, additional resources are provided in each lesson for both the facilitator's and participant's purposes.

Being that this unit is intended to teach a very personal and sensitive subject, it is crucial that the design principles are taken into consideration out of respect for the individual, respect for time, and respect for choice. This curriculum is highly adaptable, and should allow for members of the cohort to create a meaningful and useful experience for themselves under the direction of the facilitator. Participants can get out only what they are willing to put into this process, and carry forward into their lives beyond this unit.

Recommended Background Knowledge:

As the facilitator of this curriculum, you are not expected to be an expert in any or all of the practices involved. It is, however, necessary that, in advance of employing this program, you take the time to deeply read the Recommended Readings that are provided for the participants in each lesson. To aid in your understanding of the topics to be covered, background information has been provided for each lesson, as well as additional resources for further study. These resources are for the facilitator to use, if they choose, in advance of the sessions. They are also included for the event that a participant would like to further explore a specific practice. These resources are not a comprehensive list, but only represent a selection from what the designer of this curriculum found meaningful and useful.

It is also recommended that, as the facilitator, of this curriculum, you have contemplated and practiced the techniques that are covered. You are not expected to be a master of any, but it might be a powerful experience to participant along with the cohort in order to refine your own practices and fully be a part of the developing community. It is critical that you have thoughtfully considered this curriculum before you begin to implement the lessons.

Curriculum Goals:

Enduring Understandings:

- ❖ To care for others you must first care for yourself.
- ❖ Jewish ritual can create a path towards a balanced life.

Essential Questions:

- ❖ What do I need to do in order to be of healthy body, mind, and spirit?
- ❖ How can I develop self-care practices to enrich my life, and enhance my ability to be a Jewish leader?
- ❖ In what ways can Judaism, and Jewish teachings help me cultivate a healthy body, mind, and spirit?

Core Concepts:

- ❖ In order to effectively care for oneself, one must discover rituals, or activities, that are restorative, and practice them.
- ❖ Practice leads to improvement.

Evidence of Understanding/KDBB:

Know

- Three Jewish concepts that promote a balanced life.
- Six self-care practices based on Jewish tradition.
- Eight resources for continued practice in self-care.

Do

- Experiment with six self-care practices throughout the course of this course.
- Commit to continued practice of at least one self-care practice explored in this course.
- Utilize a journaling process to reflect on personal developments throughout this course.

Believe

- Contemplate ways in which Judaism might add balance to their life.
- Consider the benefits of adding self-care practices to their life.
- Reflect on how caring for oneself and living a balanced life enhances their ability to be a Jewish leader.
- Ponder the difficulties associated with self-care habits.

Belong

- To a community that supports self-care
- Connect to Jewish texts.
- Utilize Jewish rituals that promote self-care.

Outline of Sessions:

The purpose of this unit is to inspire individuals in leadership positions to identify and test a variety of self-care practices. In order to undertake this meaningful work, an extended period of time is necessary to provide opportunities for experimentation. Therefore, this curriculum is divided into one ninety-minute introductory session, and seven forty-five minute sessions. It is possible to schedule the remaining sessions in several ways, and maintain the intended integrity of this unit. The suggestion by the designer is that the sessions take place on a bi-weekly basis. Alternative timelines may be developed to suit different situations to allow for more time in between each session. However, it is not recommended to meet more often than every other week

Participants will explore the Jewish value of rest as a sacred act, be guided through a process of reflection and self-discovery, and experiment with carefully selected self-care practices. However, before beginning such personal work, participants must become familiar with each, and create a safe learning environment. Therefore the initial session is dedicated, in part, to this task, as well as instructing the students in the need for self-care and its Jewish roots. This session will also include a time for the participants to reflect on their lives through the use of personal inventories, and reflect upon what they hope to achieve in the course of this program.

The six intermediary sections are divided into three major domains, each intended to instruct the participants in different practices that can help achieve balance physically, mentally, and spiritually. It is important to note that “mentally” in the context of this capstone refers to academic, intellectual, or philosophical pursuits, and not to the realm of “mental health.” The self-care practices will be approached through a Jewish lens,

acknowledging that there are some aspects of each that can be explored through knowledge from the secular world and sciences.

Each domain is further divided into two subgroups, one for each lesson. In the area of physical balance, participants will explore Jewish ideas of ethical and balanced eating with a study of *kashrut*, as well as a balanced diet. The other session on finding a physical balance will center on exercise. Within the subject of “mental” balance, the two sub-divisions are Jewish study of ethics through Mussar and by using Maimonides as an example, the necessity for well-rounded intellectual pursuits. The two sessions are dedicated to finding a spiritual balance. Judaism has a wealth of resources in this area. In this curriculum, meditation will be the focus of one session, and prayer the other.

Throughout the course participants will be asked to make simple commitments between sessions to experiment with the exercise or practice studied. They are also asked to reflect on his or her experiences throughout this unit, and record their thoughts through journaling to more easily observe their development over the course of the unit. The conclusion of this curriculum will then be one final session in which participants will reflect on the process, and through self-assessment and discussion determine what has been helpful for them to begin to balance in their lives. It will be helpful in determining which practice, if any, they would like to continue practicing. If there is interest among the group’s participants, it is highly encouraged that they continue to use their *chevrutah*, learning partnership, for continued reflection, and practice.

Session 1: In the Beginning

Session 2: Guf/Body – Healthy/Ethical Eating

If I Am Not For Myself, How Can I Be For Others?
Brian Nelson, Spring 2014

Session 3: Guf/Body – Physical Well Being

Session 4: Binah/Mind – Mussar

Session 5: Binah/Mind – Well Rounded Study

Session 6: Nefesh/Spirit – Jewish Meditation

Session 7: Nefesh/Spirit – 100 Blessings a Day

Session 8: The Next Steps

What's In A Lesson:

In addition to restating the Enduring Understandings for the entire unit, specific learning targets for each lesson are included at the beginning of every lesson. Each lesson has specially crafted Essential Questions, Core Concepts, Learning Targets, and Evidence of Understanding. Following that, each lesson also contains the Recommended Pre-Reading Assignments, a list of materials needed, a schedule for the day, suggested additional resources for participants to further their study of the topic, and suggested small commitments for each lesson. These small commitments are introduced at the end of each session. They are simple commitments for each participant to state aloud and in writing regarding what they plan to practice during the intervening weeks. These commitments are revisited once in *chevrutah* during that time, and may be revisited at the beginning of the next lesson. These small commitments will be introduced with a suggested series of questions provided in more detail at the conclusion of the lesson. Each lesson then contains specific notes and some required background information for the facilitator to be prepared for the session.

The lessons are not scripted in a sense that one must follow the script to the letter. They generally contain an introduction and team building exercise to ease participants into the session. This activity will often serve as a set induction to prepare the cohort for the activities in which they will later engage. This is followed by an exploration of the topic of the day either through text study, an experiential learning activity.

Each lesson has designated reflection time to provide a space for participants to contemplate the activities they have just experienced, and determine what they would like to do going forward in their practice for the weeks before the next session. Sometimes

this deliberation may be done with their *chevrutah*, alone, or with the group, depending on the setting and the lesson for the day.

Please note that following the conclusion of each session is a reminder to the facilitator to engage the participants, and remind them to meet with their *chevrutah* to discuss their progress during the week. Some sample questions are provided, although each group may choose to take their own direction, and establish a ritual or conversation style that suits their needs. While it is recommended that the Recommended Readings Handouts for the next session be provided at the conclusion of each lesson, this reminder email is a perfect opportunity to include those handouts again.

Each lesson itself contains the text of the handouts, and any guided instruction that might be needed throughout the lesson. This is done only for the sake of keeping all materials in one central place. In the appendix of this curriculum are “clean” copies of any handouts necessary for distribution during the lesson.

Session 1: In the Beginning

Enduring Understandings:

- ✓ To serve as an effective leader one must have an intimate knowledge of themselves.
- ✓ Self-care can help a person live a healthier and more balanced life.

Essential Questions:

- ✓ What do I need to do in order to be of healthy body, mind, and spirit?
- ✓ What do I already do in my life to support a healthy body, mind, and spirit?

Core Concepts:

- ✓ Judaism instructs us to practice self-care.
- ✓ Self-care can bring balance to our lives.

Learning Targets:

- ✓ Participants will understand that self-care is a Jewish value that can bring balance to their lives.
- ✓ Participants will know what activities offer them the most healthy, and balanced lifestyle.

Evidence of Understanding:

- ✓ Participants will share what, if any, self-care habits they have in their lives.
- ✓ By outlining their self-care goals participants will demonstrate an understanding that self-care, and rest are Jewish principles,

Recommended Pre-Reading Assignments:

- 🌀 Participants are asked to bring in an object that symbolizes how they care for their mind, body, or spirit. They will be asked to share it with the group.
- 🌀 Boorstein, David. "Who Will Heal the Doctors?" *New York Times*. October 2, 2013. Accessed on April 18, 2014.
<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/10/02/who-will-heal-the-doctors/>.
- 🌀 "Introduction." Slater, Jonathan. *Mindful Jewish Living: Compassionate Practice*. New York, NY: Aviv Press, 2004.

Materials Needed:



- Tables
- Chairs
- Copies of Prayer
- Copies of Text Study
- Pencils or pens
- Notepads/Journals for distribution

Schedule of the Day:

00:00 – 00:10	Introduction
00:10 – 00:25	Ice Breakers/Trust Building I
00:25 – 00:35	Reflect on Pre-Reading
00:35 – 00:50	Text Study

00:50 – 01:10	Ice Breakers/Trust Building II
01:10 – 01:20	Current Care Practices
01:20 – 01:30	Conclusion

Additional Resources:

-  Slater, Jonathan. *Mindful Jewish Living: Compassionate Practice*. New York, NY: Aviv Press, 2004.
-  Williams, Mark, and Danny Penman. *Mindfulness: An Eight-Week Plan For Finding Peace in a Frantic World*. New York, NY: Rodale Inc., 2011.

Small Commitments:

- ✓ Write down your goals for this professional development curriculum. Be prepared to share them with the facilitator.
- ✓ Commit to journaling process

Notes For This Lesson:

It is important to explain the expectations for this course to the participants. There are several opportunities for personal choice, and the participants have many options from which to select their practice. It is strongly recommended that each person commit to a personal practice they can achieve, and enter each session with an open mind and open heart. They will only be able to take from this process what they put into it.

Background Information:

In the last fifteen to twenty years, several religious organizations and research institutions have completed studies that have found that care givers in many fields, including religious organizations, are so committed to caring for those that they serve, that they do not remember to care for themselves well enough. This results in several unhealthy trends, such as being overweight and developing other related illnesses like high blood pressure and Type II Diabetes. We have also seen an increase in burnout among professionals in religious organizations⁴, medicine and healthcare⁵, and education.⁶ It is necessary for our leaders and the staff of our organization to each care for themselves if they are to be effective in their duties to those whom they serve.

Not only is it necessary as members of a holy community committed to serving the needs of others, but also it is simply a healthier way to live. Judaism provides us with a wealth of resources from which we can draw to live a balanced life. As leaders in our institution, we must live out the values we teach to those whom we serve. For more detailed information, please consult the cited studies and resources in this section.

00:00 – 00:10 Introduction

⁴ “Clergy Members Suffer from Burnout, Poor Health.” *Talk of the Nation*, NPR, (Washington DC: NPR October 3, 2010), <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=128957149&sc=emaf>.

⁵ Pauline Chen MD, “Easing Doctor Burnout With Mindfulness,” *New York Times*, September 26, 2013, accessed April 18, 2014, http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/09/26/easing-doctor-burnout-with-mindfulness/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=0.

⁶ Erik Kain, “High Teacher Turnover Rates are a Big Problem for America’s Public Schools,” *Forbes Magazine*, March 8, 2011, accessed April 18, 2014, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/erikkain/2011/03/08/high-teacher-turnover-rates-are-a-big-problem-for-americas-public-schools/>.

- Welcome the participants.
- Introduce facilitator and the project that we are undertaking.
- Highlight the sensitive nature of the project, and the level of respect and confidentiality.
- Explain what the participants can expect during this program.
- Thank participants for their participation.
- Begin with A One-Minute Meditation
- Offer A Prayer Before Our Study

00:10 – 00:25 Ice Breakers/Trust Building I – Why Are You Here?

- Invite participants to sit in a large circle
- First the facilitator should share their name, and why they have decided to bring this professional development unit to the organization
- Ask the participants to take their new journal and write why they are motivated to seek balance in their lives.
 - o Facilitator: It may be in your interest to record the answers to this question without recording names of the participants. There will be an opportunity later in this lesson to ask the participants to craft their own personal goals.
- Invite participants to share their name, what their job-title is in the organization, what they do, and why they are motivated to do it?

00:25 – 00:35 Reflect on the Pre-Reading

- Before the session today you were asked to read the short article emailed to you
 - o What were the main points?
 - o How does this translate into what we do here?
 - o What are some similarities?

00:35 – 00:50 Text Study

- Distribute Text Study Hand Out
- Discuss background information
 - o What do you remember happens in Genesis 1?
 - (Creates Heaven and Earth)
 - (Creates plant life)
 - (Creates all living beings)
- Let's look at the text.
- Genesis 1:31, what happens in this portion of the text?
- Genesis 2:2 – God rests
- What does it mean to rest?
- Why might God have rested?
 - o The text tells us that God's work was finished, why then does God create man?
- Ask the students to recall the assigned pre-reading.⁷
 - o What does this article teach us?

⁷ Pauline Chen MD, "When It's the Nurse Who Needs Looking After," *New York Times*, July 5, 2012, accessed April 18, 2014, <http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/07/05/when-its-the-nurse-who-needs-looking-after/>.

- In what ways is our profession similar to that of nursing?
- How does it relate to God's behavior in Genesis?

00:45 – 01:10 Ice Breakers/Trust Building II – Representing Self-Care of Mind, Body, and Spirit

- As we have seen from our text study, Judaism places a value on rest and refreshment. It is a holy act, and is an important part of self-care.
- Before we begin to cultivate specifically Jewish self-care practices, we want to consider things that you might already be doing in your lives.
- Sitting in a circle with a table containing the “self-care” objects participants brought with them within view.
- One at a time invite the participants to approach the table and select an item that is not their own that could represent self-care of mind, body, or spirit for them.
 - Once they select an item, share it with the group and why they chose it
- Then ask the true owner of the object explain what it represents to them.

01:10 – 01:20 Current Care

- Thank everyone for sharing such an intimate part of his or her lives.
- Continue to explore their current self care-practices, and assess their needs.
- After completing the previous exercise invite participants to take the next 10 minutes to reflect on the following areas of their life, they may choose to write in the provided notebook/journal
 - What activities drain you of energy the fastest?
 - What are three obstacles in your life to balanced self-care?
 - What are three activities that give you the most energy?
 - What are some self-care activities you might be interested in exploring?
- One last piece on which we would like to reflect. Gratitude, acknowledging the things that are going well in your life, is an important aspect of self-care. When you are feeling stressed, it can be relaxing and beneficial to stop and reflect on what you appreciate.
 - Write down five things for which you are grateful. They can be anything that you are grateful for at this moment.
 - Provide an example of your own.

01:20 – 01:30 Conclusion

- Assess for understanding
 - Why is it important for us to create a balanced life utilizing self-care practices?
 - What does Judaism have to say on the subject?
 - In the large group ask participants to share what self-care practices they already have, and one or two things for which they are grateful at this moment.
- Conclude with advice to continue the journaling process.
- Explain what the participants can expect next time.

- Ask the participants to find a *chevrutah*, someone with whom they feel comfortable reflecting with, confiding in, and relying on for the remainder of the course.
 - o One person might be in *chevrutah* with multiple people, or form a so-called *trivurtah*, a *chevrutah* of three. But it is recommended to be in pairs.
- Remind the participants that their assignments for next time will be a pre-reading that will help facilitate and deepen their experience in the next lesson. They should also write down one to three goals, or things they hope to learn from this course.
- Remind participants that although they might not journal on their own during the week, it is important to bring the journal with them for each session.

Session 1 Resources and Handouts:

A One-Minute Meditation⁸

Note to facilitator:

This meditation has been excerpted verbatim from Mindfulness. If it suits your purposes please, develop this in a way that is most comfortable for you to lead. You should also note, and make it explicit to members of the cohort that, should sitting fully erect be uncomfortable, take a more comfortable position.

- 1) Sit erect in a straight-backed chair. If possible, bring your back a little way from the rear of the chair so that your spine is self-supporting. Your feet can be flat on the floor. Close your eyes or lower your gaze.
- 2) Focus your attention on your breath as it flows in and out of your body. Stay in touch with the different sensations of each in-breath and each out-breath. Observe the breath without looking for anything special to happen. There is no need to alter your breathing in any way.
- 3) After a while your mind may wander. When you notice this, gently bring your attention back to your breath, without giving yourself a hard time—the act of realizing that your mind has wandered and bringing your attention back without criticizing yourself is central to the practice of mindfulness meditation.
- 4) Your mind may eventually become calm like a still pond—or it may not. Even if you get a sense of absolute stillness, it may only be fleeting. If you feel angry or exasperated, notice that this may be fleeting too. Whatever happens, just allow it to be as it is.
- 5) After a minute, let your eyes open and take in the room again.

⁸ Mark Williams and Danny Penman, *Mindfulness: An Eight-Week Plan For Finding Peace in a Frantic World*, (New York, NY: Rodale Inc., 2011), 4.

A Prayer Before Our Study

Brian Nelson, April 2014

Source of All Being,
here we are, ready to accept Your invitation to engage in sacred study.
Your wisdom has provided meaning to those that came before us.
Your lessons have been passed to us through the ages.
Here we are, today, prepared to continue our quest to find balance.
We seek the patience to have compassion for ourselves.
We ask for strength to persevere,
and the wisdom to know that we pursue improvement, not perfection.
Blessed are You, ADONAI,
whom we thank for the opportunity to study,
and improve our lives.

Text Study: For Rest and Refreshment of Soul

Genesis 1:31-2:3

וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה-טוֹב מְאֹד וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי: **Gen. 1:31**

וַיֵּכְלוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל-צִבְאָם: **Gen. 2:1**

וַיְכַל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְכָל-מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה: **Gen. 2:2**

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ כִּי בּוֹ שָׁבַת מְכָל-מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר-בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת: **Gen. 2:3**

Genesis 1:31-2:3

Gen. 1:31 Then ELOHIM saw every thing that God had made, and, behold it was very good. There was evening, and there was morning, a sixth day.

Gen. 2:1 The heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

Gen. 2:2 Then on the seventh day ELOHIM finished the work which God had done, [God] rested on the seventh day from all God's work which God had done.

Gen. 2:3 God blessed [*va'y'varech*] the seventh day, and made it holy [*va'yi'kadesh*]; because on it God rested from ELOHIM's work of creating which [God] had done.

- What has God created before this passage?
- What does God create on the 7th day?

The Sabbath – Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (Page 8)

“It is indeed, a unique occasion at which the distinguished word *kadosh* [*va’yi’kadesh*] is used for the first time: in the book of Genesis at the end of the story of creation. How extremely significant is the fact that it is applied to time: ‘God blessed the seventh day and made it holy.’ There is no reference in the record of creation to an object in space that would be endowed with the quality of holiness. This is a radical departure from accustomed religious thinking. The mythical mind would expect that after heaven and earth have been established, God would create a holy place- a holy mountain or a holy spring- whereupon a sanctuary is to be established. Yet it seems as if to the Bible it is holiness in time, the Sabbath, which comes first.”

- According to Heschel, what is unique about God’s decision to create rest?
- What might it imply for us if God requires rest as a part of God’s work?

The Sabbath – Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (Page 17-18)

"It must always be remembered that the Sabbath is not an occasion for diversion or frivolity; not a day to shoot fireworks or to turn somersaults, but an opportunity to mend our tattered lives, to collect rather than to dissipate time. Labor without dignity is the cause of misery; rest without spirit the source of depravity."

- What does, or should take place during this period of rest, according to Heschel?
- We learned from the Pre-reading for this lesson that adding moments in our day for spiritual refreshment. How does this text reinforce this idea?

Session 2: Guf/Body – Healthy/Ethical Eating

Enduring Understandings:

- ✓ To serve as an effective leader one must have an intimate knowledge of themselves.
- ✓ Self-care can help a person live a healthier and more balanced life.

Essential Questions:

- ✓ What does Judaism say about healthy and ethical eating?
- ✓ How can I incorporate healthy and ethical eating into my life?

Core Concepts:

- ✓ Being conscious of what we eat is a Jewish value.
- ✓ Mindful eating can bring balance to our lives.

Learning Targets:

- ✓ Participants will engage with Jewish traditions connected to healthy and ethical eating.

Evidence of Understanding:

- ✓ Participants will be able to articulate their relationship with healthy eating.
- ✓ Participants will describe a plan to be mindful about their eating practices.

Recommended Pre-Reading:

Materials Needed:

Schedule of the Day:

Small Commitments:

Additional Resources:

Notes For This Lesson:

Background Information:

Proposed activities:

- Begin with A One-Minute Meditation, and prayer
- Introduction and team building exercises
- Text Study on Kashrut
- Consider Magen Tzedek

Session 3: Guf/Body – Physical Well Being

Enduring Understandings:

- ✓ To serve as an effective leader one must have an intimate knowledge of themselves.
- ✓ Self-care can help a person live a healthier and more balanced life.

Essential Questions:

- ✓ What does Judaism have to say about physical exercise?
- ✓ What exercises am I capable of doing?

Core Concepts:

- ✓ Judaism supports healthy physical activity.
- ✓ Physical exercise can help bring health and balance to our lives.

Learning Targets:

- ✓ Participants will study the Jewish case for physical well-being.
- ✓ Participants will reflect on embodied practices.
- ✓ Participants will experience embodied practices.

Evidence of Understanding:

- ✓ Participants will develop a routine for use during the intervening days or weeks.

Recommended Pre-Reading:

Materials Needed:

Schedule of the Day:

Small Commitments:

Additional Resources:

Notes For This Lesson:

Background Information:

- Begin with A One-Minute Meditation, and prayer
- Introduction and team building exercises
- Discussion of Jewish basis for active healthy living – Talmud source, teach your child to swim.
-

Session 4: Binah/Mind – Mussar

Enduring Understandings:

- ✓ To serve as an effective leader one must have an intimate knowledge of themselves.
- ✓ Self-care can help a person live a healthier and more balanced life.

Essential Questions:

- ✓ What is my relationship to Jewish texts?
- ✓ With whom can I study?
- ✓ What Jewish texts am I inspired to learn?

Core Concepts:

- ✓ The study of Torah can be a restorative practice.
- ✓ Judaism has a wealth of resources that we can study.
- ✓ Our learning can and should affect our daily lives.

Learning Targets:

- ✓ Participants will engage in text study.

Evidence of Understanding:

- ✓ Participants will be able to work through a text in *chevrutah* during the session.
- ✓ Participants will articulate a plan to continue to study in the coming weeks.
 - Begin with A One-Minute Meditation, and prayer
 - Introduction and team building exercises
 - Text study from Luzzato

Recommended Pre-Reading:

Materials Needed:

Schedule of the Day:

Small Commitments:

Additional Resources:

Notes For This Lesson:

Background Information:

Session 5: Binah/Mind – Well Rounded Study

Enduring Understandings:

- ✓ To serve as an effective leader one must have an intimate knowledge of themselves.
- ✓ Self-care can help a person live a healthier and more balanced life.

Essential Questions:

- ✓ What topics excite me, and inspire me to learn?

Core Concepts:

- ✓ Judaism explains that a well rounded knowledge base can bring balance.

Learning Targets:

- ✓ Participants will engage in philosophical or intellectual exercises.

Evidence of Understanding:

- ✓ Participants will commit to a course of study, or subject matter they will pursue.

Recommended Pre-Reading:

Materials Needed:

Schedule of the Day:

Small Commitments:

Additional Resources:

Notes For This Lesson:

Background Information:

Proposed activities

- Begin with A One-Minute Meditation, and prayer
- Introduction and team building exercises
- Text study on Rambam's *derekh haemtza'it* (from *Shmoneh P'rakim*)

Session 6: Nefesh/Spirit – Jewish Meditation

Enduring Understandings:

- ✓ To serve as an effective leader one must have an intimate knowledge of themselves.
- ✓ Self-care can help a person live a healthier and more balanced life.

Essential Questions:

- ✓ How might I be comfortable engaging in meditation?
- ✓ How is meditation beneficial to me?

Core Concepts:

- ✓ Judaism has a tradition of meditation that are resources for me.
- ✓ Meditation can bring balance to one's life.

Learning Targets:

- ✓ Participants will engage in meditative practices.
- ✓ Participants will articulate their experience with meditative practices.

Evidence of Understanding:

- ✓ Participants will be able to articulate their experience with meditative practices.
- ✓ Participants will describe a plan for incorporating meditation in their lives in the coming weeks.

Recommended Pre-Reading:

- ✎ Milgram, Rabbi Goldi. "Introduction to Jewish Meditation." *Reclaiming Judaism*. <http://www.reclaimingjudaism.org/teachings/introduction-jewish-meditation>.
- ✎ "Chapter 1: Waking Up in the Midst of Your Life." Roth, Rabbi Jeff. *Jewish Meditation Practices for Everyday Life: Awakening Your Heart, Connecting with God*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2009.

Materials Needed:

- Chairs
- Cushions
- Pens/Pencils
- Participants' journals
- Meditation handouts, one for each participant
- Copies of Prayer
- Copies of next pre-reading, one for each participant

Schedule of the Day:

00:00 – 00:05	Introduction
00:05 – 00:10	Trust Building
00:10 – 00:20	Meditation Practices

00:20 – 00:40	Experimentation with Meditation
00:40 – 00:45	Debrief/Conclusion
Post Session	Guiding Questions For Reflection

Small Commitments:

- ✓ Select a type of meditation to which you can commit.
- ✓ Over the next two weeks try to meditate daily, or every other day, if only for a few minutes.
- ✓ Keep a journal of your experiences and thoughts.
- ✓ Check in with your *chevrutah* at least three times over the next few weeks

Additional Resources:

- 📖 Kaplan, Aryeh. *Meditation and the Bible*, York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser Inc., 1978.
- 📖 Lew, Allen. *Be Still and Get Going: A Jewish Meditation Practice for Real Life*. New York, NY: Little, Brown, and Company, 2005.
- 📖 Gefen, Nan Fink, PhD. *Discovering Jewish Meditation: Instruction & Guidance for Learning an Ancient Spiritual Practice*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2011.
- 📖 Milgram, Rabbi Goldi. "Introduction to Jewish Meditation." *Reclaiming Judaism*. <http://www.reclaimingjudaism.org/teachings/introduction-jewish-meditation>.
- 📖 "Introduction to Jewish Meditation." *Ohr Chadash*. <http://thetrugmans.com/1123/introduction-to-jewish-meditation/>.
- 📖 Roth, Rabbi Jeff. *Jewish Meditation Practices for Everyday Life: Awakening Your Heart, Connecting with God*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2009.

Notes For This Lesson:

Facilitator, in this lesson, participants will be asked to experiment with two different types of meditation. In order to help facilitate this endeavor it is advised that you verse yourself in the basics of the practices by reading the highlighted sections of Rabbi Roth's book, *Jewish Meditation Practice*, in addition to the information about this history of Jewish Meditation. You are not required to be an expert in this area, only to be a seeker as well.

The Trust Building Exercise for this section has been selected to initiate the participant's contemplation of concentration and meditation, and to deepen their connections with other members of the group. Eye Contact is an intimate experience, and requires participants to have a respectful and trusting relationship.

If it is at all possible, be prepared to lead a guided meditation, or bring in another person who can guide participants through the initial processes.

Background Information:

There is information that points towards Jewish meditation that dates back to the time of the Bible. The actions of the patriarchs Isaac and Jacob,⁹ the ritual of Moses's encounter with God,¹⁰ and allusions to meditative practices in the psalms –for example Psalms 16, and 63) are evidence that supports a long history of meditation within Judaism. Aryeh Kaplan suggests in both Meditation and the Bible, and in Jewish Meditation, that it is possible that Ezekiel, and other prophets, utilized meditation techniques to aid in their prophecy.¹¹ Kaplan explains that there is evidence for continued use and development of different meditation techniques throughout the first dispersion, and during the Second Jewish Commonwealth.

Some, such as Gefen, argue that mainstream practice dwindled between the time of the destruction of the Second Temple and meditation's resurgence within Kabbalistic and Hasidic movements. Other writers on the subject, such as Kaplan, find evidence of meditation among the writings of the rabbis of the Mishnah, and Talmud.

The purpose of this lesson is not to discuss, or debate the history of Jewish meditation, but to ground the participants of this program in a practice that is actionable in their lives. While some may have experience with meditation in non-Jewish settings, this session employs Jewish imagery, techniques, and concepts in its practice. For your own interest, or the interest of participants, consult the additional resources for more detailed discussions on the topic. Remember that if there is a member of this cohort that is experienced in meditation, this is a wonderful opportunity to invite them to help lead their colleagues.

00:00 – 00:05 Introduction

- Welcome participants back.
- Offer a few moments for participants to reflect on the previous week if they so choose.
- Provide very general overview of the lesson: Jewish Meditation.
 - o Trust Building
 - o Overview of Meditation practices, and Jewish Context
 - o Exploration of meditation
 - o Conclusion
- Begin with A One-Minute Meditation (See Appendix).
- Use A Prayer Before Our Study (See Appendix).

00:05 – 00:10 Trust Building: Eye Contact¹²

- This is an intimate, and possibly intense trust building exercise. At this point in the program participants should feel comfortable with each other, but it might be best to begin with their *chevrutah*, someone with whom they have a relationship.
- Ask participants to find their *chevrutah* partner.

⁹ Nan Fink Gefen, *Discovering Jewish Meditation: Instruction and Guidance for Learning an Ancient Spiritual Practice*, (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1999), 10.

¹⁰ Allen Lew, *Be Still and Get Going: A Jewish Meditation Practice for Real Life*, (New York, NY: Little, Brown, and Company, 2005), 33-35.

¹¹ Aryeh Kaplan, *Meditation and the Bible*, (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1978), 43-44.

¹² Rishi Chowdhury, "10 Quick and Easy Team Building Exercises [Part 2]," Huddle.com, accessed April 18, 2014. <http://www.huddle.com/blog/team-building-exercises/>.

- Find a space in the room.
- Sit or stand across from each other.
- Partners should stare into each other's eyes for 60 seconds.
- There might be giggling at first, but try to let it pass.
- Then participants should find a second partner, and go through the exercise a second time.

00:10 – 00:20 Meditation Practices

- Invite participants to share what they learned from the pre-reading
 - o Any questions?
 - o Anything need to be clarified?
- Explanation and description of styles of meditation
 - o Distribute handouts
 - o Explain the different styles of meditation presented
 - o Leave open the option that for their own practice, later, they might consult the resources for their own practice.

00:20 – 00:40 Experimentation with Meditation

- The group will have two opportunities to experiment with two different meditations. The first guided, the second not.
- Remind participants that their mind will wander. Nobody perfects meditation. When you notice your mind wandering, acknowledge it, and refocus if you can. Do not judge yourself.
- Lead the guided meditation experience.
- Gently call the group together at the determined time. (7 minutes)
- Guided reflection
 - o In your journal, write down the type of meditation with which you experimented.
 - o What was a challenge?
 - o What left you with a good feeling?
 - o What was helpful?
- Now, select one of the meditations we discussed, but did not experience yet. This will be unguided. Find a space where you can be comfortable and experiment.
- Call the group together after the determined time. (7 minutes)
- Guided Reflection
 - o In your journal, write down the type of meditation with which you experimented.
 - o What was a challenge?
 - o What felt good?

00:40 – 00:45 Debrief/Conclusion

- With your *chevrutah* partner discuss the following
 - o What were some challenges you faced?
 - o Pick a meditation that felt most comfortable.

- With the last minute or two, write a personal commitment that you can keep for the next two weeks.
 - o How many times will you attempt to meditate?
 - o Which meditation will you use?
 - o If you find it difficult, what will you do to help refocus yourself?
 - o Commit to reflecting in your journal after your meditation sessions

Post Session Guiding Questions For Reflection

Roughly one week after the session, email the pairs of *chevrutah* and remind them to check in with each other. Some guiding questions might help frame their discussion.

- How often have you been able to meditate in the last week?
- Which meditations have you continued to use?
- What have been some obstacles to your meditation?
- What benefits have you seen already?
- Have you noticed a pattern where your mind drifts?
- Remember to affirm the difficulty many of us have when trying to begin a meditation practice. Your mind will wander. This does not make you a poor meditator, but a normally imperfect human, with a normally functioning mind.

Session 6 Resources and Handouts:

Meditation Practices

Meditation Practices

The following piece is by no means a conclusive list, or a complete description of meditation practices. It is a brief explanation of four different meditative practices and how they might be utilized. For many more options and variations please consult any of the additional resources that are included as a part of this curriculum.

Contemplation:

A contemplative meditation practice is one in which you attempt to focus the mind on something specific. The most commonly known type of contemplation meditation is a mantra meditation during which one meditates on a certain phrase or word repeated throughout the sitting. This is one of the simplest types of meditation and is often a good place to start.

The mantra phrase could be as simple as the vocalization of a sound, a simple word, or could be a phrase that is especially meaningful to the meditator. Some examples of such a mantra could be a favorite verse from a prayer, psalm, or from other parts of the *Tanakh* (the Hebrew Bible) such as: “*sh'ma yisrael adonai eloheinu adonai echad*.” It could be something like the mantra made famous by Rabbi Nachman, “*ribono shel olam* [Master of the Universe],” or even a single word that one finds particularly meaningful such as “*sh'ma*.”

It is important, especially in the early stages of cultivating a meditative practice, for one to repeat the mantra aloud but in a soft voice. After much practice, the mantra can still be effective silently, only moving the lips forming the shapes of the words or

eventually reciting them in your mind alone. It is most beneficial, especially early on, to recite the mantra aloud as this requires a greater amount of concentration.

Other types of contemplation meditation include focusing on something specific. This might be the Divine Name, one's breath, or a specific ritual object. The objects of concentration can vary from person to person. The Zohar teaches that one could even use a flame as the object of concentration.

To begin a Contemplation Meditation first decide what you would like to focus on, then find a place where you can sit without much distraction for several minutes, or for as long as your practice will last. Then sit in a position that is comfortable to you. Many find it comfortable to sit on chair with a back to help support their back, while others choose to sit in a simple cross-legged position. With your eyes opened or closed, allow the mind to settle. Rabbi Jeff Roth describes this process in Jewish Meditation Practices for Everyday Life as a snow globe settling after it has been shaken (Roth, 2009. 23).

Use the object of contemplation, or mantra, to focus your mind. Let the other thoughts, or worries drop to the side. The mind will wander. When it does, acknowledge that it has moved on, and return to your object of contemplation. It might be helpful to use your breath to aid this process. One technique that some find helpful is to imagine your thoughts as clouds; allow them to drift past and disappear.

Visualization:

A practice that extends from contemplation is visualization. Aryeh Kaplan explains the nuanced difference between these two practices in Jewish Meditation: A Practical Guide. He writes that that one attempts to discipline the mind to visualize the object of contemplation. Kaplan recommends beginning with a mantra or other meditation to help settle the mind. "When the visual field is fairly calm, you can begin to try to visualize the *alef* [the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet]. You may have an *alef* printed on a card and set the image of it in your mind. Then close your eyes and try to picture the *alef*. Try to see it with your eyes closed exactly as you saw it with your eyes open" (Kaplan, 1985. 77).

Awareness:

An Awareness Meditation is a practice that involves an attempt to become more aware of either our body or the things our body can sense or experience. As with visualization, it is easiest to begin with a contemplation of your breath, a mantra, or an object before moving into an awareness phase. Once your mind has become reasonably settled allow your attention to drift to sensations in your body. It might be the pressure of your calves or head against the floor if you are lying down. You might notice the bend in your knees if you are sitting. Become aware of the sensations in your body as you allow your mind to focus on different parts of yourself.

Another variation of awareness meditation can involve eating. One example could be to eat a single piece of dried fruit, like a raisin. Before you put the raisin in your mouth, examine it. What does it look like in different lights? What does it smell like? What does it feel like between your fingers? Place the raisin in your mouth. Acknowledge the ridges of the raisin. What does it taste like? Do not bite into it yet, but allow it to roll across your tongue. As you slowly bite down, how does the taste change?

How does it feel between your teeth? A similar process can be done with many foods or beverages like chocolate or coffee.

Awareness meditations are an attempt to slow the world that you are experiencing down. It is an opportunity to take in a sensation deliberately, intentionally, and thoughtfully.

Nothingness:

Meditation on nothingness is far more difficult than the previously mentioned practices. It is critical to note that the goal of nothingness meditation is not to rid the mind of thoughts altogether. It is instead to focus on no-thing. The challenge is that no-thing is difficult to imagine. Kaplan suggested that one way to focus on nothingness is to imagine the space that exists behind the back of your head, or the complete transparency of the air that is just before our eyes (Kaplan, 1985. 84). This is an advanced technique, and can be rather difficult.

Remember that regardless of practice, there will be some days when meditating is excruciatingly difficult. Acknowledge the difficulty for the day, and try again at another time. There is no sense in letting yourself get upset. Meditation is not something easy and takes years of practice to develop: even the most practiced masters can have difficulty at times. The key is to continue with your practice regularly without judgment as to the “success” or “failure” of a particular session. Meditation is a process, not an outcome.

A Guided Meditation

As we discussed, there are several verses or texts on which we can focus during a meditation. This meditation will focus on God’s name. Yud, Hey, Vav, Hey. Use God’s name to focus your mind. Use God’s name to focus your breath. Your mind might wander. No. Your mind will wander. That is what it is designed to do. When it does, acknowledge the thought. Recognize that your focus has shifted. Do not judge. Release the thought. Return to God’s name. Use God’s name to help you focus your mind. When it wanders, do not judge. Let your mind return.

Sit forward on the edge of your chair in a way that feels comfortable for you.

If you choose, close your eyes. (pause)

Slow your breathing. Inhale. (pause) Exhale. (pause) Inhale. (pause) Exhale. (pause)

Picture in your mind the Divine name, Yud, Hey, Vav, Hey.

Hey. (pause) The sound of us inhaling. (Pause)

Hey. (Pause) The sound of God’s breath exhaling. (pause)

Notice the yud. It is small, compressed. Empty. (Pause)

Like our lungs after they have expelled all of your breath. (Pause)

Hey. (Pause) Exhale. (Pause) Yud, emptiness. (Pause)

Hey. Inhale, and notice the vav.

Like your lungs filled with the breath you inhaled. (Pause)

Filled with God's breath. (Pause)

As you inhale, feel the hey fill your lungs.

Inhale slowly, sense your back straighten with the inhalation. (Pause)

Feel you back as if it were a vav, filled with God's breath. (Pause)

Hey. Exhale.

(Long pause)

As you inhale, feel the hey fill your lungs.

Inhale slowly, sense your back straighten, feel your head lift. (Pause)

Feel you back as if it were a vav, filled with God's breath. (Pause)

Hey. Exhale.

Focus on your breath. Yud. Hey. Vav. Hey.

God's name. Yud. Hey. Vav. Hey.

Feel the Divine fill your lungs.

(long pause)

If your mind has wandered, acknowledge where it is.

Release the thought.

Return to Yud, Hey, Vav, Hey. Return to God's name.

(long pause)

(long pause)

When you are ready open your eyes.

Softly take in the light again.

Continue to breathe slowly.

Breathe. Breathe.

Session 7: Nefesh/Spirit – 100 Blessings A Day

Enduring Understandings:

- ✓ To serve as an effective leader one must have an intimate knowledge of themselves.
- ✓ Self-care can help a person live a healthier and more balanced life.

Essential Questions:

- ✓ How do I relate to prayer?
- ✓ How might prayer help me relate to the Divine?
- ✓ How can prayer bring balance to my life?

Core Concepts:

- ✓ Judaism has a wealth of prayerful practices to be a resource for me.
- ✓ Prayer can serve many purposes regardless of theological perspective.
- ✓ Gratitude is restorative.
- ✓ Prayer is restorative.

Learning Targets:

- ✓ Participants will explore a variety of prayerful practices.
- ✓ Participants will consider their relationship with the Divine.

Evidence of Understanding:

- ✓ Participants will be able to articulate their relationship to prayer.
- ✓ Participants will be able to articulate things in their lives for which they feel blessed.
- ✓ Participants will describe ways in which they will engage in prayer over the next weeks.

Recommended Pre-Reading:

- ☞ “Chapter 1: What is Prayer?” Hammer, Reuven. Hammer, Reuven. *Entering Jewish Prayer: A Guide to Personal Devotion and the Worship Service*. New York, NY: Schocken Books, Inc., 1994.
- ☞ “Prayer Invites” Handout

Materials Needed:

- Chairs
- Tables
- Copies of Text, one for each participant
- Copies of Mishkan T’filah, one for each participant
- Pens/Pencils
- Participants’ journals
- Copies of Prayer Invites

Schedule of the Day:

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| 00:00 – 00:05 | Introduction |
| 00:05 – 00:15 | Trust Building: Blessings to One Another |

00:15 – 00:30	Text Study
00:30 – 00:40	This is How We're Blessed
00:40 – 00:45	Debrief/Conclusion
Post Session	Guiding Questions For Reflection

Small Commitments:

- ✓ Over the next two weeks practice reciting prayers, or blessings of gratitude, or other manifestations of a prayerful practice.
- ✓ Keep a journal of your experiences and thoughts.
- ✓ Check in with your *chevrutah* at least three times over the next few weeks.

Additional Resources:

- 📖 Hammer, Reuven. *Entering Jewish Prayer: A Guide to Personal Devotion and the Worship Service*. New York, NY: Schocken Books, Inc., 1994.
- 📖 Harlow, Rabbi Jules, *Pray Tell: A Hadassah Guide to Jewish Prayer*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2003.
- 📖 Hoffman, Lawrence A. *The Art of Public Prayer: Not for Clergy Only*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1999.
- 📖 Hoffman, Lawrence A. *The Way Into Jewish Prayer*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000.
- 📖 Kaplan, Aryeh. *Jewish Meditation: A Practical Guide*. New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1985. Chapter 10.

Notes For This Lesson:

The activity Blessings to Each other is intended to serve as a set-induction and trust building. Throughout this program participants have been working together and building a relationship. By this time in the program the members of the cohort should feel comfortable with each other, and able to share on this deep level.

When cohort arrives at the activity during which they are to consider some of the miracles they encounter each day, or things for which they are thankful, it may serve the group well for you as the facilitator to provide a few personal examples of something that is, to you, an obvious blessing, as well as demonstrate how to shift perspective and consider a nuisance to be actually a blessing. Rabbi Greenbaum provides the example of a sound that is annoying, or ear piercing. Instead of complaining about the irritation one feels, consider the blessing that you are able to sense and interpret sounds.¹³ As a starting point it might also be beneficial to distribute copies of the morning blessings, and the Thanksgiving blessing from the *Amidah*. These documents are provided in the handouts.

This lesson specifically focuses on prayers of gratitude as an introductory prayer experience for self-care. Should a participant in this cohort feel as if they want to explore a different prayer practices during the intervening weeks that should be encouraged. Such a participant should be referred to some of the additional resources in this lesson.

¹³ Rabbi Alex Greenbaum, "100 Blessings A Day," Beth El Congregation of the South Hills, accessed April 18, 2014, <http://www.bethelcong.org/rabbis-desk/333-100-blessings-a-day>.

Background Information:

Talmud teaches that it is incumbent upon a Jew to recite 100 blessings each day, “It is taught: Rabbi Meir used to say, A man is bound to say one hundred blessings daily, as it is written, And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God Require of thee (Deut. 10:12)? On Sabbaths and on Festivals Rabbi Hiyya the son of Rabbi Awia endeavored to make up this number [of “missing” blessings not recited on Shabbat, or Festivals] by the use of spices and delicacies,” (Talmud Bavli, Tractate Menachot 43b). This statement takes some unpacking.

First, and foremost it is important to understand the exegetical tactic employed by Rabbi Meir. The text itself reads, “What does YHWH your God ask/require of you? Only this: to revere YHWH your God, to walk only in God’s paths, to love God, and to serve YHWH your God with all your heart and soul...” The Hebrew word for “what” is מה, which is close to the word for one hundred, מאה. In the Talmud the rabbis read this passage as implying that we must serve God in these ways one hundred times each day. As these are commandments, and fulfilling commandments are, in the traditional Jewish world, accompanied by *b’rachot*, blessings, it is incumbent upon us to recite 100 blessings each day.

If one were to live with the worldview of the rabbis it is easy to recite 100 blessings each day. This is already explained in an earlier citation of Rabbi Meir’s statement, which can be found in *Tosefta*. In *Berachot* 6:24 it says, “There is no man in Israel who does not preform one hundred commandments each day [and thereby recites one hundred benedictions]...” It is a part of the ancient rabbis’ worldview that every religious action is accompanied by a benediction or blessing. Additionally, many of these blessings are achieved by the thrice-daily prayers, which account for 57 blessings. The remaining blessings are accounted for through the various ritual acts that were a normal parts of their lives, such as the morning blessings, blessing over Torah study, grace after meals, and many more. On Shabbat, and Festivals, however, there are fewer blessings recited during thrice-daily prayer, and therefore there are blessings that must be “made up”.

It is easy to forget the wonder and beauty of the world. It can be a positive self-care practice to stop for a moment and recognize things that we experience throughout our day as wondrous miracles. Rabbi Alex Greenbaum of Beth El Congregation in Pittsburgh, PA posted on the synagogue’s website a short message about this practice. In it he explains that we can change the way in which we look at the world, and how we live our lives if we were to open our hearts to embrace these experiences that pass us by each day.¹⁴

Demonstrating our gratitude for the wonder of the world in which we live can be a powerful experience and is a valuable practice of self-care. It can remind us of how lucky we are to be alive, and can provide a shift in our worldview. Prayers of gratitude are an easy place to start because unless someone is suffering from a hopeless depression there is something in our day that we can be thankful for. For example the wonder of our taste buds’ ability to sense flavors that are pleasurable, our ability to hear music, take in surroundings, or even to wake up in the morning.

¹⁴ Greenbaum, “100 Blessings A Day”.

00:00 – 00:05 Introduction

- Welcome participants back.
- Provide the participants with space for reflection on the previous week's experiences if they wish.
 - o Before beginning distribute "Prayer Invites". At this point, ask for a few reactions to this text.
- Today we will be talking about prayer in general, but specifically prayers of thanksgiving in specific.
- Provide very general overview of the lesson: 100-Blessings A Day.
 - o Trust Building
 - o Text Study
 - o This Is How We're Blessed
 - o Conclusion
- Begin with A One-Minute Meditation (See Appendix)
- Use A Prayer Before Our Study (See Appendix)

00:05 – 00:15 Trust Building: Blessings to One Another

- Begin seated in a circle facing each other
- As the facilitator it is important to begin this activity
- Participants will be asked to contemplate the other members of this cohort, and offer aloud a blessing by stating something about each other member of the group that they appreciate.
- It may be appropriate to frame it as a blessing, such as, I feel blessed to have learned _____ from you, or I appreciate how you always _____.

00:15 – 00:30 Text Study: 100 Blessings

- Transition between activities. We were able to offer blessings to each other, and receive blessings from each other. Both are powerful experiences. We will now look at some of the things Judaism has to say about blessings, and prayer.
- Facilitate text study (See Appendix)

00:30 – 00:40 This is How We're Blessed

- Participants will be asked to use this time to do one of the following
 - o Use some of the Jewish blessings, and prayers of thanksgiving to explore gratitude through a Jewish lens. Reflect on these blessings and how they might be manifest in their own lives.
 - o Craft his or her own blessings of gratitude.
 - Helpful formulae might be
 - Blessed are You, Adonai, our God, who has given me, provided me with, allowed me to, etc.
 - For _____. *Modim anachnu lach.*
 - o Make a list of things they are grateful for in their lives
- Provide a space of 2 minutes to allow people to share one thing for which they are grateful, and how it impacts them thinking about it today.

00:40 – 00:45 Debrief/Conclusion

- Check for understanding
 - o Ask participants to share one thing they have learned.
- With the last minute or two, write a personal commitment that you can keep for the next two weeks.
 - o How many times will you attempt to meditate?
 - o Which meditation will you use?
 - o If you find it difficult, what will you do to help refocus yourself?
 - o Commit to reflecting in your journal after your meditation sessions

Post Session Guiding Questions For Reflection

Roughly one week after the session, email the pairs of *chevrutah* and remind them to check in with each other. Some guiding questions might help frame their discussion.

- What has been good, in your life, in the last week?
- What, if anything, has been getting in the way of your prayer?
- What has felt good about this practice?
- What patterns have arisen in your prayers?
- Can you share something for which you are grateful at this moment?
- How has this practice of prayer, and expressing gratitude changed how you look at the world this week?
- What are you looking forward to in the next week?

Session 7 Resources and Handouts:

Prayer Invites

Prayer invites
God's Presence to suffuse our spirits,
God's will to prevail in our lives.
Prayer may not bring water to parched fields,
nor mend a broken bridge,
nor rebuild a ruined city.
But prayer can water an arid soul,
mend a broken heart,
rebuild a weakened will.¹⁵

- Adapted from Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

¹⁵ Rabbi Elyse D. Frishman, ed., *Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur* (New York, NY: CCAR Press, 2007), 75.

Blessings of Gratitude

Nissim b'Chol Yom – Daily Miracles¹⁶

The following is excerpted and adapted from morning service in *Mishkan T'filah*. These blessings can be a reminder of the wondrous miracles that we encounter each day. In some communities they are recited each morning as a part of the morning service.

Blessed are You, ADONAI our God, Sovereign of the universe, who has given the mind the wisdom and ability to distinguish day from night.

Blessed are You, ADONAI our God, Sovereign of the universe, who opens our eyes and awakens our minds.

Blessed are You, ADONAI our God, Sovereign of the universe, who frees us from the bonds of sleep.

Blessed are You, ADONAI our God, Sovereign of the universe, who stretches the earth over the waters.

Blessed are You, ADONAI our God, Sovereign of the universe, who strengthens our steps.

Blessed are You, ADONAI our God, Sovereign of the universe, who clothes the naked.

Blessed are You, ADONAI our God, Sovereign of the universe, who gives strength to the weary.

Blessed are You, ADONAI our God, Sovereign of the universe, who made me with a spark of the Divine.

Blessed are You, ADONAI our God, Sovereign of the universe, who has made me free.

Blessed are You, ADONAI our God, Sovereign of the universe, who has made me a Jew.

Blessed are You, ADONAI our God, Sovereign of the universe, who girds Israel with strength.

Blessed are You, ADONAI our God, Sovereign of the universe, who crowns Israel with splendor.

Modim Anachnu Lach – We Thank You¹⁷

¹⁶ Rabbi Elyse D. Frishman, ed., *Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur* (New York, NY: CCAR Press, 2007), 36-41.

¹⁷ Rabbi Elyse D. Frishman, ed., *Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur* (New York, NY: CCAR Press, 2007), 256-257.

The following is excerpted and adapted from the blessing for thanksgiving during the Shabbat morning service in *Mishkan T'filah*.

For the expanding grandeur of Creation,
worlds known and unknown, galaxies beyond galaxies,
filling us with awe and challenging our imaginations,
Modim anachnu lach.

For this fragile planet earth, its times and tides,
its sunsets and seasons,
Modim anachnu lach.

For the joy of human life, its wonders and surprises,
its hopes and achievements,
Modim anachnu lach.

For human community, our common past and future hope,
our oneness transcending all separation, our capacity to work
for peace and justice in the midst of hostility and oppression,
Modim anachnu lach.

For high hopes and noble causes, for faith without fanaticism,
For understanding of views not shared,
Modim anachnu lach.

For all who have labored and suffered for a fairer world,
who have lived so that others might live in dignity and freedom,
Modim anachnu lach.

For human liberties and sacred rites:
For opportunities to change and grow, to affirm and choose,
Modim anachnu lach.

For all these things, O Sovereign, let Your Name be forever praised and
blessed.

Session 8: The Next Steps

Enduring Understandings:

- ✓ To serve as an effective leader one must have an intimate knowledge of themselves.
- ✓ Self-care can help a person live a healthier and more balanced life.

Essential Questions:

- ✓ How have my practices over this unit affected my life?
- ✓ What will I continue to do to balance my life?

Core Concepts:

- ✓ Judaism instructs us to practice self-care.
- ✓ Self-care can bring balance to our lives.

Learning Targets:

- ✓ Participants will know what activities offer them the most healthy, and balanced lifestyle.

Evidence of Understanding:

- ✓ Participants will be able to communicate which practices they have tried, and how they have felt to them.
- ✓ Participants will verbalize, or write a commitment to personal self-care practices.

Recommended Pre-Reading:

Materials Needed:

Schedule of the Day:

Small Commitments:

Proposed learning activities

- Begin with A One-Minute Meditation, and prayer
- Breakout group discussion
 - o What was meaningful?
 - o What was not?
 - o What has changed in your life?
 - o What can you carry forward?

Other Resources:

Included in this section are some resources that could be helpful in designing or implementing this unit. They may also provide assistance for developing personal self-care practices or additional study.

The Awakened Heart Project for Contemplative Judaism -
<http://www.awakenedheartproject.org/>

Center for Jewish Mindfulness - <http://jewishmindfulness.net/>

Huddle.com - <http://www.huddle.com/>

Institute for Jewish Spirituality - <http://www.jewishspirituality.org/>

Jewish Publication Society. *Genesis 1:1-2:4 Hebrew English Tanakh*. Jewish Publication Society. Philadelphia, PA. 1999.

Maimonides, Rabbi Moses. A Guide for the Perplexed. Varied editions available.

Maimonides, Rabbi Moses. Shmoneh Perakim. Varied editions available.

Mussar Institute - <http://www.mussarinstitute.org/index.htm>

Sefaria.org – <http://www.sefaria.org>

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<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/10/02/who-will-heal-the-doctors/>.

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https://www.cisco.com/web/solutions/trends/unified_workspace/docs/Expanding_Role_of_Mobility_in_the_Workplace.pdf.

Frishman, Rabbi Elyse D. editor. *Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur*. New York, NY: CCAR Press, 2007.

Gefen, Nan Fink. *Discovering Jewish Meditation: Instruction & Guidance for Learning an Ancient Spiritual Practice*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1999.

Greenbaum, Rabbi Alex. "100 Blessings A Day". *Beth El Congregation of South Hills*. Accessed on April 18, 2014. <http://www.bethelcong.org/rabbis-desk/333-100-blessings-a-day>.

Goodman, Roberta Louis, and Sherry H. Blumberg, Editors. *Teaching About God and Spirituality*. Denver, CO: A.R.E. Publishing, Inc., 2002.

Hammer, Reuven. *Entering Jewish Prayer: A Guide to Personal Devotion and the Worship Service*. New York, NY: Schocken Books, Inc., 1994.

Heschel, Rabbi Abraham Joshua. *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1951.

Kain, Erik. "High Teacher Turnover Rates are a Big Problem for America's Public Schools." *Forbes Magazine*. March 8, 2011. Accessed April 18, 2014.
<http://www.forbes.com/sites/erikkain/2011/03/08/high-teacher-turnover-rates-are-a-big-problem-for-americas-public-schools/>.

Kaplan, Aryeh. *Jewish Meditation: A Practical Guide*. New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1985.

Kaplan, Aryeh. *Meditation and the Bible*, York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser Inc., 1978.

Lew, Allen. *Be Still and Get Going: A Jewish Meditation Practice for Real Life*. New York, NY: Little, Brown, and Company, 2005.

Lieber, Rabbi Moshe. *Pirkei Avos Treasury*. New York, NY: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1995.

Maimin, Rabbi Rachel M, 2013. *In All Your Ways Be Mindful: A Project in Mindfulness Meditation*. Rabbinic Thesis, Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion. New York, NY.

Maslin, Simeon J., Editor. *Gates of Mitzvah: A Guide to the Jewish Life Cycle*. New York: NY, CCAR Press, 1979.

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<http://www.reclaimingjudaism.org/teachings/introduction-jewish-meditation>.

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Roth, Rabbi Jeff. *Jewish Meditation Practices for Everyday Life: Awakening Your Heart, Connecting with God*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2009.

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<http://www.slu.edu/rel-news-slavin-med-ed-325>.

Weinberg, Rabbi Noah. "Learn in Order to Do." *Simple to Remember.com-Judaism Online*. Accessed April 18, 2014. <http://www.simpletoremember.com/articles/a/learn-in-order-to-do/>.

Williams, Mark, and Danny Penman. *Mindfulness: An Eight-Week Plan For Finding Peace in a Frantic World*. New York, NY: Rodale Inc., 2011.

Zamore, Mary L, Editor. *Sacred Table: Creating a Jewish Food Ethic*. New York, NY: CCAR Press, 2011.

Annotated Bibliography:

Goodman, Roberta Louis, and Sherry H. Blumberg, Editors. *Teaching About God and Spirituality*. Denver, CO: A.R.E. Publishing, Inc., 2002.

This collection provides wonderful insights and ideas for discussion God and Spirituality in a variety of settings with many different audiences. It contains several ideas for lesson plans and even activities in which people might engage in learning or discussion about God and Spirituality, two challenging topics. Each section begins with an introduction from the author that provides background information that is often very helpful for one who seeks to facilitate based on information learned in this work. This is a valuable resource, however, it is not useful to read cover to cover. Some of the sections seem redundant unless the reader acknowledges the intent of the work. This is a wonderful starting point and resource collection.

Kaplan, Aryeh. *Jewish Meditation: A Practical Guide*. New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1985.

From the outset of this work it is clear that Kaplan has a specific bias, and culture from which he writes. It is a very traditional, *halachik* mindset, and that must be kept in mind. With that consideration, there are some helpful guides, and beginning meditation practices, that could be useful in one's preparation for leading the sessions on meditation. *Jewish Meditation* does contain a plausible history of meditation practices in a Jewish context. However, this work contains not a single citation, which raises some academic concern. If one were to take Kaplan at his word, this history is persuasive and could be helpful in framing this in a Jewish professional context.

Roth, Rabbi Jeff. *Jewish Meditation Practices for Everyday Life: Awakening Your Heart, Connecting with God*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2009.

Rabbi Roth's work begins by providing a brief history of Jewish Meditation. Roth provides citations for many of his sources, which buttress his credibility on the topic of history. This work also provides an exploration of his personal journey with meditation. At times the personal story can be a bit of an obstacle for me, but could be very helpful for others. His insights into his practice are helpful for someone who is just beginning their own practice of meditation as it highlights some of the pitfalls and struggles. The instructive sections are very well organized, and accessible to most readers. Following some of Roth's suggested practices can be a very helpful way to engage in Jewish Meditation.

Williams, Mark, and Danny Penman. *Mindfulness: An Eight-Week Plan For Finding Peace in a Frantic World*. New York, NY: Rodale Inc., 2011.

This work is a practical approach to a specific self-care practice. After a short introduction to the benefits of self-care practices, the authors explain a week-by-week program for "awakening" the mind through mindfulness practices. By asking the reader to implement one practice each week the authors used an approach that promotes the cultivation of a new outlook, and generate a new awareness of the world in which we live. This is a good practical manual for one specific course exercises based primarily on mindfulness meditations, and is a wonderful resource for the facilitator of the curriculum or for a participant that would wish to explore this area. It is not a particularly religious, and is explicitly not a Jewish source. In a curriculum such as this project this resource has many ideas from which one might draw, although there must be some translation of Jewish concepts into these practices for it to match perfectly.

Appendix: Handouts Ready for Photocopy:

The following pages contain copies of handouts that are formatted and ready for photocopy and use. They are organized in order of first occurrence in this curriculum.

A One-Minute Meditation

Note to facilitator:

This meditation has been excerpted verbatim from Mindfulness. If it suits your purposes please develop this in a way that is most comfortable for you to lead. You should also note, and make it explicit to members of the cohort that, should sitting fully erect be uncomfortable, take a more comfortable position.

- 1) Sit erect in a straight-backed chair. If possible, bring your back a little way from the rear of the chair so that your spine is self-supporting. Your feet can be flat on the floor. Close your eyes or lower your gaze.
- 2) Focus your attention on your breath as it flows in and out of your body. Stay in touch with the different sensations of each in-breath and each out-breath. Observe the breath without looking for anything special to happen. There is no need to alter your breathing in any way.
- 3) After a while your mind may wander. When you notice this, gently bring your attention back to your breath, without giving yourself a hard time—the act of realizing that your mind has wandered and bringing your attention back without criticizing yourself is central to the practice of mindfulness meditation.
- 4) Your mind may eventually become calm like a still pond—or it may not. Even if you get a sense of absolute stillness, it may only be fleeting. If you feel angry or exasperated, notice that this may be fleeting too. Whatever happens, just allow it to be as it is.
- 5) After a minute, let your eyes open and take in the room again.

A Prayer Before Our Study

Brian Nelson, April 2014

Source of All Being,
here we are, ready to accept Your invitation to engage in sacred
study.
Your wisdom has provided meaning to those that came before us.
Your lessons have been passed to us through the ages.
Here we are, today, prepared to continue our quest to find balance.
We seek the patience to have compassion for ourselves.
We ask for strength to persevere,
and the wisdom to know that we pursue improvement, not
perfection.
Blessed are You, ADONAI,
whom we thank for the opportunity to study,
and improve our lives.

For Rest and Refreshment of Soul

Genesis 1:31-2:3

וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה-טוֹב מְאֹד וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי: **Gen. 1:31**

וַיְכַלּוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל-צִבְאָם: **Gen. 2:1**

וַיְכַל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְכַל-מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה: **Gen. 2:2**

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדְּשׁ אֹתוֹ כִּי בּוֹ שָׁבַת מְכַל-מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר-בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת: **Gen. 2:3**

Genesis 1:31-2:3

Gen. 1:31 Then ELOHIM saw every thing that God had made, and, behold it was very good. There was evening, and there was morning, a sixth day.

Gen. 2:1 The heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

Gen. 2:2 Then on the seventh day ELOHIM finished the work which God had done, [God] rested on the seventh day from all God's work which God had done.

Gen. 2:3 God blessed [*va'y'varech*] the seventh day, and made it holy [*va'yi'kadesh*]; because on it God rested from ELOHIM's work of creating which [God] had done.

- 1) What has God created before this passage?
- 2) What does God create on the 7th day?

The Sabbath – Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (Page 8)

“It is indeed, a unique occasion at which the distinguished word *kadosh* [*va’yi’kadesh*] is used for the first time: in the book of Genesis at the end of the story of creation. How extremely significant is the fact that it is applied to time: ‘God blessed the seventh day and made it holy.’ There is no reference in the record of creation to an object in space that would be endowed with the quality of holiness. This is a radical departure from accustomed religious thinking. The mythical mind would expect that after heaven and earth have been established, God would create a holy place- a holy mountain or a holy spring- whereupon a sanctuary is to be established. Yet it seems as if to the Bible it is holiness in time, the Sabbath, which comes first.”

- 5) According to Heschel, what is unique about God’s decision to create rest?
- 6) What might it imply for us if God requires rest as a part God’s work?

The Sabbath – Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (Page 17-18)

"It must always be remembered that the Sabbath is not an occasion for diversion or frivolity; not a day to shoot fireworks or to turn somersaults, but an opportunity to mend our tattered lives, to collect rather than to dissipate time. Labor without dignity is the cause of misery; rest without spirit the source of depravity."

- 3) What does or should take place during this period of rest, according to Heschel?
- 4) We learned from the Pre-Reading for this lesson that adding moments in our day for spiritual refreshment are beneficial. How does this text reinforce this idea?

Sample Email Reminder

Shalom [*chevrutah pair*],


I hope your week of practice has been fruitful. I would like to take this moment to remind you of the benefit you can gain by meeting with each other to discuss your selected practices this week. What has been beneficial? What have you found troubling? Do you have suggestions for each other to help improve? Remember, this past week has been an opportunity for you to practice. Do not be discouraged if you have struggled. This is not the easiest thing.

If you are looking for more resources to aid in your practice, please see this week's resource list.

 Resource 1

 Resource 2

As a reminder, we will be meeting again next week. Please take a free moment to look over the Recommended Readings for our next meeting. They can be very beneficial to your further understanding of these self-care practices. Please see the included attachment.

 Recommended Reading 1

 Recommended Reading 2

I look forward to seeing you again next week. If you have any questions that you cannot answer together, feel free to reach out. I am happy to help.

Meditation Practices

The following piece is by no means a conclusive list, or a complete description of meditation practices. It is a brief explanation of four different meditative practices and how they might be utilized. For many more options and variations please consult any of the additional resources that are included as a part of this curriculum.

Contemplation:

A contemplative meditation practice is one in which you attempt to focus the mind on something specific. The most commonly known type of contemplation meditation is a mantra meditation during which one meditates on a certain phrase or word repeated throughout the sitting. This is one of the simplest types of meditation and is often a good place to start.

The mantra phrase could be as simple as the vocalization of a sound, a simple word, or could be a phrase that is especially meaningful to the meditator. Some examples of such a mantra could be a favorite verse from a prayer, psalm, or from other parts of the *Tanakh* (the Hebrew Bible) such as: “*sh’mā yisrael adonai eloheinu adonai echad.*” It could be something like the mantra made famous by Rabbi Nachman, “*ribono shel olam* [Master of the Universe],” or even a single word that one finds particularly meaningful such as “*sh’mā.*”

It is important, especially in the early stages of cultivating a meditative practice, for one to repeat the mantra aloud but in a soft voice. After much practice, the mantra can still be effective silently, only moving the lips forming the shapes of the words or eventually reciting them in your mind alone. It is most beneficial, especially early on, to recite the mantra aloud as this requires a greater amount of concentration.

Other types of contemplation meditation include focusing on something specific. This might be the Divine Name, one’s breath, or a specific ritual object. The objects of concentration can vary from person to person. The Zohar teaches that one could even use a flame as the object of concentration.

To begin a Contemplation Meditation first decide what you would like to focus on, then find a place where you can sit without much distraction for several minutes, or for as long as your practice will last. Then sit in a position that is comfortable to you. Many find it comfortable to sit on chair with a back to help support their back, while others choose to sit in a simple cross-legged position. With your eyes opened or closed, allow the mind to settle. Rabbi Jeff Roth describes this process in Jewish Meditation Practices for Everyday Life as a snow globe settling after it has been shaken (Roth, 2009. 23).

Use the object of contemplation, or mantra, to focus your mind. Let the other thoughts, or worries drop to the side. The mind will wander. When it does, acknowledge that it has moved on, and return to your object of contemplation. It might be helpful to use your breath to aid this process. One technique that some find helpful is to imagine your thoughts as clouds; allow them to drift past and disappear.

Visualization:

A practice that extends from contemplation is visualization. Aryeh Kaplan explains the nuanced difference between these two practices in Jewish Meditation: A Practical Guide. He writes that that one attempts to discipline the mind to visualize the object of contemplation. Kaplan recommends beginning with a mantra or other meditation to help settle the mind. “When the visual field is fairly calm, you can begin to try to visualize the *alef* [the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet]. You may have an *alef* printed on a card and set the image of it in your mind. Then close your eyes and try to picture the *alef*. Try to see it with your eyes closed exactly as you saw it with your eyes open” (Kaplan, 1985. 77).

Awareness:

An Awareness Meditation is a practice that involves an attempt to become more aware of either our body or the things our body can sense or experience. As with visualization, it is easiest to begin with a contemplation of your breath, a mantra, or an object before moving into an awareness phase. Once your mind has become reasonably settled allow your attention to drift to sensations in your body. It might be the pressure of your calves or head against the floor if you are lying down. You might notice the bend in your knees if you are sitting. Become aware of the sensations in your body as you allow your mind to focus on different parts of yourself.

Another variation of awareness meditation can involve eating. One example could be to eat a single piece of dried fruit, like a raisin. Before you put the raisin in your mouth, examine it. What does it look like in different lights? What does it smell like? What does it feel like between your fingers? Place the raisin in your mouth. Acknowledge the ridges of the raisin. What does it taste like? Do not bite into it yet, but allow it to roll across your tongue. As you slowly bite down, how does the taste change? How does it feel between your teeth? A similar process can be done with many foods or beverages like chocolate or coffee.

Awareness meditations are an attempt to slow the world that you are experiencing down. It is an opportunity to take in a sensation deliberately, intentionally, and thoughtfully.

Nothingness:

Meditation on nothingness is far more difficult than the previously mentioned practices. It is critical to note that the goal of nothingness meditation is not to rid the mind of thoughts altogether. It is instead to focus on no-thing. The challenge is that no-thing is difficult to imagine. Kaplan suggested that one way to focus on nothingness is to imagine the space that exists behind the back of your head, or the complete transparency of the air that is just before our eyes (Kaplan, 1985. 84). This is an advanced technique, and can be rather difficult.

Remember that regardless of practice, there will be some days when meditating is excruciatingly difficult. Acknowledge the difficulty for the day, and try again at another time. There is no sense in letting yourself get upset. Meditation is not something easy and takes years of practice to develop: even the most practiced masters can have difficulty at times. The key is to continue with your practice regularly without judgment as to the “success” or “failure” of a particular session. Meditation is a process, not an outcome.

Prayer Invites¹⁸

Prayer invites
God's Presence to suffuse our spirits,
God's will to prevail in our lives.
Prayer may not bring water to parched fields,
nor mend a broken bridge,
nor rebuild a ruined city.
But prayer can water an arid soul,
mend a broken heart,
rebuild a weakened will.

- Adapted from Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

¹⁸ Rabbi Elyse D. Frishman, ed., *Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur* (New York, NY: CCAR Press, 2007), 75.

Blessings of Gratitude

Nissim b'Chol Yom – Daily Miracles¹⁹

The following is excerpted and adapted from morning service in *Mishkan T'filah*. These blessings can be a reminder of the wondrous miracles that we encounter each day. In some communities they are recited each morning as a part of the morning service.

Blessed are You, ADONAI our God, Sovereign of the universe, who has given the mind the wisdom and ability to distinguish day from night.

Blessed are You, ADONAI our God, Sovereign of the universe, who opens our eyes and awakens our minds.

Blessed are You, ADONAI our God, Sovereign of the universe, who frees us from the bonds of sleep.

Blessed are You, ADONAI our God, Sovereign of the universe, who stretches the earth over the waters.

Blessed are You, ADONAI our God, Sovereign of the universe, who strengthens our steps.

Blessed are You, ADONAI our God, Sovereign of the universe, who clothes the naked.

Blessed are You, ADONAI our God, Sovereign of the universe, who gives strength to the weary.

Blessed are You, ADONAI our God, Sovereign of the universe, who made me with a spark of the Divine.

Blessed are You, ADONAI our God, Sovereign of the universe, who has made me free.

Blessed are You, ADONAI our God, Sovereign of the universe, who has made me a Jew.

Blessed are You, ADONAI our God, Sovereign of the universe, who girds Israel with strength.

Blessed are You, ADONAI our God, Sovereign of the universe, who crowns Israel with splendor.

¹⁹ Rabbi Elyse D. Frishman, ed., *Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur* (New York, NY: CCAR Press, 2007), 36-41.

Modim Anachnu Lach – We Thank You²⁰

The following is excerpted and adapted from the blessing for thanksgiving during the Shabbat morning service in *Mishkan T'filah*.

For the expanding grandeur of Creation,
worlds known and unknown, galaxies beyond galaxies,
filling us with awe and challenging our imaginations,
Modim anachnu lach.

For this fragile planet earth, its times and tides,
its sunsets and seasons,
Modim anachnu lach.

For the joy of human life, its wonders and surprises,
its hopes and achievements,
Modim anachnu lach.

For human community, our common past and future hope,
our oneness transcending all separation, our capacity to work
for peace and justice in the midst of hostility and oppression,
Modim anachnu lach.

For high hopes and noble causes, for faith without fanaticism,
For understanding of views not shared,
Modim anachnu lach.

For all who have labored and suffered for a fairer world,
who have lived so that others might live in dignity and freedom,
Modim anachnu lach.

For human liberties and sacred rites:
For opportunities to change and grow, to affirm and choose,
Modim anachnu lach.

For all these things, O Sovereign, let Your Name be forever praised and
blessed.

²⁰ Rabbi Elyse D. Frishman, ed., *Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur* (New York, NY: CCAR Press, 2007), 256-257.