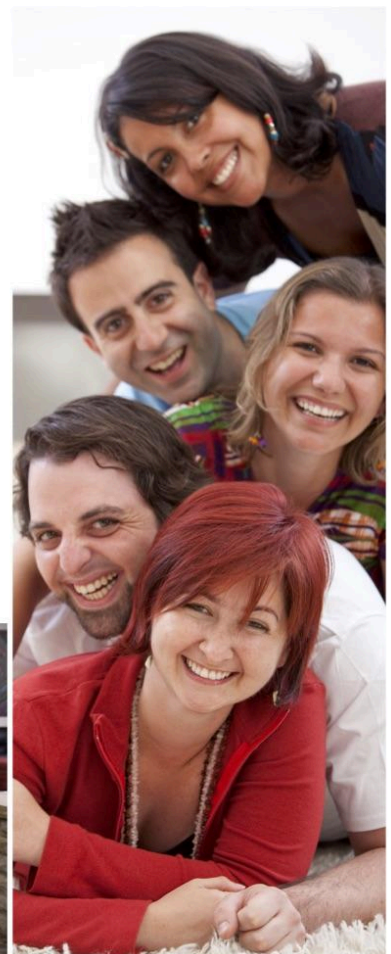




Always Improv'ing: Training Workshops

- ACTIVITIES FOR ALL AGES
- SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING
- JEWISH VALUES IN ACTION
- ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP SKILLS

The Bible
Players



BIBLE PLAYERS “MITZPROV” ACTIVITIES

Why, you ask, should we bring Improvisation into our communities? With the help of improvisational exercises, our spaces can become labs for *kavod* (כָּבוֹד, respect), *chesed* (חֶסֶד, kindness), creativity, and collaboration. When we improvise together we build a safe space for trust, inclusion, listening, and empathy. Building our emotional intelligence can transform our classrooms, bringing us together as a *Kehillah* (קְהִילָה, community).

The benefits of improvisation have been shown both anecdotally and scientifically:

1. MRI's by scientist Charles Limb have shown that while improvising the brain achieves a heightened state of awareness and self expression. Source: Peabody Magazine.
2. Studies have shown that with regular improv practice individuals can lower their levels of anxiety and improve their communication skills. Source: Forbes Magazine.

Studying Jewish values is good, and putting them into action is even better. Through improv activities we can get on our feet and practice living out our Jewish Values like *Hachnasat Orchim* (הַכְנָסַת אוֹרְחִים) (Welcoming guests). When we improvise we have to show respect (כָּבוֹד) and listen, following the *sh'ma* (שְׁמַע), otherwise the activities won't work.

The Jewish Improv exercises in the following pages are fun, but they're so much more than that. They are a means to help participants develop social-emotional skills with their peers, and give them the tools to make their Jewish Values meaningful to them. Games are not something to avoid, they are a tool we can use to make learning engaging, memorable and exciting-- adding *ruakh* (רוּחַ/spirit)!

So, are you ready to start *improv-ing*?

Emotional Entrances:

In this social-emotional exercise, the facilitator instructs participants, “In a moment I will ask you to stand up, we’ll all crouch down into a ball. Then I will state an emotion, or Feeling Word, and we will each pop up exhibiting that emotion, not just on our face but with our whole bodies. I’ll start and then I will ask for suggestions. The first emotion is-- confused. Everyone crouch down...1, 2, 3-- Confused!” The facilitator then gets some suggestions from the crowd. This gets participants up and moving and expressing emotions in a controlled, healthy way. *The ability to accurately recognize one’s emotions/thoughts and their influence on behavior is the foundation of S.E.L.*
Mitzvah: בִּינָה / *Binah*/Understanding; קְהִילָה / *Kehillah* / Community, Ages 5+

“Todah Rabbah”/ תּוֹדָה רַבָּה / “Thank you very much”:

In this two-person activity, Person 1 says “I got you a gift” and mimes handing a gift to Person 2, who mimes receiving the gift and first says “*Todah Rabbah*” and names what the gift is, “Thank you for the Turtle” or “Thank you for the flashlight.” Next, Person 1 then explains why they got that gift saying, “I know your rabbit ran away so I wanted to get you a slower pet” or “I got you a flashlight because you’re so good at telling ghost stories.” The next round the partners switch roles and play again with a new gift and a new explanation. Play 5-6 times before group reflection: How did it feel to give/receive? Improv is about listening and giving “gifts” to our scene partners.

Mitzvah: חֶסֶד / *Chesed* / Kindness; *kavod*/כְּבוֹד/respect, Ages: 5+

(Adapted from “Business Improv” by Val Gee & Sarah Gee)

Kvetch or “Speech”

Since the Israelites left Egypt and immediately starting complaining to Moses, the Jewish people have loved to complain-- or, in Yiddish, *Kvetch*! Participants stand in a circle and begin each round by quietly chanting, “Kvetch, Kvetch, Kvetch.” One brave volunteer (or simply go in order, around the circle) steps into the middle and becomes the Speaker. They loudly say, “I am sick and tired of...” At this point anyone from the circle raises their hand and if they’re called upon, suggests a simple topic for the Speech. The 2 rules: no people/groups of people and it must be something simple (such as, “Bagels” “Trees,” “Ears”). The Speaker in the middle loudly repeats the suggested word (“Trees!”) and everyone cheers. Then the Speaker lists 3 qualities about that word (trees) that they pretend to be “sick and tired of.” Everyone cheers “Yeah” after each one. For example, “Trees!” “Yeah!”... “They’re tall” “Yeah!”... “They need sunlight” “Yeah!”... “And I can’t climb up them” “Yeah!”

After the third complaint, everyone applauds as the Speaker rejoins the circle, the crowd begins chanting “Kvetch” again and the cycle repeats.

The goal for those around the circle is to support the Speaker. The common fear of public speaking is really a fear of judgment from others and this activity eliminates that--no judgment, just support. And for the Speaker, we practice speaking up when it's silly and low stakes so that when the time comes to speak up for something actually important, we all have practice.

Mitzvah: קהילה / *Kehillah* / Community; *kavod*/כבוד/respect, Ages 8+
(Learned from the Magnet Theater)

“Anachnu”/ אַנַּחְנוּ / “We Are”:

In this activity participants take turns raising their hands and when called upon saying, “*Anachnu* Ducks,” or “*Anachnu* Baseball Players.” Everyone then has to support the suggestion by acting like “Ducks” or “Baseball Players” or whatever the suggestion was. After about 10 seconds the leader says, “Freeze” and everyone has to stop moving and raise their hand if they have a new idea. This teaches participants to support each other's ideas and build community. It can be focused on vocab for any specific holiday or unit (“*Anachnu* hamantaschen/groggers/Esther”) and teach Hebrew vocabulary (“*Anachnu* oznei Haman / *ra'ashanim*...”).

Mitzvah: קהילה / *Kehillah* / Community, Ages 4+

SuperMensch (Names/Sounds):

Participants stand in a circle, Leader explains the meaning of mensch as someone who helps others and listens, like a superhero. Each of us can be a supermensch. The Leader loudly says his/her name with a movement (e.g., “Aaron!” and hula dance, or head-scratch, or hands on hips). Everyone else in the circle copies the Leader, then we proceed to the left of the Leader, all the way around the circle until everyone has an opportunity to say his/her name. If a participant is scared or struggling, encourage them to say their name with a Hand Wave or a Thumbs Up. You may repeat the game with Sounds, gibberish word/noise (e.g., “Moo!” and patting one's belly; “Zoink!” and Thumbs Up).

Mitzvah: שְׁמָע / *Sh'ma*/ Listening skills, Ages: 5+

Miriam's Moves

This dance party game follows the example of Miriam, who led the Israelites in song and dance as they walked to Freedom during the Exodus from Egypt (*Yitzi'at Mitzrayim*, Exodus 15:20-27).

The Facilitator brings 3-5 volunteers onstage to take turns being “Miriam”, a.k.a., the Leader. The audience stands and the Facilitator plays music and every 10 seconds points to a different “Miriam” (or places a hand over their head) and that “Miriam” leads everyone in one simple dance move (e.g., the running man, or swimming).

A modification: The “Israelites” stand in 2 parallel lines as “Miriam” walks down the center aisle doing a dance move. The “Israelites” copy, then switch to a new “Miriam” at the end of the lines.

It’s a fun reminder that for generations, Jews have celebrated through dance!
Mitzvah: קהילה / *Kehillah* / Community; רוּחַ / *ruakh* / spirit, Ages 4+

“Gam Anee” / גַּם אֲנִי / “Also me”:

A version of *A Strong Wind Blows*. Participants stand in a circle, with the Leader in the Middle. The Leader says a statement that is true for them (e.g., “ My name is _____, I was born in New Jersey”, or “I love sushi”), and any participant that agrees with that statement says, “Gam Anee” (גַּם אֲנִי) and they walk through the middle to a different spot in the circle. Like musical chairs, the last participant to walk through the middle remains there and makes a new statement that is true for them (e.g., “I’ve been to Israel” or “I have 2 sisters”).

Mitzvah: קהילה / *Kehillah* / Community, Ages 7+

Sh’ma News!

This game is focused on creativity and listening skills. Person 1 invents a silly news headline, “Sh’ma News: Monkeys are driving cars!” and Person 2 takes **1 word** from the headline and creates their own headline: “Sh’ma News: My brother bought a car made of chocolate!” And they continue back and forth. This can be played with 2+ participants.

Mitzvah: שְׁמָע / *Sh'ma* / Listening skills, Ages 7+

Hineini / הִנְנִי / “Here I am”

This grounding exercise is a great way to begin any class. Participants stand in a circle. The first volunteer walks over to Person #1 and says, “Hi. I’m [name].” Person #1 responds in kind. Then the volunteer says, “*Hineni*.” Person #1 responds in kind, then they each walk over to two new people and repeat. This continues to grow until everyone in the circle has said “*Hineini*.” This helps us become present to our group--- in addition to being physically present, we are also mentally and emotionally present, ready to learn and grow and respect one another. No cell phones, no screens, just one

another. Like Abraham (Genesis/Breisheet 22:1) and Moses (Exodus/Shmot 3:4) who spoke this phrase when God called out to them, we are present and ready to engage.

Mitzvah: קהילה / *Kehillah*/ Community, *kavod* (כבוד, respect), Ages 8+

“Mazel Tov, Oy Vey!”

A version of “Yay/Boo!” ... great for a group of 3 to 20... This is a story-telling game that cycles from Positive to Negative... Person 1 says a positive thing (“Today I got a puppy!”), Person 2 finds a negative aspect (“But the puppy hurt its paw”), then Person 3 finds a positive (“But my friend is a veterinarian!”)... After each positive statement, the whole group shouts “Mazel Tov!” After each negative statement, the whole group shouts, “Oy Vey!”

In life we can choose to focus on the Negatives or the positives... and if we can laugh at the Negatives (“Oy vey!”), it will alleviate the pain.

Mitzvah: שְׁמַע / *Sh'ma*/ Listening; קהילה / *Kehillah* / Community, Ages 7+

Aleph, Bet, Go! / א', ב', ג' :

On the board, write a Hebrew word (e.g., “shalom”). Divide learners into 2 teams, with equal numbers. Have teams line up parallel, in single file. The leader will whisper any Hebrew letter from the word (e.g., “final mem”-- not in order) to the “caboose” of each line, then say “Go!” and the caboose will use their finger to trace the word on the back of the teammate in front of them. The teammate may say “Again” if they wish to have the caboose repeat the motion.

Once the teammate thinks they know the letter, s/he traces it on the back of the person in front of him/her, and it continues down the line, till the person at the head of the line shouts out the letter. Each team can shout out only once. If they get it wrong, the other team can still shout it out. Repeat until there is just one letter left in the word. You may also start with the English version of the word (e.g., “peace”), until the learners get used to it. This can be applied to any unit, or multiple words (e.g., “Shalom Bayit” or “Chag Sameach”).

Mitzvah: יצירה / *Yitzirah*/ Creativity, Ages 6+

Abraham’s Angels:

Five volunteers are needed. Two volunteers act as Abraham & Sarah, they will be the Guessers. They go out of earshot so as not to hear the suggestions. Three Angels will be chosen and given unique character traits suggested by the audience (e.g., one angel acts like an Animal, another angel is playing a sport; the third angel has

a profession, “He’s a cat”, “She’s a gym teacher”). Once all the traits are chosen, Sarah & Abraham are brought back to welcome the Angels into their home, one at a time, while trying to figure out what’s unique about them. When Sarah and Abraham guess the different traits of each Angel, each Angel sits down. Start by introducing each Angel one at a time, only welcoming the next angel once the previous angel has sat down.

Mitzvah: הַכְנָסַת אֹרְחִים / *Hachnasat Orchim*/ welcoming guests, Ages 8+

(Adapted from “Party Quirks”- *Whose Line is it Anyway*)

Bestie/Bashert:

Bashert is a Yiddish word meaning “soulmate”. This activity is about finding a few soulmates-- or best friends-- of one lucky participant, and discovering that we have more in common than we realize.

The Facilitator chooses a participant who comes onstage and turns so their back is towards the audience. The entire audience stands up. The Facilitator proceeds to make ‘THIS or THAT’ statements, holding up ONE arm or TWO arms... like “Number One-- tea or Number Two-- hot cocoa!”

Then everyone in the audience will hold up either ONE arm or TWO, for what they prefer. After a moment, the participant holds up their answer. Any audience member who holds up the SAME number of arm(s) as the participant remains standing. Anyone who has a different number will sit down. We narrow it down and eventually see who is the participant’s BESTIE-BASHERT!

[End the game when they are 2-3 people left, don’t want to risk having nobody... Even if there are still +10 participants left, after 3 minutes, wrap it up.]

Mitzvah: קְהִילָה / *Kehillah*/ Community, Ages 8+

Opinion Thermometer :

Everyone stands up and enters in the “middle of a spectrum” (younger participants: “thermometer”) facing the Leader. One wall (to the Left) is “Hot”/“They completely agree”, and the opposite wall (to the Right) is “Cold”/ “completely disagree.” The Leader is standing exactly in the middle of the two temperatures. The Leader makes a statement (“Dogs are the best pet ever!”) and participants go stand by one wall if they agree completely, the other if they disagree completely, and anywhere in between, depending on their opinion. Then the Leader can ask any participant if they would like to share why they chose to stand in their spot. Then the Leader makes a new statement. The statements can refer to a holiday (“Passover is the most important Jewish holiday!”) or a story you are studying (“David was a good king”), and can be adjusted for more complex discussions (“Every Jew should live in Israel”).

If peer pressure is a concern, you may have all the learners stand on a line, shoulder to shoulder, facing the Leader. If they agree, take a step forward (towards the Leader), if they disagree, take a step backwards. This way the participants cannot see what their peers are doing. After the activity, discuss how participants' opinions changed, what they considered differently as the activity progressed.

Mitzvah: בִּינָה / *Binah*/Understanding; *kavod*/כְּבוֹד/ respect, Ages 8+

(Adapted from *Kolot Chayeinu* and *Matan*)

“Mah Koreh?”/מָה קוֹרֶה? / “What’s Happening?”:

In this circle game, participants stand in a circle. The first volunteer enters the Center and acts something out (e.g., “Disco dancing”). After 3-5 seconds, someone taps the volunteer on the shoulder and asks “*Mah Koreh?*” (“What’s happening?”). The person in the middle says a new action (e.g., “I’m riding a horse;”) and the person who tapped must then start doing that action, while the other person returns to the circle. This can be played after a holiday unit (“I’m lighting the shabbat candles”, “I’m searching for the Afikoman”) or modified so participants must use one hebrew word in their description (“I’m washing a *kelev*/dog”, “I’m petting a *chatoole*/cat”). It can be done in order, or anyone may tap the person in the Center. People standing in the Circle may add sound effects. Important rule before beginning, in order to keep the game appropriate, remind participants, “**Keep suggestions out of the bedroom and the bathroom.**”

Mitzvah: יְצִירָה / Creativity/ *Yetzirah*, Ages 10+

Helpful Hints:

The Facilitator gets 2 volunteers, then gets a suggestion of a hobby/activity, and a letter of the alphabet (e.g., “T” as in “today” and “Hiking”).

Then 1 volunteer thinks of 3 words, each starting with the letter “T”, and the other volunteer will share one sentence how that “T” word is a helpful hint for Hiking.

Remember-- the “T” Words shouldn’t connect to the activity at all-- just 3 words that start with “T” (examples: “Tomato”... “It’s important to have some healthy snacks when hiking-- bring a tomato!”) .

Mitzvah: יְצִירָה / Creativity/ *Yetzirah*, & Ages 10+

Hands-on Jewish Expert:

Two volunteers are brought on stage. Person A will play the Expert with their hands behind their back and Person B will act as their hands (sticks hands through

Person A's armpits). The Leader then gets a suggestion from the crowd for a topic (Jewish holiday, Biblical story), or the Expert can pretend to be a character from the Bible/story that is being studied! The Leader interviews them about it. Note: We recommend keeping volunteers the same gender because of the physical interactions in this activity.

Mitzvah: קהילה / *Kehillah*/ Community, Ages 8+

4 in 1:

Optional: pencils and paper. In groups of 4, participants will have 5-7 minutes to talk as a group and come up 4 things they all have in common, and 4 things that make each of them unique in their group (e.g., "We've all been to the Statue of Liberty... Only I have a pet turtle"). So each group will end up with 8 items total, 4 shared, and 1 unique fact from each person. Then have the groups share their responses with the whole room. This helps connect us as a community, but also acknowledges our individuality.

Mitzvah: קהילה / *Kehillah*/ Community, Ages 10+

(Adapted from Georgetown Facilitation Program, Rae Ringel, Maya Bernstein)

Hands-On Sh'ma/ שְׁמָע:

Recite the first line of the Sh'ma with quasi-sign language. The 1st rule of Improv is "Always listen", just like the meaning of the word "Sh'ma." Normally we cover our eyes to recite this prayer, but in this version we keep our eyes (and our minds) open, as we learn that listening can be done with our eyes and hands, fully engaged, as well as our ears! [YouTube: Hands-On Sh'ma!](#) (or search "Shema Bible Players")

Mitzvah: שְׁמָע / Sh'ma/ Listening, Ages 6+

Oseh Shalom (עוֹשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם) Walk-Around:

A walking around activity, a great way to introduce "Barukh she'amar," end the Amidah, the Birchot ha'Shachar, "Oseh Shalom" or the whole service. The leader instructs the participants: "This will be a 4-part activity, beginning silently. First, please silently walk around the room and don't make eye contact with anyone.... Okay, keep walking, keep your expression the same, only now make eye contact with others... Okay, keep walking, now make eye contact and smile at others... Okay, now smile, wave and say "Shalom!" to others... Okay, please stop. How did you feel when no one made eye contact? How about when people smiled at you? Or enthusiastically said "Shalom" to you? This shows us the power of our eyes, our smiles, our words. Let us all try to make more peace, more "shalom," in this world today.

Mitzvah: שלום / *Shalom*/ Peace, Ages 6+

Amidah (עמידה) Ancestors Walk:

This is a great activity to use during Tefillot when leading into the “Amidah” (עמידה) service. This helps to feel connected to our own family, as well as the matriarchs and patriarchs mentioned in the first section (Avraham, Yitzhak, Yaakov, Sarah, Rivka, Rachel, and Leah).

The leader asks participants to slowly and silently walk around the room, which they do for the duration of this activity. After a few moments, the leader says, “Now imagine your parents walking behind you. They’re not breathing down your neck, just silently walking a few paces behind you.” After a few moments, the leader says, “Now imagine your grandparents are walking behind your parents. Maybe you’ve never met them, but there they are.” After a few more moments, the leader says, “Now imagine your great-grandparents are added to the group. Maybe you’ve never seen them, in person, think of photos or imagine them.” After a few additional moments, the leader says, “Now imagine your oldest relative that you know of, maybe you’ve never even seen a picture of them, but imagine they are following your great grandparents, who are following your grandparents, following your parents... who are following you... your relatives crossed oceans and continents and survived so that you could be here today, right now.”

Mitzvah: דור לדור / *Dor L’Dor* / Generation to Generation, Ages 10+

(Adapted from the Jewish Theological Seminary)

Categories:

A circle game that teaches us to listen and think simultaneously. One person chooses a Category (e.g., colors), and the person to her left names color (e.g., “Yellow”). Then each person goes around the circle and names a color. The round ends when someone cannot think of one, or repeats a color. This person isn’t called “out,” instead she gets to be the new leader, gets to think of the next category (e.g., Hanukkah words), stands in the center of the circle and keeps the beat for others if you want to play the more challenging way. To make it more challenging, try keeping a beat (hit your knees twice, then snap. Think of Queen’s song “*We Will Rock You*”). Answers must be given on the snap/beat. If someone can’t answer on the beat, they become the next “leader.” **NOTE:** Can include a balloon-- a participant must tap the balloon in the air when they speak-- if the balloon touches the ground, you must pick a new category.

Mitzvah: אֶמֶץ לֵב / *Ometz Lev*/ Courage, Ages 10+(adapted-Cherub Improv)

Bible Players Rap Game:

The circle game is based on the rhyming style of those lovely Brooklyn Jewish fellas, the Beastie Boys! They would often end a verse by saying the same rhyming word in unison. The chorus is just 4 beats of “The Bible Players, The Bible Players”, as slow or fast as you like. The leader has a volunteer think of a one-syllable word (e.g., cat), everyone takes 10 seconds to think of a few rhyming words in their heads. The leader starts the first verse, “I really love my cute pet *cat*” and everyone says “cat” together. Then the chorus, followed by the next person in the circle improvising the second rhyming verse, “When I play ball I use a *bat*,” (everyone says “bat” together), then the chorus, and so on. The idea is to telegraph to your circle mates what your rhyme will be, so that they can all say it together. This game teaches us to listen and think at the same time, and forgive ourselves and others for making mistakes (perfect for the High Holidays/ יָמִים נֹרָאִים / *Yamim nora'im*).

Mitzvah: שְׁמַע / *Sh'ma*/ Listening; רוּחַ / *ruakh*/spirit Ages 10+ (Adapted from The Magnet Theater)

Five Sense Gratitude/ “Modeh/Modah Ani” / “מוֹדֶה/מוֹדָה אֲנִי”

A great meditation for the opening, morning prayer, this is an appreciation of our 5 senses. Ask participants to think of 1 thing they appreciated seeing today/recently, ask a few to share. Then think of 1 thing they smelled that was good... And so on, for taste, touch, and hearing. We often take things for granted and this helps us stop, appreciate our abilities and gifts. That's what a *b'racha*/blessing does-- it allows us to pause. Now let's say Thank you. Gratitude is the attitude! Ages 5+

Mitzvah: תּוֹדָה רַבָּה / *Todah Rabah*/ expressing thanks

Vision Circles (esp. For Rosh Hashana/ ראש השנה):

Looking back at the year ahead! In groups of 3, we each share our vision of the coming year. We take turns speaking, reflecting on why the coming year will be so great, but *as if it's already happened*. We usually connect it to ראש השנה / Rosh Hashana, but can be to the beginning of a new semester or the closest Jewish holiday (e.g., “It's Passover 2024 and it's been a great year...”). For 2-3 minutes, the speaker proceeds, describing all the amazing things that occurred. The 2 circle-mates just listen, no facial reactions or nodding. A facilitator keeps time, gives a 20-second warning, then will indicate when time is up. The two listeners high-five the speaker, then a new

speaker begins with the same phrase (“It’s ראש השנה/Rosh Hashana 2024, and it’s been a great year...”), helping us see the coming year as one of possibilities!

Mitzvah: אמונה / *Emunah* / Conviction, Ages 11+ (Adapted from the Georgetown University Facilitation Program)

Rock, Paper, Scissors...Champion!:

In this activity everyone begins playing Rock, Paper, Scissors in pairs. When one person wins, the loser begins chanting their name and becoming their cheerleading section. The winner plays another winner in Rock, Paper, Scissors. Whoever wins now absorbs the other player’s cheerleaders, who now chant the winner’s name. This continues until there is one final champion and everyone chants their name.

Mitzvah: קהילה / *Kehillah*/ Community; רוּחַ/ *ruakh*/spirit, Ages 7+ (Origin unknown)

Pirkei Avot Commercials:

Divide learners into groups of 3-5. Give each group a verse from Pirkei Avot/ “Ethics of the Sages”. The group has 4-5 minutes to discuss its meaning and how they would like to interpret it, in order to create a 30-second commercial. Then the groups take turns performing their commercial for the other groups.

For example: “Who is strong? One who controls his/her impulses.” The group could have a spokesperson say, “Drink this new Pirkei Avot Fruit Punch and you won’t lose your temper anymore. See before--” Person A sees Person B eating cookies, decides to steal the cookies, Person B cries. “But watch what happens when Person A drinks our Punch!” Person A then goes to Person B, wants to steal the cookies, instead she asks to have one. Person B shares and says, “Wow, you are really strong! I know you wanted them. Thank you for controlling your impulses.” Person A says, “Thank you, Pirkei Avot Punch!” A commercial can also simply be a sketch/scene, no need to actually invent a product. Here are the [Pirkei Avot Cards](#) for downloading.

Mitzvah: חוכמה / *Chochma*/Wisdom, Ages 8+ (Created by Aaron Friedman & Andrew Davies)

The Wise Rabbis:

4 to 6 volunteers stand in a semi circle facing a larger crowd. The crowd is told these wise rabbis know the answer to every question in the world. The crowd asks a question and the rabbis answer by each rabbi saying one-word-at-a-time, repeating the question and then answering. The answer is over when a rabbi claps *instead* of adding a word and says “Amen.” All the Rabbis bow and say “Amen.” For example if the crowd asked, “What’s the meaning of life?” The rabbis might say, “The, meaning, of, life, is, to,

always, wear, deodorant, and, be, friendly, amen!" The rabbis take 2-5 questions total and then get a new set of rabbis.

Mitzvah: שְׁמַע / *Sh'ma*/ Listening, Ages 8+ (Adapted from Bob Bedore book)

Israeli Film:

In this performance activity four volunteers stand in front of the group. Two "actors" stand side by side, center stage, facing the audience. Two "translators" stand on the far side of each actor, facing them, sideways to the audience. The audience gives a suggestion of a Hebrew word (e.g., shalom/שָׁלוֹם) and a made-up English movie title. For instance, "The Dog is Gone" or "The Final Cookie." The host then says, "Let's see that award-winning climactic scene from the Israeli movie, 'The Final Cookie.'" One actor then speaks one line of dialogue-- but can only say the chosen Hebrew word ("shalom") over and over again, with lots of miming. At the end of their sentence both actors freeze. The translator closest to them translates that sentence into English while the actor stays frozen. The actors then unfreeze and the *other* actor speaks one line using that same Hebrew word, then freezes, and then *their* translator translates. This continues until the host ends the activity with applause. The more dramatic and emotional the actors are the better.

Mitzvah: יִצְרָה / *Yetzirah*/ Creativity, Ages 9+ (Adapted from Cherub Improv)

"Antiochus Says"/ "Haman Says"/ "Pharaoh Says"

Imagine "Simon Says" turned on its head! The Speaker acts as the villain in any of the classic Jewish holidays tales (Antiochus for Hanukkah; Haman for Purim, Pharaoh for Passover).

"I will pretend to be Antiochus! I will give commands to all you Maccabees (participants). However, you will do the OPPOSITE of the command, since you rebel against cruel tyrants like me." The Speaker can get more annoyed after each one. And the participants can get creative, deciding what the opposite of "Hands on Head" could be-- there's not one answer.

(Good Examples: *Act like a cat/dog; Everyone cry/laugh; go to sleep/ wake up; arms at your sides/wave your arms; be serious/silly; open your eyes/close 'em; nobody dance/everybody dance; be a frozen statue/shake your arms and legs...And end with: Nobody clap!!*)

Then open it up to all participants to be the Leader and share one.

Mitzvah: יִצְרָה / *Yetzirah*/Creativity, שְׁמַע / *Sh'ma*/ Listening, Ages 4+ (Created by Aaron Friedman & Andrew Davies)

Trivia Fingers:

The facilitator asks Jewish trivia questions, but the answers are all between zero and ten. Participants answer by simply raising the correct number of fingers. (e.g., How many books are in the Torah?... Which commandment is about Shabbat?... How many Olympic gold medals did Mark Spitz win at the '72 Olympics?). The facilitator gives shout-outs to people who guess correctly (e.g., 5; 4; 7).

Mitzvah: חוכמה/ Chochmah/Wisdom, Ages 4+

Vacation Slideshow:

In this activity one person is the presenter and two people are the slideshow. The host gets a suggestion of where the presenter went on vacation such as, "Paris," "The Bahamas," or "The Grand Canyon." The presenter then says, "Let me tell you about my trip to Paris, Click." When they say "click" they will push an imaginary button in their hand and the two other performers will freeze in a pose. The presenter will then explain what image we're looking at until s/he says "Click" and the performers change to a new pose. For instance, "Click, (performers freeze), here's my mom and dad a little scared about going in the water. They're both afraid of sharks. Click." This continues until the host applauds and ends the activity. The poses need not relate to each other-- it is the host's job to make sense of the poses.

Mitzvah: שְׁמַע / Sh'ma/ Listening, Ages 8+

Name & Activity:

In this activity the group of 20 or less stands in a circle. One at a time each person says their own name and a free-time activity/hobby they love to do. For example, "Rachel, Swimming" or "Daniel, Bowling". They act out their activity with a motion while saying it. Everyone in the circle repeats after each person. Then after reviewing a 2nd time you begin to pass the energy around by saying your own name and activity, and then someone else. So Daniel could start and say, "Daniel Bowling, Isaac Tennis." Then Isaac might say, "Isaac Tennis, Miriam Painting."

Mitzvah: קהילה / Kehillah/ Community, Ages 7+

Shabbat Tag:

Pick 3 or 5 students to help demonstrate the elements of Shabbat: 1 or 2 challot (bread), 1 or 2 candles and 1 kiddush cup. Tagger(s) will run around and when participants are tagged they must put their feet together and become a candle (hands straight up) or a challah (hands twisted/wound together) or a kiddush cup (hands curved to either side). When participants are tagged they must only hop till they can combine all

3 (or 5) elements in a circle saying “Shabbat Shalom” as they gather. Once they have all the elements, they put their hands together in the middle, making a Havdalah candle, they say “Shavua Tov” (“a good week”, said at the end of Shabbat) and are free to run until they’re tagged again.

Mitzvah: שַׁבָּת / Shabbat, Ages 4+

(Created by Andrew Davies)

Hanukkah Tag:

A fun, active way to learn about the shamash and number of candles for each night!

Before each round, the Tagger (labeled the “Adult”) will declare which night of Hanukkah it will be (e.g., the 3rd night). Then the Tagger runs around and when people are tagged they must put their feet together and become a Hanukkah candle (Hands straight up). They must then only hop until they can gather together in a group of 4, (one candle for each night, plus the *shamash* /helper candle). This completes the hanukkiah. Then the tallest person in the group is the shamash and high fives (“lights”) each of the other candles, and they all say “Chag sameach” (“Happy Holiday!”... or “Happy Hanukkah” or “Hanukkah sameach/ Chag Oorim Sameach”).

Then they are free to run around again. At the start of the next round, a new Tagger is picked and a different night of Hanukkah.

An optional component-- as a complete Hanukkiah, the shamash can mime taking a selfie, fulfilling “*hidoor mitzvah*”/publicizing the miracle.”

Mitzvah: קְהִילָה / *Kehillah* / Community, Ages 5+

(Created by Aaron Friedman & Andrew Davies)

Shofar Jump... “Stop/Go/Jump/Clap”...

Everyone begins by walking around the room. When the Leader shouts out an order “Stop/Go/Jump/Clap”, the followers do so. Then the Leader announces they will do the opposite: Stop will mean Go, Go will mean Stop, etc.

ROSH HASHANA: Then the Leader shouts out **Shofar** blasts. *Tekiyah*= they hop once. *Sh’vareem*= they hop 3 times, *Tru’ah*= 9 hops. *Tekiyah Gedolah*= Silly dance break for 5 seconds.

Mitzvah: Higher level thinking/listening; שְׁמָע / Sh’ma/ Listening, Ages 3+ (Created by Aaron Friedman & Andrew Davies)

Mirror Game

In this classic improv game, one person acts something out and their partner serves as their mirror, copying their actions exactly. We encourage participants to go slowly-- the goal is NOT to make your partner mess up, but rather, for a passerby to be unable to distinguish who is leading and who is mirroring. To be as close to in sync with one another as possible. Listening, not with our ears, but with our eyes and whole bodies. Some prompts could be “playing a certain sport,” “your hobby,” “a day at school,” or “preparing for dinner.”

Mitzvah: שְׁמָעַ / Sh'ma/ Listening, Ages 6+

Israel / America (or TV/Torah):

The Bible Players' version of the bat-mitzvah game “Coke or Pepsi.” The leader divides the participants into pairs, and lines up participants facing their partner, standing on opposite sides of the room. The leader designates one side of partners as “Israel” and the opposite side as “America.” Whenever the leader yells out a place or word associated with Israel (e.g., “Tel Aviv” or “Falafel” or “Massada”) the partner on the “America” side must run to their partner’s side and sit on their knee/high five them. When the leader yells a word associated with America (“San Francisco” or “fried chicken” or “Grand Canyon”), the “Israel” side must run to the “America” side. One to three pairs can be eliminated per run. Game ends when there are 1-5 pairs left... judgment call. Whenever there is a critical mass of participants watching, rather than running. This can also be done with celebrities.

Mitzvah: בִּינָה / Binah/Understanding, Ages 6+

(Adapted from “Coke/Pepsi” by Aaron Friedman & Andrew Davies)

“Mishpacha”/ “Mishpukha”/Family

This simple ice breaker builds community through relatives with common names. The leader stands up and begins naming relatives they have (e.g., “I have a cousin named Maya, I have a cousin named Shuli...”). The leader continues to name relatives and their relationship to the leader. As soon as any participant in the crowd has a relative with the *same name* as the speaker’s, that person stands up and shouts “Mishpacha!” (“Family”), then everyone repeats “Mishpacha!” as if they’re seeing a relative after a long hiatus! The leader sits and the participant remains standing and begins naming relatives (“I have an uncle named Gary. I have an aunt named Shira”) until a new participant stands up... TIP: Start with more obscure names and, only if nobody else has relatives with those names, start sharing more common names (e.g., Rachel, David, etc.).

Mitzvah: קְהִלָּה / Kehillah / Community, Ages 5+

A,B,C scenes

This classic improv game begins with the Facilitator getting 2 volunteers, a relationship (e.g., roommates; boss-employee) and a Jewish *simcha* or holiday (e.g., a wedding; Shabbat dinner). The two volunteers create a scene wherein they have the relationship and it takes place at the event. The challenge is that each sentence they speak must begin with the subsequent letter of the alphabet. We recommend limiting it to 1 sentence per person per turn. You stop after 2 minutes or when you reach a certain letter. The game may begin with any letter of the alphabet.

Hint: When stuck on a letter, try names (e.g., Xavier, Yolanda, Zack, Katey).

Mitzvah: בִּינָה / *Binah*/Understanding, שְׁמָע / *Sh'ma*/ Listening, Ages 8+

(Adapted from *Who's Line Is It Anyway*)

B'Yachad ("All together")

Also known as, "mindmeld", this activity is ideal for 3-7 participants. The goal is for two participants to say the same word at the same time. The group stands in a circle. Two participants each independently think of any word and everyone counts down "3,2,1" (or in Hebrew), and then the two say their words at the same time... the words will be random (e.g., "tree" and "cookie"). Then everyone in the group takes a moment and thinks "What 1 word connects, links or bridges these 2 words?" Then any two participants who each think of a word say "Anee!" (me) or "Yesh lee" (I have). Then once again everyone counts down "3,2,1"... and two new words are shouted out (e.g. "brown" and "cocoa")... the idea is that the group gets closer and closer to saying the same word at the same time (this may take 2 rounds or 10 rounds... Once it's close, start with 2 new words...

Mitzvah: קְהִילָה / *Kehillah* / Community, Ages 7+

Busy Bee ("Dov, Dov, D'vora")

In Busy Bee (Hebrew word for "bee" is also the name "*D'vora*"), the facilitator encourages everyone to buzz around the room like busy bees until they say, "freeze!" After saying "freeze" the leader will say a letter from the alphabet such as, "A", "F", or "T" and participants have to use their body to make the shape of that letter. They can do this solo standing up, or lying down, and can work with others as long as they don't physically touch. For instance two folks bending over to make an "M" together. After a few seconds admiring the letters and complimenting them, the leader says "busy bee" and everyone flies around again as a bee until the next, "freeze!"

After a few English letters the leader can try Hebrew letters such as “*reish*,” “*shin*,” or “*gimmel*.” The beauty is that if participants know the Hebrew letters they can jump right in, and if they don’t they can look to others and copy them.

Advanced version: When the leader says “freeze” and names a letter like “L”, participants have to think of a word that begins with the letter “L” and get in the shape of that. So some folks may become a “lion,” “laser,” or “ladle.” The leader can then walk around and ask a few of them what they are before saying “busy bee” again. This can also be done with Hebrew letters and words that begin with those letters.

(Adapted from Tara Gadomski of the Philly Improv Theater)

Mitzvah: בִּינָה / *Binah*/Understanding, Ages 3+

Amazing Advertisers

This is a partner or performance game-- participants will all become advertisers in a commercial. First, The leader may ask the group to brainstorm what makes a good commercial (get 4-8 suggestions, like “funny, short, they utilize the product they’re describing, energetic, a jingle/song, etc.”). Then the leader gets 2 volunteers to each suggest an object, but they don’t share it out loud until everyone counts off (in English or Hebrew) “1,2,3!” After 3, they share their objects (e.g., “Soap” and “apple”)... Then the leader improvises a commercial. For example, “How many times has this happened to you... You’re taking a bath and you get hungry for a healthy snack! Well, no more worries because we have the perfect product for you-- the Soap Apple! etc...”

The leader gets 2 more object-suggestions and participants partner-up and create their own for 45-60 seconds, from their seats. You can also play this as a performance game and bring 2-3 volunteers up to sell it; or combine 1 Jewish object (e.g., *seder plate*, *tallit*) with regular objects (*toaster*, *gloves*).

Mitzvah: יִצְיָרָה / *Yitzirah*/ Creativity, Ages 6+

Shabbat Dinner

In this game, 4 volunteers speak with only 2 voices. The volunteers stand or sit in pairs and act attached at the hip. They have a “Shabbat Dinner” conversation where they are old friends catching up on their week over Shabbat dinner. But the catch is that the two people must look at each other’s mouths and make up their words together slowly. So two minds, two people, simultaneously speaking the same improvised words. The goal is to go back and forth having a conversation and take turns leading, following, and listening.

Mitzvah: בִּינָה / *Binah*/Understanding, Ages 8+

The Sanhedrin

The Sanhedrin is a problem solving modality where one person brings their issue to a group, and hears their ideas and suggestions of what might help. The name refers to the Jewish legislative and judicial court that helped with decisions and rulings in ancient Israel (from the Greek *synedrion*, “council”/ “to sit together”).

For this activity you’ll need at a minimum 3 people, and maximum about 10. One person is bringing a problem or challenge that they need help with to the group of “Sanhedrin.” One of the Sanhedrin must be a timekeeper to keep the 2, 2, 4, 2 timing of this, to keep it to just 10 minutes.

Round 1 is up to 2 minutes long and features an uninterrupted story from the volunteer about the problem/challenge their facing. The more details and backstory they can give in those 2 minutes, the better. Round 2 is up to 2 minutes long and features *clarifying* questions from the rest of the group to understand, but not *yet* solve, the problem. It’s important that these are just information-gathering questions, and not solutions *disguised* as questions (like, “Have you thought about telling them that they’re breaking the rules?”).

Round 3 is the pivotal 4 minute round where the volunteer must sit *silently* while the others in the “Sanhedrin” talk about their problem in front of them. They can share ideas, suggestions, questions, or solutions. No matter what they say, the volunteer with the problem must listen silently without interrupting. It can be fun to have them put tape on their mouths to facilitate this silence! Round 4 is the final 2 minute round where the volunteer can take off the “tape” and share their reactions to the Sanhedrin’s solutions. Anyone may speak in this round as the volunteer thinks about how to take the group’s wisdom and move forward.

Mitzvah: קהילה / *Kehillah* / Community, Ages 12+ (Adapted from Georgetown University Facilitation Program)

Band Names

In this super simple game, a group/pair pretends to be in a band and they’re brainstorming names for their band. Taking turns, one person suggests a Band Name-- it could be ANYTHING (“Windshield Wipers” or “Chocolate cake”). The next person nods and says “I love it!”

That’s the whole game! Then the next person comes up with a Band Name. This encourages us to, well, encourage each other! Create community by supporting other people’s ideas. It’s also practicing turning off the judgmental side of our brains that says, “that’s not good” and “you’re not funny.”

Add-on: a third person can say, “Please welcome/put your hands together for/ *Hinei ha’tizmoret* (“Here’s the band...”) ... ‘Windshield Wipers!!’” Then high-fives are exchanged.

Mitzvah: קהילה / *Kehillah* / Community, Ages 5+ (Created by Andrew Davies & Aaron Friedman)

Mensch Moments:

Choose any biblical story, divide the story into sections of 3 sentences/verses each. In groups of 3-5, participants have 5 minutes to rehearse/plan how to interpret their section and bring it to life, silently! Encourage them to act as objects (e.g., Israelites crossing the Sea of Reeds, people can be the water that is parted). Then everyone reconvenes and the Leader narrates each section that participants act out.

Mitzvah: תלמוד תורה / *Talmud Torah*/Learning Torah, Ages 7+ (Created by Aaron Friedman & Andrew Davies)