

Model Kedusha Curriculum Ramat Shalom Torah School

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Introductory Overview

The JRF Cooperating Schools Network program will evolve over a three-year period. With each succeeding year, new programs will be developed which center upon the core value of kedusha/spirituality. Three groups will be targeted during this three-year span: children, families and adults. All children in the school will benefit directly from the innovative family programs, as well as from parents who have been stimulated by exciting workshops and programs geared to their advanced level.

In addition, special enrichment units will be created for the fifth, sixth and seventh grades. Year one targets the fifth grade. Each year, an additional grade will be added.

Each year of the three-year cycle will focus on a different theme within the larger core value of Kedusha/Spirituality. Year one will address the need for spirituality, year two the mechanics of spirituality, and year three the application of spirituality.

We hope to gain greater insight into our own feelings of holiness and spirituality, as well as cultivating a greater understanding of this very complicated subject. To aid in our journey of discovery, we will direct our studies by using a specific format. Each year, three basic questions/topics will be discussed which address the particular theme for that year. Programs and curricula will be designed to help us search for a response to the questions asked.

While the way in which these questions are posed may differ in their degree of sophistication, the questions parallel each other for all three age groups.

Year One: The Need for Spirituality

The questions/topics for year one are as follows:

1. Adults–Human Search for Meaning: The psychological basis for spiritual needs
Children and Families - What are the wonderful things prayer does for us?
2. Adults–The Nature of Prayer: What is it? What purpose does it serve? What are some categories of prayer we encounter in Judaism?
Children and Families–What is prayer? What are some kinds of prayer? How can we be like God's shofar when we pray?
3. Adults, Children and Families–When and how do we experience God?

Year Two: The Mechanics of Spirituality

1. Adults–An Exploration of the Geography of the Siddur: The rhythmic cycle of our prayers
Children and Families–Where in the World is Moshe Pipik?: The geography of the siddur
2. Adults–The Movement of Prayer: A traditional and creative approach
Children and Families–Rock, Roll, and Pray: The movement of prayer
3. Adults–What we Wear: Prayer apparel (origin and meaning as an aid to spirituality)
Children and Families–What we Wear: Prayer apparel (hands-on arts and crafts; meaning; how we feel when we wear a kippah, talit, tefilin, etc.)

Year Three: The Application of Spirituality

1. Adults–Keva and Kavana: How both contribute to kedusha/spirituality
Children and Families–Keva and Kavana: Creating family traditions (instituting regular family traditions which help establish an atmosphere of kedusha in the home)
2. Adults–Kavana: How may it find expression? (in prayer, celebration of holidays, religious milestones, everyday life)
Children and Families–Finding Kavana Together: A family class service (every class service this year is compiled by students and parents, with both participating)
3. Adults - Kedusha: Achieving holiness through action (the sanctification of the everyday through awareness, ritual and tikun olam)
Children and Families - Kedusha, The Shabbat Experience: A family retreat

Kedusha/Spirituality: Adult Education

Year #1

Spirituality: The Need

1. The Human Search for Meaning: The psychological basis for spiritual needs. Sunday brunch/lecture and workshop. Use synagogue resources - psychologists and educators.
2. The Nature of Prayer: What is it? (Reconstructionist and traditional views)
What purpose does it serve? What are some categories of prayer we encounter in Judaism? If we were to rank the categories, would you find one to be more preferable than another? Shabbat morning creative service with selected readings by well-known Jewish thinkers, to be followed by lunch, study session and small group discussion. Each group is given specific questions to consider.
3. Does God answer our prayers? If so, how? Present differing views of the various movements and how these views have changed since Biblical times. Discuss personal responses and how this has changed over time. Move from the experiential to the general: discuss moments in people's lives when they felt a need for prayer or ritual. What were some personal experiences in dealing with death, trauma, birth, etc.? Choose one experience and create a spiritual autobiography (oral or written). (Sunday brunch/lecture and workshop)

Year #2

Spirituality: The Mechanics

1. The Geography of the Siddur: The Rhythmic Cycle of our Prayers. The order and format of the siddur and of the various services; explanation of the components. (Sunday brunch/lecture and workshop-hands-on.)
2. The Movement of Prayer: A Traditional and Creative Approach.
Part I: Experiential-create new movements in reaction to specific prayers; explore the concept of using movement to create spirituality.
Part II: The meaning of various traditional movements and when they occur. (During Friday evening service, explain and perform motions as a congregation. During study session, discuss how we may use these traditional movements to enhance the spiritual nature of prayer.)
2. Prayer Apparel: Origin, Meaning, and Structure as an Aid to Spirituality. Sunday brunch/lecture and "dress rehearsal." Similar to Family Education program, may create a hands-on arts and crafts type program, i.e. making a talit or kipah. In addition, review the rituals and procedures surrounding ritual apparel (i.e. tefilin).

Year #3

Spirituality: The Application

1. Keva and Kavana: How Both Contribute to Kedusha/Spirituality
 - a. Definition
 - b. Exploration of both through traditional sources
 - c. Are they mutually exclusive?
 - d. Why we need both
 - e. Begin exploration of concept of kavana inductively - begin with the core meaning of a prayer and the way each of us approaches it emotionally

2. Kavana: How May it Find Expression?
(In prayer, in celebrations of holidays, in religious milestones, in everyday life. Provide concrete suggestions for participants to take home and use in family settings and/or for personal growth.) Sunday brunch/lecture and workshop.

3. Kedusha: Achieving Holiness Through Action
 - a. The sanctification of the everyday through awareness, ritual, and tikun olam.
 - b. The use of traditional sources such as Pirkey Avot to aid us in finding the formulas for living a life which we consciously try to sanctify.
 - c. Concrete suggestions (e.g. *Gateway to Happiness* by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin) for sanctifying and giving meaning to our lives.

Possible format: Shabbat retreat where we invite educators, rabbis and psychologists to conduct workshops. Open to the entire community; may be done jointly with other synagogues.

Kedusha/Spirituality: Family Education

Year # 1

Spirituality: The Need

1. What are the wonderful things that prayer does for us?
 - a. Makes things special. Turns the ordinary into the holy; helps us see God's part in things.
 - b. Helps us feel wonder and gratitude
 - c. Creates a connection with God
 - d. Enables us to be God's partners in the world

Invite a professional storyteller to use midrash and Hasidic stories to explain the above. (Sources for ideas: *The Book of Miracles* by Lawrence Kushner, *When a Jew Prays* by Seymour Rossel,)

2. What is Prayer? The congregation's Kotel
Each class prepares a "Kotel" to hang in the social hall. On Family Day, everyone writes a prayer on a slip of paper to place in a "crack" in the "wall." Parents and children divide by class and discuss in workshop format what kinds of prayers were written (categories: praise, petition, thanks); each person shares his or her prayer (optional); think about how we felt after we wrote the prayer; compare ourselves to God's shofar when we pray. Conducted by staff on different levels depending on the children's ability to conceptualize.

3. When and How do We Experience God?
(Sources: Rabbi Harold Kushner's *When Children Ask About God*, various Reconstructionist sources, midrash)
Jewish Story Theater: Create open-ended vignettes of situations in which one may experience God. Families act out together and discuss in larger group. Group may try to agree upon an appropriate ending to the sketch. They may also conduct values discussions which explore the wider implications of these vignettes - especially, how may we create a greater awareness of God in our everyday lives? (Adapt discussion to level of child in family.)

Year #2

Spirituality: The Mechanics

1. Where in the World is Moshe Pipik? (Geography of the Siddur)
 - a. Two or three families are grouped together (by ages of children). Each group receives questions asking them to find specific items in the siddur; they receive clues as well. Each family group fills out an answer log, which they bring to the larger group (divided by class). Compare answers.
 - b. A more formal discussion ensues, facilitated by group leader, about the structure of the siddur and the services (a very basic outline geared to the level of the children

in the group).

2. Rock, Roll and Pray: The Movement of Prayer

- a. Invite a parent with dance background to demonstrate ways in which we may move creatively to a specific prayer. Each family then creates a special movement of its own in reaction to a specific prayer.
- b. The more traditional movements and their origins may be explored and tried out in small family groups. (This activity may be expanded.)

3. Prayer Apparel: Hands-on Arts and Crafts

Make a talit and kipah. Examine the inside of an old set of tefilin.

Year #3

Spirituality: The Application

1. Creating New Family Traditions

Each family is paired with another one or two families. Their mission is to create ways to express kedusha in the home (families divided within classes). Group comes together, and a representative from each small group shares ideas with the larger group.

2. Family/Class Services

Every class service this year is compiled by students and parents, with both participating. (Special music and readings may be added to the service.) Parents meet with kids during class to discuss and plan.

3. The Shabbat Experience: Family Retreat

Schedule of Events:

Friday evening Shabbat seder—prayers and blessings, zemirot

Friday evening service

Shabbat morning service

Shabbat meal and songs/blessings

Israeli dancing

Study session at various levels

Light dairy meal

Havdalah

Spirituality: The Need
What Does Prayer Do For Us?: An Enrichment Unit for Fifth Grade

Goals: To consider the ways that prayer functions in our lives and our role in making prayer "work."

Objectives:

1. Children will be able to list five ways that prayer functions in their lives.
2. Children will be able to identify specific instances in their own lives which demonstrate each of these prayer functions.
3. Children will be able to explain the term "kavana" and give specific examples of times when they pray with kavana.

Concepts:

1. Prayer turns the ordinary into the holy, sanctifying everyday things. It helps us take the time to recognize the uniqueness of God's creations in the world around us.
2. Prayer helps us feel wonder and gratitude.
3. Prayer enables us to be God's partner in perfecting the world.
4. Prayer helps create a connection between ourselves and God.
5. Prayer helps create a connection between ourselves and others.
6. Kavana is praying with feeling and understanding. It is what you do inside yourself to make your prayers real, putting your whole heart into the words of the prayer.

Activities and Readings:

Activity #1: The Magic Circle

Students sit on the floor in a circle. Discussion moves around the circle so that everyone has an opportunity to share. Magic Circle rules: everyone's opinion is respected; the person speaking has the right to speak uninterrupted; if someone is truly reluctant to express an opinion, he/she may pass.

1. Students have been asked to bring to class a detailed description of something they have seen or felt. For example, a description of their favorite food as they eat it (i.e., how it tastes, what it smells like, how it feels), a sunset (a description of the changes that take place as the sun slowly sets, the change in temperature, sounds, the wind), a rainstorm (the smells, sounds, sights). Students are asked to read their descriptions aloud in the magic circle.
2. After the descriptions are read, students discuss the following:
 - I. What is one thing I noticed during my observations that I never noticed before?
 - II. Choose one or more of the following, and explain your answer:
 - A. I never pay such close attention to things
 - B. I sometimes pay such close attention to things.
 - C. I always pay such close attention to things.
 - D. People are too busy to give so much attention to things.

E. People should try to pay closer attention to things around them.

F. It's more important to do things than to stop and examine things so closely.

3. Students read the following excerpts aloud:

"To be a Jew means to wake up and keep your eyes open to the many beautiful, mysterious, and holy things that happen all around us every day. Many of them are like little miracles: when we wake up and see the morning light, when we taste food and grow strong, when we learn from others and grow wise, when we hug the people we love and feel warm, when we help those around us and feel good. All these and more are there for us every day, but we must open our eyes to see them." (p.6, *The Book of Miracles*, Lawrence Kushner)

"Jews have a special way of remembering to pay attention. It is called a berachah or a blessing. It begins, 'Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha'Olam,' then we add words appropriate for the occasion like: 'who brings forth bread from the earth' or 'who removes sleep from my eyes and slumber from my eyelids' or 'who spreads the shelter of peace over us.' (p.9, *The Book of Miracles*, Lawrence Kushner)

4. Students and teacher brainstorm and say as many berachot as they can think of and explain what we are asked to pay attention to or be grateful for with each blessing.

5. Students read the following excerpts aloud:

"What a wonderful world we live in! Everything in it is special to God and can be special to us. Every second is a different second, every minute a different minute; each one happens only once and then never again. We, too, happen only once. . . . No one else can ever be you and you can be no one else. You are special.

Praying reminds us just how special we and our world are. It keeps us from forgetting how marvelous our world is and can be.

When something is special to God, we say that it is holy or sacred. And because the whole world is holy to God, we must try to discover the holiness in it. That is what we are saying when we pray: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts; [God's] glory fills the whole earth.'

Prayer makes the ordinary into the holy, because it helps us to see God's part in all things. When we understand that everything is holy to God, then we do not want to do anything to hurt others (or the world around us). We want instead to treasure them, to learn to love them." (pp.50-51, *When a Jew Prays*, Seymour Rossel)

6. Students are asked to summarize what they have learned so far about what prayer does for us. (See concepts #1 and #2.)

Activity #2: The Partnership Chain

1. Two students are picked to role play together. One student acts very upset. He/she approaches the second student and says:

"Hi, (student's name)! Listen, I'm in real trouble. We have a major exam tomorrow, and I don't understand the material. If I don't get a good grade on the test, my parents will ground me for life. I may even fail the class and have to make it up during summer school. Can you please take some time to study with me?"

"You know (student's name), I have to study for the test, too. How will I have time to help you and study too?"

"But you know the stuff cold. All I'm asking for is an hour of your time to explain a few things."

"Why don't you just have faith that everything will be O.K.? I'm sure you'll do just fine. I've got to get going. See ya around."

2. Students discuss the following:

- A. If you were the student who knew the material, what would you do and why?
- B. Do you think he/she was justified in turning down his/her fellow student?
- C. Do you think it was fair of the student who was having trouble to ask for help?
- D. What do you think about the "good" student's comment that his/her friend should have faith that everything would be O.K.?

3. Students read the following and discuss the meaning:

Martin Buber wrote: "If someone comes to you and asks your help, you shall not turn him off with pious words saying: 'Have faith and take your troubles to God!' You shall act as though there were no God, as though there were only one person in all the world who could help this man—only yourself." (p.255, *Little Lower than the Angels*, Ronald Gittelsohn)

4. "In sixteenth century Tsefat, Rabbi Isaac Luria observed that in his world, like ours, many things seem to be wrong. People suffered from hunger, disease, hatred and war. 'How could God allow such terrible things to happen?' wondered Luria. 'Perhaps,' he suggested, 'it is because God needs our help.'" (p.47, *The Book of Miracles*)

PRAYER ENABLES US TO BE GOD'S PARTNER IN PERFECTING THE WORLD.

5. Give students the Birkat Hamazon (abbreviated version, Hebrew and English, pp.18-23, *Kol Haneshamah: Shirim Uvrahot*). Ask them if we can learn anything about the way in which we should behave from the prayer.

6. Students read the following:

"Saying the Birkat Hamazon reminds us that God and [people] share the task of feeding the world. God provides enough food for all, but we must make sure that all people get enough food. If [people] can live up to their part of the bargain, then the world will be

much closer to peace. Many wars are fought, because people are hungry and others will not feed them—even though they have more than enough food!" (p.47, *When a Jew Prays*)
Students summarize concept learned - see concept #3

Activity # 3: Like a Shofar

1. Someone brings a shofar to class and blows it for everyone to hear. Students brainstorm: When we pray, how are we like a shofar?

If we are like a shofar, what will our prayers be like?

If we are the shofar when we pray, who will blow us?

Should we blow loud or soft? High or low?

Should we blow many notes or only one long note?

How far will the sound carry?

(One student records everyone's answers.)

What conclusions can we draw about our prayers and how we should pray?

2. "Rabbi Dov Baer, the great storyteller (or *magid*) of the Polish town, Mezritch, used to say that a person is like a shofar! A shofar sounds only when breath is blown through it; we can only say prayers because God moves through us." (p.72, *The Book of Miracles*)

What do you think Rabbi Dov Baer meant when he said that we can only say prayers because God moves through us? Do you agree with him?

3. Have you ever looked up at the night sky and seen it covered by stars? How did you feel? Did you feel big or small? Did you feel alone or part of things?

When we look at God's creation, we realize that we are connected to God, and that we are a part of God's creation.

"Praying connects us to God, and, since God is also connected to everything else, prayer joins us to all creation. Abraham Joshua Heschel, one of the great spiritual teachers of our generation, explained that, in prayer, we realize that our 'self is not a hub, but the spoke of the revolving wheel.' Such a feeling is so important that Jews devote an entire day of the week to it." (p. 73, *The Book of Miracles*)

Students summarize concept learned (see concept #4)

Activity #4: The Package

1. We Jews all carry a package around with us. Many of the Jewish things we carry inside the package are just like the things that Jews around the world carry in their packages. On a slip of paper, each student will write one thing that he or she thinks we have in common with other Jews around the world. They will then drop their slips into the box. After the box is passed to everyone, one student begins to take out the slips and read them aloud. Another student records the answers on the board.

2. "We Jews are a people of prayer. The 'we' of our prayers links us to our own Jewish community—and to the great community of Jewish people praying in synagogues all over the world." (p.69, *When a Jew Prays*)

We are linked by common prayers, a common language of prayer—Hebrew—, by similar customs, and by common values expressed in our prayers. We all share the Torah, which we read aloud during services. These are but a few things which our packages have in common.

3. Not only are we connected to Jews around the world, but we are also connected to our own Jewish community.

Why do you think Jews pray together/

What is a minyan?

Do you think it is better to pray alone or as a community?

Does praying together help us in any way?

Activity #5: The Puzzle

Draw a Jewish symbol on hard poster board. Cut it into a few large pieces. Look at each piece on its own. Now place the pieces together to form one large picture again. How are Jews like that puzzle when we pray?

1. "Praying together reminds us that we are part of one people, that we are not alone. . . . When we are alone, we think mostly of ourselves. We say: what do I want to do today? . . . All of our feelings are I want or I wish. The same is true of prayer. Leave me alone to pray, and I will start talking to God, asking God for what I need or telling God what I feel. It is good to do this sometimes, because it helps us to remember that God is our personal helper and partner. But if that is the only kind of praying that we do, then we will soon forget about trying to make our world better. If we always pray by ourselves, then we may soon become selfish and pray only for ourselves." (pp.64-65, *When a Jew Prays*)

"Together as Jews we pray to remind ourselves of the covenant or contract that we made with God. We promised to be God's partner in building a good world. Saying the prayers together reminds us that we are not alone. Together we become less selfish; we think more of others than ourselves." (P.71, *When a Jew Prays*)

Students summarize concept learned (see concept #5)

Activity #6: They Drag Me to Services!

1. Pick a student to role-play the following character:

"You know, everything we've been talking about sounds O.K., and it may be all right for other people, but I just don't see it. I know all the prayers they teach in Torah School, and I say them. But to tell you the truth, they just don't mean anything to me. I just say them to keep everyone off my back. I mean, my parents practically have to drag me to services. I'd rather be with my friends or watch T.V.

"One summer I went to camp, and they had services there outdoors, in the mountains. That was kind of special. It's too bad it can't always be like that. Oh, well. See ya."

2. Students discuss the following:

Do any of the students ever feel like this character? If so, why? If not, why not? Do you think this character can sit back, say the prayers and expect to feel anything? Is praying like turning on the T.V. and watching a program? Why or why not? What can this character do to bring meaning to his or her prayers?

3. What we bring to prayer: praying with kavana

What is kavana? "Kavana is like a feeling. It is what you do inside yourself to make your prayers real. . . . Kavana is putting your whole heart into each word of a prayer. Kavana is saying the words of the prayerbook and thinking about them as if they were your own. Kavana is meeting every word you see for the first time, even when you have seen it a hundred times before. . . . Kavana is speaking to God in your own special way: by singing, laughing, dancing, or whispering. Kavana is feeling the mood of the people you are praying with: the people who sit next to you in the synagogue, the whole congregation that is praying together, the Jewish people who are praying at the same time all around the world, and all people who pray everywhere." (pp.28, 30, *When a Jew Prays*)

4. What answer would you now give the character who gets dragged to synagogue?

Students summarize concept learned.

Follow-up Activity:

Students incorporate some of the above concepts and readings in their class service during the study session.