

## “Big Word” Approach to Teaching Prayer for the High Holy Days

Lori Shaller and Rain Zohav

### SESSION SUMMARY

The session offered a technique for helping students to connect personally to the *Yamim Noraim* liturgy, using “Big Words” – words of our liturgy written large and responded to by each participant - so our students can connect deeply to our liturgy to feel truly connected to God. This technique allows you to explore with your students the underlying reasons why we pray.

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Rabbi Lori Shaller is the Co-Director of Educating for Spirituality, a program of ALEPH - Alliance for Jewish Renewal. She has written lessons on human trafficking for *Truah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights*. Her curriculum on Jewish Women in the Labor Movement was published by the Jewish Women’s Archive.

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Rabbi Rain Zohav has taught classes from pre-k through 8th grade and directed religious schools for twenty years. She has taught “Heschel’s Challenge to Jewish Educators” and “Teaching Tefillah.” Ordained in 2015 by ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, she is the Education Director of Shirat HaNefesh School and Co-Director of Educating for Spirituality, a program of ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal.

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This activity has been adapted from an activity originally created at Shakespeare & Company and then adapted by Actors Shakespeare Project.

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

- The Big Words of High Holy Days Prayer
- Markers for each student

### EVIDENCE OF UNDERSTANDING

- Each student will have an experience of spiritual connection as a measured by:
  - Observations and reflections of student’s participation and products by student and teacher.
  - Interpretations by student and teacher of student’s expressions of spirituality from student’s participation and products .
- Student will express a *kavanah* – an intention – for a prayer on the High Holy Days.

### ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS

With intentionality, every student can feel connected to an essence, being, universality, outside of her/himself. Students make meaning about the High Holy Days when they make some of the language their own.

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What does it take for you to feel connected to an essence, being, universality, outside of yourself?
- What is the meaning of the High Holy Days for you?

### PERFORMANCE TASK

Students will write and respond to “big words” about prayer. They will share their experiences and their words will be made into a Found Poem.

**LEARNING ACTIVITIES**

## 1. Guided imagery to move into the moment before uttering or offering up a prayer, (12 minutes)

- a. Quieting, centering, breathing, eyes closed if you choose.
- b. Begin to see yourself preparing to pray for the High Holy Days.
- c. What would be the ideal setting for you to pray for the High Holy Days? See yourself in that place now, preparing to pray.
- d. Connect to the feelings, consciousness, physicality of yourself in the prayer space.
- e. See if you connect to any essences – spiritual, universal, transcendence, magnitude, endlessness, Oneness, immanence, mindfulness – to or with whom or which you pray.
- f. Allow a prayer to form in your heart/mind, the prayer you need to offer during these coming High Holy Days services.
- g. Focus on your intention for offering this prayer. Be specific about what you want this prayer to do, the effect you hope it will have.
- h. In your heart/mind, offer this prayer and notice how that feels, what it evokes for you now, even before we've moved into the High Holy Days season.
- i. Hold onto this intention and the sensations you've experienced as you begin to transition back into this space. When you're ready, be present with your eyes open while remaining silent.

## 2. Big Words about High Holy Days Prayer (24 minutes)

Preparation: Strew the attached Big Words on the floor of the room facing in all directions.

Instruct participants to:

- Take a marker and walk about the room, writing a word or drawing an image on each paper you come to. Words don't need to be in English or even real words, if just some sound or number or random letters are what you are moved to write down. No matter if the same word appears on more than one piece of paper; allow yourself to respond to each word in the moment. Keep moving around until you've been able to respond to each paper, and then return to your seat. Please remain silent through this exercise.

Instruct participants to:

*Walk around the room and pick up the paper that you need in your hands at this moment. If someone gets to it first, find the next word that is calling to you.*

- Take six minutes now and write your response to the word on the back side of the paper of the word you're holding. You will be asked to share your responses. Consider the intention you set for the prayer you prayed earlier, the sensations, consciousness, feelings that were evoked for you in the guided imagery as you respond to the word before you.
- Now, please read your responses.  
*As participants read their responses, you record words and phrases on a piece of paper creating a found poem from their words and phrases.*
- Read back the found poem you create from their responses. (Collect papers after they are finished.)

## 3. Conclusion Circle (8 minutes)

- Share an impression/sensation/question/feeling/idea from the session.
- What do you know about the High Holy Days from this session?

**“BIG WORDS” ARE FOUND ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES.**

# MALCHUT

# ZICHRONOT

# SHOFAROT

# REPTENTANCE

# AVODAH

# TZEDEKAH



# TEFILLAH

# TESHUVAH

# YIZKOR

# YAMIM MORAIM

# ROSH HASHANAH

# YOM KIPPUR

# AL CHET

# FORGIVENESS



# SIN

# GATES

# MEMORY

# NEILAH

# SELACH LANU

# KAPER LANU