

Moving Into Ourselves, A Course on Body, Mind, and Spirit

Priority Goal

This curriculum is intended for use by synagogues or Jewish community centers which feel mandated to provide community members with educational experiences that are personally meaningful and which prize total health and well-being. These learning sessions are designed to give learners the opportunity to explore and to engage notions of mindfulness and personal meaning-making through creative use of their bodies. In doing so, this curriculum is meant to expand the personal awareness of learners as they engage various athletic experiences and movement practices. The lessons will be geared to help learners not only inhabit their bodies in a fuller and more meaningful way, but also help them to bring this awareness into other realms of their life as well. Through these self-awareness building endeavors, learners will be better equipped to move through their every day with a greater sense of purpose, connectedness, and value.

Age Group

This curriculum is aimed towards adult learners (though could at times be expansive to include younger adults as well)

Organizational Setting

This learning could take place within the bounds of a synagogue-community, a JCC, or as a stand-alone individual course. Teacher/facilitators must be physically engaged and actively in good health to serve as a model for learners. Teacher/facilitators must also dialogue with community leaders (either clerical or lay leaders) to explore possible liability concerns that may extend from physical activities. It is important to note that learners must engage activities in ways that are safe and non-threatening (both mentally and physically).

Further, a registration process is necessary for this course of learning. Such a registration can and should be done in dialogue with community leadership for reasons stated above. Also, such registration provides the opportunity for important intake interviews during which teacher/facilitators may discover personal motivations for participation as well as confidentially evaluate physical ability. Such intake opportunities also allow for the discovery of participants' personal theologies and relationships to spirituality—providing important information for refining course content and the language teacher/facilitators might use.

Rationale

This curriculum stems from observations I've made in the world around me. We appear to live in a society and culture in which individuals seek and thirst for meaning and purpose in their lives. Individuals, however, are no longer looking to classical institutions or more classical methods of finding, exploring, and enriching their senses of meaning in their lives. Often times, Jews would rather go to a yoga class, go on a weekend retreat, or just have a great day trip with friends instead of seeking out what synagogue communities can offer. Moreover, synagogue activity finds itself in competition with sporting events, yard work, etc. (not just for children, but for adults as well). This curriculum allows both affiliated/engaged Jews as well as more secular Jews the opportunity to discover meaning in a wide variety of active experiences—entirely outside the realm of the synagogue. Learners will experience the possibility of meaning-making in activities using their bodies, ranging from a number of athletic engagements to more directly physically self-aware mindfulness practices—all while based in Jewish ideas, notions, and contexts where applicable. In a sense, it is an opportunity for Jews to find their own sense of the spiritual in things they would not have thought of in that way—an opportunity to re-invent how they experience what they are doing and more fully connect body, mind, and soul.

In preparation for teaching this course, teachers must engage (for themselves) the connections between purpose and meaning. What are the things in your life that you do, and why? What greater meaning do these things hold for you? Why or why not? Teachers may wish to consult, survey, or read the following books to help develop their understandings of this dynamic:

- The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook, by Davis, Eschelman, and McKay
- The Clinical Handbook of Mindfulness, by Fabrizio Didonna
- The Body in the Mind, by Mark Johnson
- Intentions in the Experience of Meaning, by Raymond Gibbs
- Mindful Jewish Living, by Jonathan Slater
- Jewish Spiritual Direction, by Addison and Breitman

Learner Needs

This course is rooted in both mindfulness and physical activity. Because this course is rooted, to a large extent, in physical activity, many tasks and lesson activities may not be suitable for all learners. As mentioned throughout, care must be taken to

ensure the safety of all learners in all situations. Because of this dynamic, this course of learning is admittedly very limited to those with physical disabilities. Some learning sessions, such as the initial, introductory lesson offered below, is, open to less mobile and non ambulatory learners—as are the one-on-one bi-weekly meetings with instructors, and some other lessons. While this learning opportunity is not readily available to those with severe physical disabilities and/or the homebound, adjustments can be made to include many with physical disabilities. (In this way, these learners might attend those class sessions which do not require physical activity, as well as bi-weekly meetings, etc. The instructor, however, will need to adjust and tailor bi-weekly individual meetings to better reflect learner abilities.)

Because the course is also rooted in mindfulness, because mindfulness is an internalized and individual awareness, and because many of the on-going tasks for the course require independent reflection, this course allows for learners of many different creeds, backgrounds, and social minority groups to explore themselves at a pace comfortable to them without feeling the greater social pressures present in many other learning environments. Further bi-weekly meetings with instructors allows for deeper individual exploration that can support and address individual learner differences in a proactive and productive environment. To this end, however, instructors must be open, supportive, and aware of possible learner diversity and need.

In addressing the possible special learner needs that may arise for this course, and to better prepare for bi-weekly one-on-one meetings with learners, instructors are encourage to engage in a course of clinical pastoral care or other counseling/pastoral education learning opportunity before teaching/facilitating this course.

Enduring Understanding

Building meaningful self-awareness through movement can help us move through our days with greater purpose—ultimately adding meaning to our lives.

Essential Questions

In what ways are you able to move your body and why?

What does my body have to do with my soul?

What is the environment around you telling your body?

How do I connect my mind, my body, and my soul?

How does body movement support me in search for meaning?

Addressing Whole Person Learning

Knowledge:

What is the knowledge and what are the skills needed to participate in this experience?

- Over the course of this learning experience, learners will gain a basic, working knowledge of a variety of movement based activities (namely yoga, walking, classical dance, hiking, tai chi, basic exercise, and other expressive sports).
- Learners will build the individual skills necessary to be aware of their bodies during these activities.
- And learners will gain a vocabulary with which to apply these awareness skills to meta-issues of meaning-making and spirituality.

Doing:

What are the real life Jewish experiences that learners will actively participate in and shape?

- Judaism is a religion based in action (often focused on mitzvot). This action is not relegated to holidays, Shabbat, or life-cycle events, but rather the rabbi's envisioned Judaism as a way of living life. Within this learning experience, learners will engage their bodies physically in appropriate athletic activities. With guidance and learning, learners will reflect upon these activities in an effort to cultivate greater self awareness and mindfulness that they may transfer to many aspects of their own lives.

Belief and Values:

How will learners use their knowledge and reflect on their experience to articulate emerging beliefs and values?

- During the class, learners will be provided with journals in which to express their experiences and reflect on their specific engagement with class topics and activities. A goal of the class is for learners to deepen their experience through greater self-awareness and personal meaning making. Thus, learners will also "articulate" what they've gained through seeking out new endeavors in which they can employ their new found skills and self-awareness competencies.

Belong:

How will learners build long lasting and caring relationships with God within a “community?”

- Class activities for this learning experience are not in a room at desks, or sitting at a table, rather, they are directly interactive and offer multiple points for dialogue and interaction. While instruction is integral to many aspects of this course, the learning is truly based in a learning-by-doing model. Given this learners will have the opportunity to directly work with others and create a class community of support throughout class activities.

Assessment

Learning assessment will occur through the following:

One on one meetings with instructor:

- 1) Preliminary entrance interview (meant for assessing health and wellness suitability for class activities, as well as to explore personal reasons and interests for taking the course. Preliminary interviews should be supportive, but challenge learners to outline those things that they do currently to cultivate mindfulness and self-awareness)
- 2) Biweekly meetings (to decompress and debrief learner gains and pitfalls over the course of the previous two sessions via review of learners’ journals. These meetings should offer supportive guidance and reflections on both learner strengths and learner weaknesses.)
- 3) Exit interview (to review and reflect upon the total learning experience and to create/explore a plan for future action)

Brit Lilmode: a pact for learning

As an in-class activity for the first session (that helps learners assess where they are and helps them project where they want to be educationally), learners create a brit for themselves in which they articulate their goals for the course overall.

Living Journal:

Learners will independently keep a journal (through which ever medium is most meaningful to them, i.e. writing privately, blogging, video, voice recording, drawing, etc.) of their experiences both in and out of class relating to class topics and

self-awareness. Learners should ask themselves, what am I focused on when I do _____? What am I aware of? How might I go about expanding my awareness? How does this alter or deepen my experiences?

Midway exploration: a personal theology of movement

Half way through the course, learners articulate (or begin to articulate) their personal theology of movement/physical activity in their lives. Based upon what they've gained so until this point in the course, learners should explore and commit to paper the role that the development of mindfulness through movement and action now plays in their lives. This assessment should be introduced several weeks before it will be turned in to allow learners to effectively ruminate and consider what they want to address and how they want to address it. Preparing some examples may be helpful for some learners for whom the idea of writing a personal theology seems too daunting.

Introduction to Moving Into Ourselves, A Course on Body, Mind, and Spirit

A. Lesson Overview.

This is the initial lesson in a course designed to create greater self-awareness and mindfulness through physical movement and activity. The simplified aim of the course is to increase and deepen one's engagement in life to better inform one's personal sense of spirituality and personal growth all within the context of a Jewish community. Learners will have already had an entrance interview in which they have received basic course materials (schedules, costs, etc.) and explored their reasons for taking the course as well as those practices and activities they currently use to cultivate mindfulness (or those activities from which they currently garner mindfulness/self-awareness—even though these actions may not be stand alone practices). Class sessions will generally be between one and one and a half hours in length.

B. Enduring Understanding for the Unit of which this lesson is a part.

Building meaningful self-awareness through movement can help us move through our days with greater purpose—ultimately adding meaning to our lives.

C. Core Concepts

Understanding key personal definitions help to articulate beliefs, current situations, and can allow for better learning.

Learning about how we inhabit our bodies can help us grow in our self-awareness and increase our personal mindfulness.

D. Essential Questions.

What does self-awareness and mindfulness mean to me?

How do I engage the word spirituality?

How do I inhabit my body?

What role does physical activity play in my life?

E. Performance Tasks

Learners will meet one another and engage in social joining

Learners will create a brit lilmode regarding their goals for the course

Learners will undertake a body-scan

F. Students will be able to

Use and apply the body scan activity in their lives—independently of the class environment

Articulate their goals for the course

Write a journal entry about their experience with the body scan exercise

Continue engaging and building a class culture

G. Activities

Introduction:

- I. Reception and Nosh [10 minutes]
 - A. Healthy, locally acquired snacks and beverages should be provided
 - B. All snacks and beverages should be accompanied with “Awareness Information” cards that include the item’s:
 - provenance
 - ingredients
 - health and wellness benefits
- II. Convene class [7–10 minutes]
 - A. Gather learners
 - B. Once seated and settled (or getting settled) ask learners to introduce themselves by going around the room and stating, in one statement: their name, their profession, and their favorite physical activity.

Main Content:

- I. Pass out copies of Mishkan Tefilah (or, if this siddur is not available, pass out copies of the Asher Yatzar (a prayer about our bodies), Elohai Neshamah (a prayer about our souls/our spiritualities), and Nisim b’Kol Yom (a prayer about situations and action) prayers in both Hebrew and English) as well as the accompanying daf of questions.
- II. Ask learners to divide into small groups of 2 or 3 to read the prayers noted above and work through the daf of questions. [20 minutes]
- III. Reconvene learners and inquire about their findings [5 minutes]
- IV. Read part of the Nisim b’Kol Yom prayer: “ברוך אתה ה' אלוהינו מלך העולם פוקה עורים”
Barukh Atah Adonai, Eloheinu melekh ha’olam pokei-akh ivrim”
 - A. give translation of the above blessing
 - B. Say, “Blindness isn’t always a word that pertains to a lack of physical sight with our eyes. The purpose of this course is to also open up our eyes to our bodies, our actions, and through that greater vision, we can also open our eyes to our lives and spirits. We can start that process by learning how to open our eyes to our bodies and how we inhabit them.”
- V. Body scan activity (adapted from The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook, p.20)
 - A. Ask learners to sit or lie in a comfortable position and close their eyes
 - B. Ask learners to focus their attention on the outside world. [3 minutes]
 1. Prompt them to speak in their minds in statements like: “I am aware of the cars outside, people walking outside the room, the wind blowing outside...”
 - C. Ask learners to shift their focus onto their bodies. [3 minutes]

1. Prompt learners to similarly articulate their thoughts to themselves in statements like: “I am aware of feeling warm, my stomach gurgling, tension in my neck...”
- D. Ask learners to then alternate their focus. [2 minutes]
 1. Using the same methods as above, ask learners to notice something external and then something internal and so on.
 2. Instruct learners to notice how the two foci feel: what is different about noticing something external versus something internal? What is the same?
- E. Ask learners to shift all their attention to their toes—noticing every detail of how their toes feel. Note that as they move up their body, they should pay attention to each and every part of their body in the same way as they move through the rest of the exercise [5–7 minutes]
 1. Say: “Starting with your toes and moving up your body, ask yourself, “where am I tense?” Whenever you discover a tense area, exaggerate it slightly so you can become even more aware of it. Be aware of the muscles in your body that are tense. Then, for example, say to yourself, ‘I am tensing my neck muscles ... I am hurting myself ... I am creating tension in my body ... I am releasing tension in my body ...’ Note that all muscular tension is self-produced. At this point, be aware of any life situation that may be causing the tension in your body and think about what you could do to change that.”
- F. Ask learners to open to slowly open their eyes and return their focus back to the class environment.

Conclusion:

- I. In the quiet atmosphere that follows hand out the Brit Lilmode page
- II. Ask each student to take the next few minutes to write down their hopes and aspirations for the course as a whole. [5 minutes]
- III. Bring the class back together as they finish up writing their britot by introducing the journaling task. [3–5 minutes]
 - A. Learners can journal about class sessions as well as the other related activities they engage in or relevant situations in their lives between classes using any medium for journaling that they like: writing, blogging, video recording, painting (with explication), etc.
 - B. Inform learners that their journals will serve as a source of reflection for their bi-weekly meetings.
 - C. Offer the following prompt as a guide for the initial class: “My experience with the body scan affected me in the following way(s). AND I can see its use in my life in the following way(s)”

1. Learners should also be invited to add whatever thoughts or reflections they might have to their journal entries in addition to the prompts

IV. Wish everyone a fond farewell and note excitement about seeing everyone for the next session.

H. Materials needed.

Locally acquired snacks and beverages

Appropriate 'Awareness Information' cards to accompany snacks

Mishkan Tefilah (or prepared prayer sheets, if siddur is not available)

Daf of prayer questions

Brit Lilmode page

A watch, clock, or silent timer to pace the body scan exercise

Extra pens or pencils

Start Off Your Day In The Best Possible Way

What are your thoughts about the following questions? How do the thoughts and ideas sparked by these questions inform how you might move through this course?

- 1) What is the core principle behind each of these prayers?
- 2) Why do you think that these prayers begin our daily morning service?
- 3) Brainstorm some ideas: What do you think might have been the intent of the rabbis who arranged these prayers in this order at the beginning of our morning liturgy?
- 4) What might the content, order, and location of these prayers mean for you and your efforts toward self-awareness?

My Brit Lilmode

Over the course of this class, I hope to work toward, engage, and cultivate...