



How to Cultivate Jewish Mindfulness

An Educational Program Guide by Lisa Friedman



**THE JEWISH
EDUCATION PROJECT**

Developed in partnership with The Jewish Education Project

Overview

In this 90-minute intergenerational program for families with children ages 7–12, we will explore ways that Judaism can help us develop meaningful mindfulness practices.

Enduring Understanding

More than previous generations, today's parents and grandparent are aware of — and often focused on — the importance of health, fitness, mindfulness, and an overall sense of well-being. Judaism can help us shape practices to support and nurture physical and mental health. Judaism teaches us to show kindness and respect toward others and the world, while also cultivating and developing *k'vod atzmi* — self-respect or respect for our own bodies and minds.

Goals

- Engage in a physically active Jewish learning experience as a family (children, parents, grandparents, and other family members).
- Understand that *k'vod atzmi*, self-respect, is the Jewish value of showing kindness to ourselves.
- Understand that we can demonstrate kindness to ourselves by paying attention to both our physical and mental health.
- Learn a variety of mindfulness practices.

Materials

O: Organization provides

F: Families bring

F	Devices to connect with extended family members (cell phone, iPad, laptop, etc.)
F	Comfortable or loose-fitting clothing suitable for a variety of gentle movement activities
F	Yoga mats or towels, to put on the floor for the yoga station
O	2–3 Hoberman spheres (breathing balls)
O	Printed copy of instructions at each station
O	Printed copies of articles
O	Name tags for participants, pens/markers

O	Laptops/computers with large screens and/or projectors and speakers, to show videos at three stations
O	Whiteboard or poster/chart paper and a marker

Suggested Room Setup

- Large room with good cell reception and strong Wi-Fi
- Clear directions to connect to Wi-Fi
- Stations set up around the room (or in different rooms) with a table for instructions, tech materials, and chairs for participants, if appropriate
- Table coverings, if desired
- Microphone, if needed

Staffing

Ideally you will have a staff member at each of the five stations to hand out instructions, start the video, and guide participants in how to do the activity.

Timing (90-minute program)

O: Organization does

F: Families do

O	Welcome, outline of agenda, and set induction	10 minutes
O	Introduction to Jewish mindfulness	5 minutes
F	Participants/family groups choose and rotate through three of the five mindfulness stations	60 minutes
O	Sharing and wrap-up	15 minutes

Program

0:00-0:10 Welcome, outline of agenda, and set induction

To begin, the facilitator should ensure that families successfully connect using FaceTime or Zoom with family members joining at a distance.

Rabbi/educator/facilitator shares the following text with participants on a whiteboard or large poster board:

“When keeping the body in health and vigor, one walks in the way of the Eternal.”
~Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Deot* 4:1

Ensure that all participants understand the definition of vigor. (*physical strength and good health; effort, energy, and enthusiasm*)

In small groups, discuss the following prompts/questions:

- What are some things you do to remain healthy? (*eat a balanced diet; take vitamins; regular doctor visits*)
- What are some ways you keep your body in vigor? (*physical exercise such as swimming, walking, hiking; playing sports; movement*)
- How does keeping your body in health and vigor help your mind? (*helps us sleep better, move more easily, feel better about our body; helps to relax*)
- How can caring for your mind also help your body? (*helps us sleep better; helps to relax; increases focus*)
- How have these practices changed as you have aged? (*more interested in health and well-being; trying new practices; haven't changed; have slowed down; can't do as much vigorous activity; less agile*)

0:10–0:15 Introduction to Jewish mindfulness

Share with participants that in Judaism there is a value of repairing oneself — *tikkun middot* — which can also be thought of as being aware of habits and living with greater intention. In today's world there always seem to be a million things to do. Mindfulness offers us the opportunity for rest, not just for our bodies but for our minds.

Present the Hebrew phrase *k'vod atzmi* — self-respect — several times, and explain that this is the Jewish value of showing kindness to ourselves.

Write both Hebrew (transliterated) terms and their English meaning on a whiteboard or poster. Repeat the terms several times.

Explain the program to participants. There are five stations (you can include a brief overview of each — see below) that will give families a taste of different mindfulness practices. Each family group will choose three of the five stations.

Station One: Yoga

Station Two: Calming Breathing

Station Three: Silly Walking

Station Four: Classic Mindful Walking

Station Five: Cultivating Quiet

NOTE: For family members with limited mobility or other physical limitations, guide them to less strenuous stations such as Calming Breathing, Cultivating Quiet, and Yoga. In addition, family groups can do two rather than three stations if that is more comfortable for them.

Ensure that families with members at a distance are able to take their devices to each of the stations with them.

Ask families to keep the following prompts in mind as they participate in the station activities:

- What did you feel while doing this practice?
- What changes in your body or mind — if any — did you notice while doing the practice?
- How did these practices help you understand the value of *k'vod atzmi* (self-respect) and teach you ways you might show kindness to yourself?
- How might you incorporate one or more of these mindfulness practices in your daily life?

0:15–1:15 Mindfulness stations

Participants will choose three of the five stations and spend 15 minutes at each. Keep time and let participants know when to move between stations, allowing 3–5 minutes for participants to transition and get settled at their new station.

Print out the following instructions and post at each station — one per family.

Station One: Yoga

Watch the JGN video [I Am the Tree of Life Yoga](#). Follow the on-screen instructor.

When the video ends, as a family, choose another Torah story your family knows, and make up a yoga pose or a movement for some element of that story. For example, for crossing the Sea of Reeds, you might move your bodies like flowing water. For Moses receiving the Ten Commandments, you might stand with your arms over your head. For the story of Jonah and the big fish, you might make a swimming motion with your arms. As time allows, share your pose with the other families in the group.

Station Two: Calming Breathing

Watch the video [Breathing Ball](#). Using a Hoberman sphere, practice along with the instructor. Practice three times on your own after the video.

Facilitator note: If Hoberman spheres are not available, have participants simulate the opening and closing of the ball with their hands.

Then watch the video [Satanama](#). After the video, practice with another four-syllable word you choose — for example, ha-ne-shee-mah (breath, in Hebrew) or wa-ter-me-lon.

Station Three: Silly Walking

Watch a video of the Monty Python sketch "[Ministry of Silly Walks](#)." Create your own silly walks and practice them, with children taking the lead. Make sure all family members, including any who are connected remotely, have a chance to create a silly walk too. Pay attention to how your body feels during each one as a way to regulate your own energy level.

Walk as if no one is watching you!

Station Four: Classic Mindful Walking

Take a copy of the [article](#) on the table to glance at now and to read at home. Then go on a ten-minute mindful walk around the program space or around the building, paying attention to sights, sounds, smells, and anything else you notice. Walk in silence. After 10 minutes, return to the program space. As a family, take turns sharing what you noticed on the walk. Then get ready for the next station.

Facilitator note: If weather permits, participants can walk outside.

Station Five: Cultivating Quiet

Facilitator note: If possible, this station should be far away from the other stations or, ideally, in a separate room with comfortable chairs. If weather permits, it can be outside. Take a copy of the [article](#) on the table to glance at now and to read at home. Then spend 5 minutes sitting in silence together. If you like, close your eyes. Think about how the stillness and silence make you feel. Notice what feels good and what makes you uncomfortable.

1:15–1:30 Sharing and wrap-up

Lead a short discussion where families respond to the prompts you gave them earlier:

- What did you feel while doing this practice?
- What changes in your body or mind — if any — did you notice while doing the practice?
- How did these practices help you understand the value of *k'vod atzmi* (self-respect) and teach you ways you might show kindness to yourself?
- How might you incorporate one or more of these mindfulness practices in your daily life?



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