

THE WEXNER FOUNDATION

WEXNER GRADUATE FELLOWSHIP / DAVIDSON SCHOLARS PROGRAM

70 FACES OF TORAH

Facilitator: Or Mars

GROUP A

FOUR CHILDREN MEDITATION

STEP 1

 **READ:** This Jewish “text” is a rethinking of the Four Children of the Passover Seder with a suggested meditation activity.

The Passover Haggadah tells of four children: first, the wise child – the Chacham, then the evil/rebellious child – the Rasha, followed by the simple child – the Tam, and finally, the child who doesn’t know to ask. The scene of these four children plays a pivotal role in the Seder. We are moved by what they ask and by who they are.









For those who choose, we will engage in a compassion-based mindfulness meditation using the four children as our guides. Instructions will be given so that both experienced and first-time meditators can follow.

STEP 2

 **DO:** Print the Four Children Meditation worksheet (below) or take a blank sheet of paper and copy the grid below.

STEP 3





 **DO:** Ask the group to fill out the worksheet as follows:

-  **READ:** For the wise child – think of a person in your life that you consider wise (you do not need to know them personally.) Write their name in the appropriate quadrant of the paper.
 -  **DO:** Wait 10 seconds as people write the name.
-  **READ:** For the wicked child – think of a person in your life that you consider wicked or troublesome (you do not need to know them personally.) Write their name in the appropriate quadrant of the paper.
 -  **DO:** Wait 10 seconds as people write the name.
-  **READ:** For the simple child – think of a person in your life that you consider pure of heart (you do not need to know them personally.) Write their name in the appropriate quadrant of the paper.
 -  **DO:** Wait 10 seconds as people write the name.
-  **READ:** For the silent child – write your own name.
 -  **DO:** Wait 10 seconds as people write the name.





GROUP A

FOUR CHILDREN MEDITATION

STEP 4

-  **READ:** For your wise person – write one attribute about this person that you admire.
- ✓ **DO:** Wait 10 seconds as people write the attribute.
-  **READ:** For your wicked person – write one attribute about this person that you admire.
- ✓ **DO:** Wait 10 seconds as people write the attribute.
-  **READ:** For your “pure of heart” person – write one attribute about this person that you admire.
- ✓ **DO:** Wait 10 seconds as people write the attribute.
-  **READ:** For yourself – write one attribute about yourself that you admire.
- ✓ **DO:** Wait 10 seconds as people write the attribute.

STEP 5 – Guided Compassion Meditation

-  **READ:** Focusing on our wise person, let’s take 10 slow breaths. On the inbreath say their name in your head, on the outbreath say their attribute you admire.
- ✓ **DO:** Count 10 slow breaths (ring bell if desired.)
-  **READ:** Focusing on our wicked person, let’s take 10 slow breaths. On the inbreath say their name in your head, on the outbreath say their attribute you admire.
- ✓ **DO:** Count 10 slow breaths (ring bell if desired.)
-  **READ:** Focusing on our “pure of heart” person, let’s take 10 slow breaths. On the inbreath say their name in your head, on the outbreath say their attribute you admire.
- ✓ **DO:** Count 10 slow breaths (ring bell if desired.)
-  **READ:** Focusing on ourselves, let’s take 10 slow breaths. On the inbreath say your name in your head, on the outbreath say the attribute you admire.
- ✓ **DO:** Count 10 slow breaths (ring bell if desired.)

STEP 6 – Feedback

- ✓ **DO:** Ask the group the following questions (you can let the conversation flow as needed:)
- What was your experience of this activity? Strange? Calming? Anxiety producing?
 - How does this activity fit with in your definition of Jewish education, Jewish text study or Jewish practice?
 - How might this activity enrich your professional leadership, if at all?

Adapted from Steven Philp

GROUP A

FOUR CHILDREN MEDITATION

WISE

WICKED

SIMPLE

SILENT

GROUP B

JEWIS/AMERICA: A REPRESENTATION

By Frederic Brenner

FREDERIC BRENNER

Frédéric Brenner (born 1959) is a French photographer known for his documentation of Jewish communities around the world. His work has been exhibited internationally, among others, at the International Center of Photography in New York, the Musée de l'Élysée in Lausanne, Rencontres d'Arles in Arles, the Brooklyn Museum in New York, and the Joods Historisch Museum in Amsterdam. These photographs come from his collection *Jews/America/A Representation* (1996.)

Instructions:

- Take 5 minutes to quietly look at each of the photographs.
- Use the guiding questions below to frame your analysis.

Guiding Questions for Discussion:

- Are these Jewish texts? Why? Why not?
- Which of these photos do you most relate with?
- Is your Jewish story found in any of these photos?
- Which (if any) disturb you? Why? Why not?
- In what ways is Brenner commenting on or interpreting aspects of Judaism or Jewishness or Jewish culture?
- Bonus question (if time allows): Do you have a photograph that you can screen share right now that tells an important Jewish story? Feel free to share.



Citizens Protesting Anti-Semitic Acts, Billings, Montana



The December Dilemma, Colan Family, Staten Island, New York, 1993

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Faculty and Students, JTS, 1994



Nice Jewish Boys, Palm Beach, FL 1994



Kahanna Chai Summer Camp, Upstate New York, 1994



Josephson Family, Upper East Side, New York City, 1994

GROUP C

THE JEWS ARE COMING

Instructions:

READ:

The Jews Are Coming (HaYehudim Ba'im) is an Israeli comedy show presenting satire sketches, examining the history of the Jewish people since biblical times (2014-present.)

Watch this 2:30 minute video clip - <https://youtu.be/qVCs1YPk1jU?t=433>
(transcript is below for later reference.)

Guiding Questions:

- Is this a Jewish text? Why? Why not?
- What is the role of humor in Jewish life?
- This is a popular Israel TV show. What does that say about life in Israel?
- What values (or meta-values) might be interpreted from this "text?"
- How do you use humor in your work?

If time allows, watch this 2:30 minute vide clip
(as source material) – <https://youtu.be/EQnaRtNMGMl>

Abraham and Seinfeld

Announcer: *Tonight, on TV, the funniest show in history!*

Avraham: Funny... Dates are the best!

Friend: Yeah!

Avraham: So besides that, what's up with you?

Friend: You know how it is, you live, you work, you worship Ashtoret, and you go to sleep.

Avraham: I've noticed lately that everyone worships Ashtoret.

Friend: Do you know why, Avraham?

Avraham: Why?

Friend: Because people like to say "Ashtoret". I worshipped Ashtoret, I sacrificed for Ashtoret, have you seen the new idol of Ashtoret?

Avraham: I wish Ashtoret will get me a brunette.

Friend: So maybe become a prophet of Ashtoret?

Avraham: Exactly. Ah, if only our god was like that.

Friend: Like what?

Avraham: Like this, that you only request stuff, no idol, no nothing.

Friend: What do you mean "no idol"?

Avraham: No idol. No idol, no image, no nothing.

Friend: Yeah, right.

Avraham: No, I'm really serious, I think that's a good idea.

Friend: No idol?

Avraham: No idol. Forget the idol!

Friend: But every god's gotta have an idol!

Avraham: No! Who says he's gotta have an idol? Remember when we were waiting for that table in that Jebusite Restaurant that time and we constantly said: Let us get it, let us get it, and we got it? No idol, no nothing. We can say that it's because of our god.

Friend: And what? That he's invisible?

Avraham: Exactly.

Friend: Who can believe in such a god?

Avraham: I can believe in him, you can believe in him, Sarah can believe in him.

Friend: So basically, you're saying that anyone can believe in this god if he wants to.

Avraham: That's right.

Friend: Even though he's invisible.

Avraham: That's right.

Friend: So, you're saying, we go to the people and tell them we got this idea for a new god, without an idol, that you can't see?

Avraham: Totally! I think we've got a really great idea here.

Friend: An idea for what?

Avraham: An idea for a new religion!

Friend: I still don't know what this religion is.

Avraham: A religion with a god that you can't see.

Friend: A god of what?

Avraham: The god of nothing! All the gods are the "gods of something", right? There's the god of fertility, the god of love, the god of rain, our god is the god of "without a thing", god of nothing.

Friend: Nothing

Avraham: Nothing

Friend: So, you're proposing that we go to the people and tell them we have an idea for a new religion with the god of nothing.

Avraham: Exactly.

Friend: They say "Does he have an idol? Does he have an image?" We say "Nothing".

Avraham: Exactly.

Friend: They say: "What is he the god of?" We say "nothing".

Avraham: There you go.

Friend: I think you may have something here.

Avraham: Ah, and you also need to cut the tip of the thingy.

Friend: I prefer to stick with Ashtoret.

GROUP D

EVERYWOMAN HER OWN THEOLOGY

Instructions:

- Take turns slowly reading each stanza of this poem aloud to the group.
- Take five minutes for everyone to read again quietly to themselves.
- Choose a facilitator who will use the guiding questions below for reflection with the group.

Alicia Ostriker

Alicia Ostriker (born 1937) is an American poet and scholar who writes Jewish feminist poetry. She was called “America’s most fiercely honest poet,” by *Progressive*. In 2015, she was elected a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets. In 2018 she was named New York State Poet.

Questions for Group Reflection

- What questions or comments do you have about this poem?
- How does Ostriker’s “god” manifest? How does this compare to your conception of “God”?
- What ethics does she embrace and what virtues does she celebrate?
- How is gender expressed in this poem?
- What religious “thesis” would you tack up on your kitchen bulletin board? Would it look like Alicia Ostriker’s? How might it be similar or different?
- What ideas or values can you harvest from this poem that might impact your professional leadership?

Everywoman Her Own Theology

by Alicia Ostriker

I am nailing them up to the cathedral door
Like Martin Luther. Actually, no,
I don’t want to resemble that Schmutzkopf
(See Erik Erikson and N.O. Brown
On the Reformer’s anal aberrations,
Not to mention his hatred of Jews and peasants),
So I am thumbtacking these ninety-five
Theses to the bulletin board in my kitchen.

My proposals, or should I say requirements,
Include at least one image of a god,
Virile, beard optional, one of a goddess,
Nubile, breast size approximating mine,
One divine baby, one lion, one lamb,
All nude as figs, all dancing wildly,
All shining. Reproducible
In marble, metal, in fact any material.

Ethically, I am looking for
An absolute endorsement of loving-kindness.
No loopholes except maybe mosquitoes.
Virtue and sin will henceforth be discouraged,
Along with suffering and martyrdom.
There will be no concept of infidels,
Consequently the faithful must entertain
Themselves some other way than killing infidels.

And so forth and so on. I understand
This piece of paper is going to be
Spattered with wine one night at a party
And covered over with newer pieces of paper.
That is how it goes with bulletin boards.
Nevertheless it will be there.

Like an invitation, a chalk pentangle,
It will emanate certain vibrations.

If something sacred wants to swoop from the universe
Through a ceiling, and materialize,
Folding its silver wings,
In a kitchen, and bump its chest against mine,
My paper will tell this being where to find me.

GROUP E

A PRISONER CANNOT GET HIMSELF/HERSELF OUT OF JAIL

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Invite a member of the group to read the text aloud in English.
- Take a few minutes for everyone to read it again quietly to themselves.
- Use the guiding questions below for reflections with the group.

Babylonian Talmud

The Talmud is the central text of Rabbinic Judaism and the primary source of Jewish religious law (halakha) and Jewish theology. The Talmud has two components: the Mishnah (circa year 200 CE,) a written compendium of Rabbinic Judaism's Oral Torah; and the Gemara (circa year 500 CE,) an elucidation of the Mishnah and related Tannaitic writings that often ventures onto other subjects and expounds broadly on the Hebrew Bible. The term "Talmud" may refer to either the Gemara alone, or the Mishnah and Gemara together.

Questions for Group Reflection

- How would you summarize this story?
- Why might sufferings be precious to people? Do you agree or disagree with this idea?
- How would you interpret "A prisoner cannot get himself/herself out of jail?"
- How might this text inform the work you do as a Jewish professional?

Babylonian Talmud Brachot 5b

R. Hiyya Bar Abba got sick.
R. Yohanan came to him.
R. Yohanan said, "Are your sufferings precious to you?"
R. Hiyya Bar Abba replied, "I don't want them nor do I want their reward."
Said Rabbi Yohanan, "Give me your hand."
He gave him his hand and Rabbi Yohanan raised him up (out of his sickness.)

R. Yohanan got sick.
R. Hanina came to him.
R. Hanina said to him, "Are your sufferings precious to you?"
R. Yohanan replied, "I don't want them nor do I want their reward."
Said R. Hanina, "Give me your hand."
He gave him his hand and Rabbi Hanina raised him up (out of his sickness.)
"Why so?" (says the anonymous voice of the Talmud)
"Rabbi Yohanan should have raised himself up!"
They say, "A prisoner cannot get himself/herself out of jail."

רבי חייא בר אבא חלש על לגביה רבי יוחנן אמר ליה חביבין עליך יסורין
אמר ליה לא הן ולא שכן אמר ליה הב לי ידך יהב ליה ידיה ואוקמיה
רבי יוחנן חלש על לגביה רבי חנינא אמר ליה חביבין עליך יסורין אמר
ליה לא הן ולא שכן אמר ליה הב לי ידך יהב ליה ידיה ואוקמיה
אמאי לוקים רבי יוחנן לנפשיה
אמרי אין חבוש מתיר עצמו מבית האסורים