

Exploring Forgiveness in Community

By Yitzhak Bronstein, Moishe House Jewish Educator

SYNOPSIS: This program is a forgiveness practice to enable your community to tap into Yom Kippur's essential themes of repairing relationships and letting go. Over the course of approximately one hour, you will facilitate a conversation and a pair-sharing exercise in which participants take turns sharing responses to prompts on these themes. The program concludes with a community "tashlich"—a Yom Kippur ritual for letting go of past missteps and coming back to our true selves.



TIMETABLE:

1. **Ice breaker** (5-10 minutes) Yom Kippur is described as a joyful day where we are freed of our past missteps. What would you like to let go of this Yom Kippur?
2. **Framing** (10 - 15 minutes) A facilitated conversation around Yom Kippur as a joyful day. Does this resonate with your participants? Why or why not? Use the attached quotes as conversation starters.
3. **Pair Share** (15-20 minutes) Break up into pairs and allow each member of each pair 2-3 minutes to reply to each prompt.
4. **Reflection and Debrief** (10-20 minutes) Process the pair share exercise as one group.
5. **Ritual Conclusion: Tashlich** (5-10 minutes) Create a space for each member to finish this forgiveness practice by leaving something behind.

SETTING UP THE SPACE: Begin and conclude this exercise in a circle. For the pair share, try to create as much intimacy and privacy as the space allows.

Part 1: Framing Yom Kippur as a Day of Letting Go and Repairing Relationships

(10-20 minutes)

While we tend to view Yom Kippur as a rigid day filled with prohibitions, it is described in the Mishna (Ta'anit 4:8) as one of the most joyful days in the Jewish calendar. In that Mishna, Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel teaches that "There were no days of greater joy in Israel than on the 15th of Av [a festival celebrating love] and Yom Kippur." The rabbis of the Talmud (Ta'anit 30b) attribute the happiness of the day to the themes of forgiveness and letting go. Seemingly there is joy and lightness we can tap into through forgiveness, both by forgiving others and through being forgiven. Bringing this experience of release into your community can be an accessible entry point for your community into this key theme of Yom Kippur.

As a starting point for this experience, raise this idea of Yom Kippur being experienced as a day of joy. Ask if this is something which resonates with your community members. Is forgiveness (or Yom Kippur) something you associate with joy? Why or why not?

Beginning with this framing is key, since creating a space for a forgiveness practice can be quite delicate. Perhaps mention that Yom Kippur is a unique opportunity to let go and repair relationships by having intentional conversations which we otherwise would ignore. You can use either of these quotes as a starting point for a conversation about forgiveness and letting go.

**“Forgiveness, it has been said,
means giving up our hopes
for a better past.”**

-Alan A. Lew, *This Is Real and You Are Completely Unprepared:
The Days of Awe as a Journey of Transformation*

“It [Yom Kippur] is the day itself that is making us sit here and talk about the peculiar incident six months ago when you lied and I blustered and you accused me of insincerity and I made you cry, an incident that neither of us can quite forget but that we can’t quite mention either and which has been slowly corroding the trust and love we once had for one another. It is the day that has given us the opportunity, indeed the responsibility, to stop talking of our usual business and to reopen a case we pretended to have put out of our minds.”

-Alain de Bitton, *Religion for Atheists*

Part 2: Forgiveness Practice (20 minutes)

Before beginning the practice, it is important to set some guidelines so that participants feel comfortable opening up. Some suggestions include:

1. **Speak from the I.**
2. **Everything shared is confidential and must stay in the space unless explicit consent is granted.**

You may consider opening up to the room to see if there are requests for additional guidelines.

DIRECTIONS: Split the group of participants into pairs. For each prompt, one member of the pair will be the speaker and the other will be the listener. Only the speaker speaks and the listener's role is simply to listen with attention. After 2-3 minutes have passed, make an announcement that the roles will switch and now only the other member of the pair will speak.



Prompt 1:

Share a time in the past year that you have been hurt.



Prompt 2:

Share a time in the past year that you have hurt someone else.



Prompt 3:

Who have you had trouble forgiving, and who will you forgive now?

Part 3: Reflection and Debrief (10-20 minutes)

Come back as a circle to reflect as a group.
Potential questions to begin a conversation:

How did it feel to share answers to these prompts?

Which question was hardest to answer? Why?

Were you surprised by any of your answers?

Does this practice allow you insight into Yom Kippur as a day of joy? Why or why not?



Part 4: Ritual Conclusion: Tashlich (10-20 minutes)

Tashlich is a forgiveness ritual which takes place during the High Holy Days and involves symbolically throwing one's sins away into a body of water. If you can perform this program near a body of water, then great! If not, consider ways to end off the program through a ritual of letting go. One option is for each person to share, either to the entire group or silently to themselves, what they are letting go of this Yom Kippur. It could be interesting to have everyone share out loud at the same moment, so that the catharsis is experienced as a community! If you'd like to build a program with Tashlich at the core, you can find more resources and lots of useful programming ideas right [here](#).



Eating with Intention on Yom Kippur

By Ziva Swire, MHWOW Program Coordinator

One of the most well-known customs of Yom Kippur is to observe the holy day by fasting. During this fast, no food or drink is consumed from before sundown the night before Yom Kippur until after sundown on the day of Yom Kippur. Fasting is an opportunity for us to participate in the practice of self-awakening and discipline.



Did you grow up fasting on Yom Kippur? What kind of food was served to break the fast? Was it bagels and cream cheese or maybe tea and cake? Sticking to the traditions you practiced since childhood can be so meaningful, but making new ones can be great too! If you didn't grow up fasting or just want to try something different, we've created a Mindfulness Break-Fast program for you to share with your communities. We hope you can use this as an alternative to a traditional break-fast or in addition to. By facilitating this meaningful program, your participants should feel a heightened sense of self-awareness and an increased appreciation and gratefulness for food and what nourishes their body. Use this guide to engage your participants in discussion and teach them how to eat with intention.

SUGGESTED SHOPPING LIST:

- Your favorite break fast foods! We suggest foods with different textures and ones that are served both hot and cold
- Printed copies of the script (for a sit down dinner) or cut-out cards (for a come-and-go style meal)
- Candles
- Fresh flowers

CREATE YOUR SPACE

- Comfy pillows or seat cushions
- Soft lighting
- [Set the table](#)
- Add a vase of flowers and some candles for a simple centerpiece
- If you are using the cut-out cards, place them in the suggested locations



Part 1: Introduce Your Program

Having a sit-down dinner?

Proceed here.

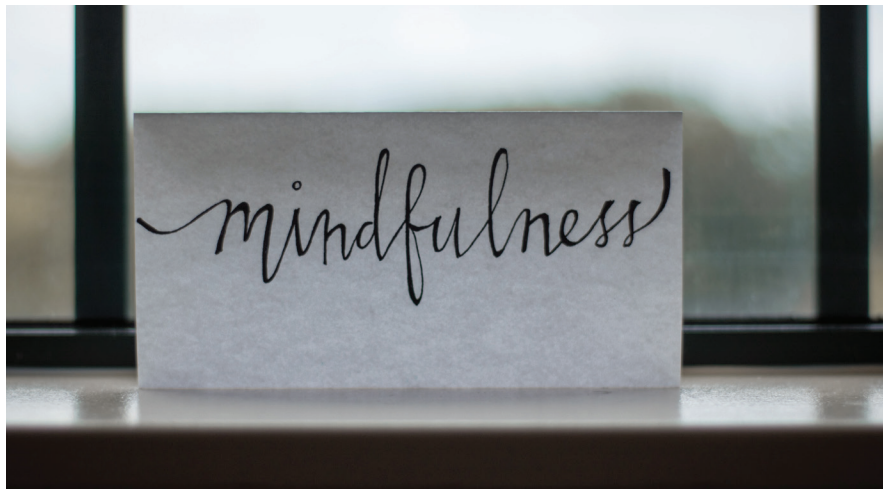


Is your break-fast more of a
come and go situation?

Proceed to page 9.

SIT DOWN: After your guests have arrived and made their plates, invite them to sit down at the table together. Begin by explaining mindful eating to your participants and that you will lead them in this activity to become more self-aware during this holy day of reflection.

Eating mindfully is a way to use all your senses as you eat and to become highly aware of the food on your plate. Having intention around eating and food can be helpful in many ways including increased awareness of food choices, enjoyment of and gratitude for food, and connectedness to the present moment. Let's begin!



Part 2: The Activity - Mindful Eating Script

*This script was adapted from [“The Mindful Eating Script”](#) by Christine Milovani, LCSW

We will start by connecting our breath with our bodies. I welcome you to close your eyes if you're comfortable to help focus your attention. Feel your feet on the ground and notice your experience in this moment. Notice any thoughts, sensations, or emotions you are experiencing. (Pause)

Bring your attention to how your body is feeling. Hungry, thirsty? What is your body hungry for? What is it thirsty for? Just notice the sensations that give you this information. (Pause)

I invite you to open your eyes and take a look at the plate in front of you. Pick up a bite of the first food you'd like to eat. Take a look at it and imagine that you are seeing it for the first time. Notice the color, the shape, the texture, and the size. (Pause)

Imagine what it took for this food to get to your plate: sunshine, water, time, processing, and shipping. You may choose to be aware of gratitude for everyone involved in the cultivation and preparation of this food. You may choose to bring in your own gratitude or blessing. (Pause)

Take the food and bring it toward your nose and smell with your full awareness. Notice if you have any memories, sensations, or reactions in your body. Even before you eat it, you may notice that you begin to feel your stomach rumble or your mouth watering just by noticing and smelling. Notice what it feels like to desire food. (Pause)

With full awareness of your hand moving toward your mouth, place the food into your mouth without chewing or swallowing it. Allow it to sit in your mouth, roll it around to different parts of your mouth and tongue. Notice the flavor and texture. Continue to breathe as you explore this food inside your mouth. (Pause)

Now take a bite and notice the flavor, notice the change of texture. Slowly begin to chew this food, and notice the parts of your mouth that are involved in chewing. You may want to close your eyes for a moment. Notice the sound and the movement of chewing. (Pause)

When you are ready, swallow the food and notice the path that it follows from your mouth and throat into your stomach. Notice the taste that may linger in your mouth. Connect again to your body and your breath and notice your experience in this moment. (Pause)

Next, I invite you to pick up another food item, and choose to eat it however you wish. Notice your choice and experience. Notice how it is similar or different. We're going to do this in silence and then continue with the rest of the meal. When we're finished, we'll discuss this experience.

Part 3: Discussion

After the meal, guide your participants in a discussion. Here are a few to get you started, but feel free to create more and see where your conversation goes!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

How was this experience the same or different from how you normally eat?

What, if anything, surprised you about the experience?

How was the intention of this exercise similar or different from fasting?

If you've fasted, how does this experience compare to the experience of fasting?

What thoughts or memories popped up while doing this exercise?

What is one tip for yourself that you might take from this experience to apply to your eating habits in the future?

What did this feel like to do this as part of a community?

COME AND GO STYLE:

Check out these printable cut-out cards! Cut on the dotted line and place in specified locations.

For the table with all the food:

As you make your plate, I invite you to participate in a mindful eating exercise to feel a heightened sense of self-awareness and an increased appreciation and gratefulness for food this Yom Kippur. Fasting is an opportunity for us to participate in the practice of self-awakening and discipline and this exercise will allow you to engage in these themes in a different or elevated way. Check out the cards on the table for instructions!

For the table(s) where your guests will eat:

1

Start by connecting your breath with your body. Feel your feet on the ground and notice your experience in this moment. Notice any thoughts, sensations, or emotions you are experiencing.

(PAUSE)

Bring your attention to how your body is feeling. Hungry, thirsty? What is your body hungry for? What is it thirsty for? Just notice the sensations that give you this information. (PAUSE)

2

Take a look at the plate in front of you. Pick up a bite of the first food you'd like to eat. Take a look at it and imagine that you are seeing it for the first time. Notice the color, the shape, the texture, and the size.

(PAUSE)

Imagine what it took for this food to get to your plate: sunshine, water, time, processing, and shipping. You may choose to be aware of gratitude for everyone involved in the cultivation and preparation of this food.

You may choose to bring in your own gratitude or blessing.

(PAUSE)

Card 3:

3

Take the food and bring it toward your nose and smell with your full awareness. Notice if you have any memories, sensations, or reactions in your body. Notice what it feels like to desire food.

(PAUSE)

With full awareness of your hand moving toward your mouth, place the food into your mouth without chewing or swallowing it. Allow it to sit in your mouth, roll it around to different parts of your mouth and tongue. Notice the flavor and texture. Continue to breathe as you explore this food inside your mouth.

(PAUSE)

Card 4:

4

Now take a bite and notice the flavor, notice the change of texture. Slowly begin to chew this food, and notice the parts of your mouth that are involved in chewing. You may want to close your eyes for a moment. Notice the sound and the movement of chewing.

(PAUSE)

When you are ready, swallow the food and notice the path that it follows from your mouth and throat into your stomach. Notice the taste that may linger in your mouth. Connect again to your body and your breath and notice your experience in this moment.

(PAUSE)

Card 5:

5

Pick up another food item and eat it however you wish. Notice your choice and experience. Notice how it is similar or different.

After you complete the exercise, discuss with the person next to you:

How was this experience the same or different from how you normally eat?

What, if anything, surprised you about the experience?

How was the intention of this exercise similar or different from fasting?
If you've fasted, how does this experience compare to the experience of fasting?

What thoughts or memories popped up while doing this exercise?

What is one tip for yourself that you might take from this experience to apply to your eating habits in the future?