

Jewish Meditations

Beginning in the Torah, there are many narratives of people meditating to fulfill higher forms of spiritual consciousness and clarity. Within Jewish history and practice there is deep history of biblical times that meditation was commonplace, through praying and speaking to G-d, walking in nature and seeking solitude for spiritual wholeness. These meditations can be used on their own, or incorporated within T'Filah/ הליפת prayer in Jewish classes and/or programs.

Before the Mitzvah Circle, provide an opportunity to practice bringing your mind and body to stillness. It's a skill that can be challenging for most of us and requires gentle guidance and practice. Learning to calm the body and mind is eased, by finding things to focus on. This can be accomplished by, using our senses and bringing our full awareness to the present moment. The Hebrew word KAVANAH / הנוכ means 'intention' or 'direction of holiness/the heart'. One can set their 'kavanah' –intention before meditation.

Have your group sit in a big circle, as comfortably as possible. Rest your hands gently on your lap in (cross legged)position, and touch each finger to your thumb while reciting with every finger:

Shalom Begins With Me שלום מתחיל איתי

The following are a few suggestions to help with Mitzvah Circle Meditations:

Students can either lie on their tummies in "Cobra" or sit up in a comfortable position.

1. Nerot/ תורנו:

“Look at how a single candle can both defy and define the darkness.”

- Anne Frank

- A candle can both create light within the darkness, and also makes us realize and notice there is darkness. It is a blessing to be able to create light in the darkness simply by focusing inwards- and knowing we have peace within us. Shalom within us, and all around us. The light within us, can add to the light in the world. Noticing the darkness- allows us to spend some time within the darkness, that it is a part of us, and makes us brighter. Darkness gives us the opportunity to shine more light. Share the light we feel deep within. The light of peace.
- Give everyone a flameless candle and have them focus on the light while breathing deeply in through the nose and out through the mouth. At first,

students may only be able to focus for a short time. Try to increase the amount of time with each session.

ShalOM-Work: When you light Shabbat Candles, take time to focus on the flame and your breath. Be present in the moment and feel the calming gift that Shabbat brings.

2. Shira / הריש :

- Play a piece of music that only uses 2-3 instruments in a repetitive form. (*Yoga Yeladim's "Shalom-Alechem Dreams is a beautiful choice*) Try to focus on the sound of only one instrument. If you lose track, no problem. Simply bring your attention back to the instrument.

ShalOM-Work: Music is a beautiful part of Jewish tradition. Find different selections of music to enjoy at home and at (school/camp...) and share it with your family and friends. Listen to this music at night before bed.

3. H'Adama / המדאה: Take a walk outside, bringing focus to the senses. What do you see? Feel? Hear? Smell? Walk slowly and mindfully and focus on the beautiful details that surround you. Come back to the circle and discuss what you felt. This is a wonderful way to engage all of the senses and connect the body with the mind.

“The best remedy for those who are afraid, lonely or unhappy is to go outside, somewhere where they can be quiet, alone with the heavens, nature and God. Because only then does one feel that all is as it should be”. – Anne Frank

ShalOM-Work: Bring your mindful gratitude for the Earth home by adapting a new conservation ritual: Recycle. Make Compost. Make a rain barrel. Be creative and share your idea with the group. Consider creating a conservation ritual at school/camp.

After the meditation, you can gather fragrant things from nature, things that have fallen off a tree, or lying on the ground with a beautiful scent. Take them back to your classroom or home, dry them, and create a scent pouch or box. There is a beautiful prayer for smelling nice fragrances in the Havdalah ceremony- this prayer can be used anytime you want to incorporate a scent ritual into your Yoga Yeladim Mitzvah Circle or closing circle.

Hold up the spice box, and recite the blessing:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא מִיַּי בְּשָׂמִים.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech haolam borei minei v'samim.

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe, Creator of all spices.

4. L'Hakshiv / בישבהל / Listen: Close your eyes and listen closely. What do you hear? Focus on the details: Sounds in the room. Sounds from outside of the room. Listen to the sounds of your body and your breath. You can imagine you are on a beach- maybe in Tel- Aviv or Eilat. Listen to the waves. Maybe you are in the Negev desert. Listen to the winds. Perhaps you are in the Jerusalem forest listening to the trees, or in the old city of Jerusalem listening to the sound of prayer, the echoes of voices off the Jerusalem stone. You can be anywhere in this moment, just listen deep inside.

ShalOM-Work: Challenge yourself to slow down and "listen" mindfully everyday. What new things did you hear or notice?

Have your children keep a listening journal. You can make your own journals as an art project, and use them at the end of the meditation, or as creative writing session.

Peaceful sounding chimes or wind chimes would be a wonderful addition to this practice. Have the children collect or bring shells to listen to- or create wind chimes out of old silverware, crystals or shells. You can also make a rain stick and other beautiful and relaxing instruments that can be used to just sit and L'Hakshiv.