

# Spirituality

for Kids

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The American Jewish  
Joint Distribution  
Committee



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## Objectives:

1. To become more familiar with the reasons behind having a religion.
2. To understand the purpose of laws (halacha).

## Background:

There are many inspiring meanings and purposes behind Jewish law [halacha] and customs, but young people are often introduced to them by means of a series of rules; 'do this' and 'don't do that', etc. The purpose of this project is to encourage young people to find their own meanings behind Jewish practice and introduce them to the idea of 'spirituality', the soul, and our various interpretations/ understandings of God.

## PROJECT 1

### Are rules made to be broken?

**Materials:** 2 large sheets of paper, pens and pencils.

**1. Read the following story or retell it in a version that is most appropriate for your group. It is based upon a midrash (a rabbinic story that has been created to explain the Torah).**

In the beginning God was deciding how to create the world and there was a big choice to be made. On the one hand God was believed in structure, order and rules, which meant creating laws so that people could live in peace. Rules are helpful for running

a society because if people do, something wrong they get punished, and it means that everything is kept safe. With rules, people are well behaved. God thought about it, and began to create a world that was run according to this principle of 'Din', which means 'justice'.

In this world there was a man called Jake who couldn't afford to buy any food so he stole a loaf of bread. Immediately, he was struck down by lightning.

There was a girl called Rebecca who told a lie to her parents and she was also, struck by lightning.



There was a Jewish man called David who ate a piece of pork and he was also struck by lightning. God realised that the world wasn't going to work properly, so made it disappear and decided to start all over again.

In the next version of the world, human beings would need to have free choice over everything they did, and there wouldn't be any punishment - certainly no more lightning! Otherwise, it would be a very scary place to live!

God created a world where there were no rules; because he loved humans so much they would be allowed to do whatever they wanted.

This didn't work either!

In the world of love, Jake couldn't afford to buy any food because he was still poor, so he stole a gun and then went into shops and took whatever he wanted! He didn't get punished by God because there was no more 'Din' (justice) in this world, just 'Hesed' (lovingkindness).

Rebecca was rude to her parents never did what she was told, and as a result they threw her out of the house.

God realised that this wasn't going to work either!

In the end the angels said to God: 'why don't you have a world where there is a balance between these two qualities of Justice (Din) and Lovingkindness (Hesed)?

**That is what He did and the world was made so that humans could decide how they want to live. The world isn't perfect, but it isn't bad either! Now it's our choice whether we want to live happily ever after...**

## 2. Discuss the following questions:

- i. Which world would you prefer to live in? one with no rules or one with lots of rules?
- ii. Do you think it was fair that Jake was struck by lightning as soon as he did something wrong?
- iii. what is the naughtiest thing that you've done which you're been? Were you punished for it?
- iv. Have you ever done something really bad and not been punished for it? If so, what?

### 3. Drawing Task

Split your group into two - team A and team B.

Both teams have to draw a big picture (on the large sheets of paper)

- Team A has to draw a world where is instant justice - ie everybody gets punished immediately for anything they do wrong - make sure that the pictures show scenes of everyday life.

-It might include drawings of people 's faces - are they happy or sad?

- Team B - has to draw a picture of a world with no rules -

-What is happening?

-Are children allowed to eat as much ice cream and chocolate as they like?  
If so what happens to them?

-Are cars allowed to drive at 200 kph ( ie very very fast )?  
If so what happens to them?

-Is it a world of sheer fun?

When both teams have completed their pictures share them with the group and discuss what you can see.



#### 4. Exploring the 10 commandments.

Moses took the children of Israel to Mont Sinai where God gave them the 10 commandments. These included rules that help make society a better place and enable us to live safe and happy lives- Olives mm.

- i. Ask; how many of the 10 commandments can you name?
- ii. Here are some of the rules that God gave all of which help society in harmony:

-Do not steal

-Do not kill

-Do not be jealous of other people's possessions

iii. Discuss what life would be like without these rules?

iv. **Make up** a list of new commandments for your school.

These can be positive (e.g. do this...) or negative (e.g. Do not do that )

Some examples of your new commandments might be:

- Be polite to teachers.
- Don't spit in the playground.
- Always be friendly to new pupils.
- Say hello to say everyone in the morning.
- Never stick your tongue out at the teacher.
- Do not pick up your lunch and throw it at the walls.
- Do not write your name on the toilet wall.
- Always sing the national anthem whilst standing on one leg.

Have fun with the exercise and encourage people to come up with silly examples if it helps the learning environment.

You could split the group up into two teams get each team to devise some rules and then compare ideas.

#### 5. Finally, play a team game such as football or tag.

Explain the rules of the game and;

- i. play the game for 10 minutes with the rules.
- ii. play the game for 5 minutes and tell people that they are allowed to break all of the rules.
- iii. Discuss- which version of the game worked better and why? Was it easier to play with or without rules?
- iv. Do the ten commandments help us create a peaceful and fair society? How?



## PROJECT 2

### The flight of the soul

#### objective:

To understand that we have a soul as well as a body and to find ways of comprehending what the soul is and how we can connect to our soul.

#### 1. Tell this story;

Many years ago, in the Land of Czechoslovakia, deep inside the capital city of Prague there was a certain Rabbi Loew. He was the rabbi of the town but there were various problems at the time: not enough money, bad anti-Semitism (when people who don't like Jewish people), and not enough hours in the day to get through all of the household tasks. Rabbi Loew had been a clever man who had learnt the laws of Jewish magic, known as the Kabbalah, and he decided to use this mystical knowledge to create a person.

This person was going to be called the 'Golem'.

First of all, he made the shape of a body out of clay and Rabbi Loew wrote a name of God on a piece of paper, rolled it up and put it in the Golem's ear and said some prayers. All of a sudden the body sprang to life and the Golem was to be the Rabbi's servant, to help the Jewish community in Prague. The Golem was around seven feet tall and looked a bit like a red tree - he had huge arms and huge legs but wasn't able to speak or think for himself. At night he would wander around the streets and keep guard. If anybody tried to attack the Jewish people the Golem would whack them around the head! When the community was building a new synagogue the Golem would lift

all of the heavy bricks and he would even help old ladies carry their shopping home from the market. Sometimes little children called him names 'Golem gumdrops' or 'Gormless Golem'; because he wasn't a real person he couldn't get upset - he didn't have any feelings at all.

The Golem had one day off a week - Shabbat. On Friday afternoon, just before Shabbat came in, Rabbi Loew would take the scroll of paper out of the Golem's ear and the Golem would lie down as if it was asleep. After the Sabbath had gone out, the scroll would be put back inside and the Golem would begin his tasks for the new week.

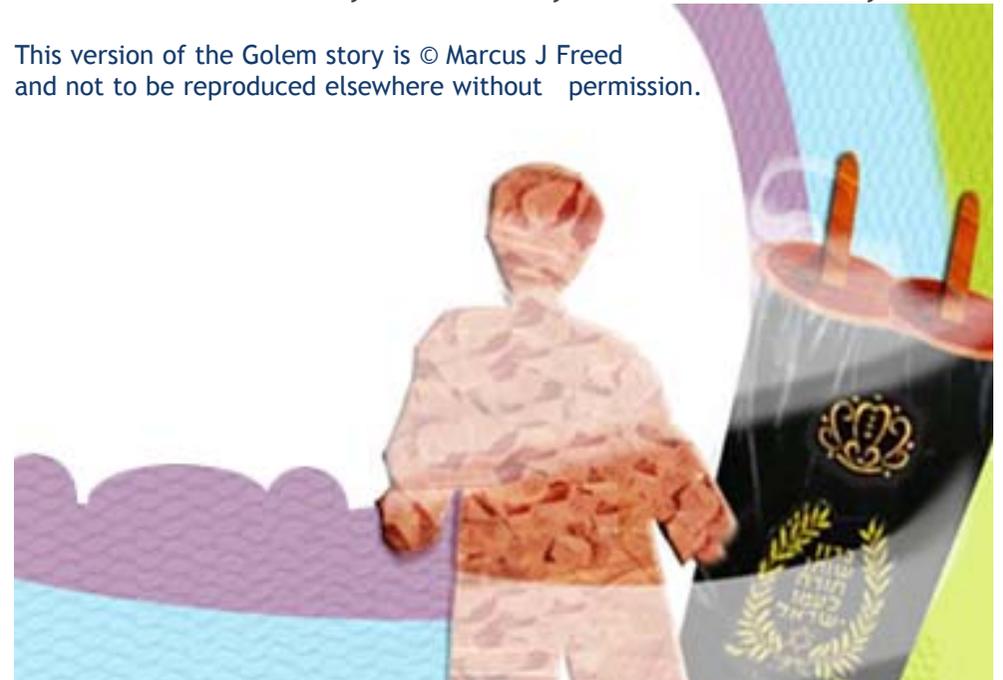
One day the rabbi's wife asked the Golem to bring buckets of water from the river and fill up the bathtub that was in the kitchen. This task usually took her hours to complete so she was glad that the Golem could do it on her behalf. She decided to sit down in the bedroom while the Golem did the work. She accidentally fell asleep and two hours later found that there was water all throughout the house. The Golem slept filling the bathtub and it was now overflowing with water! She had forgotten to tell him to stop!

The Golem was immediately given another task - to clean up all of the extra water. As usual, he didn't complain, because he didn't have any feelings.

When Rabbi Loew got older, he decided that it was time to retire the Golem. He took the creature to his synagogue, the 'Altneue shul' and removed the scroll from the Golem's ear. The creature went to sleep for the last time.

If you go to the city of Prague you can see the synagogue the place where Rabbi Loew is buried and you can even try to look for the Golem yourself!

This version of the Golem story is © Marcus J Freed and not to be reproduced elsewhere without permission.



## 2. Discuss:

- what did you like about the story?
- if you had the Golem, what would you make him do?
- how was the Golem different from a human being?
- The Golem didn't have a soul - what do you think a soul is?

3. One of the purposes for religion is to help us develop our spiritual expression so that our souls can reach their potential on earth.

Ask everyone to make a paper aeroplane and to write their name on it.

Here are some designs for paper aeroplanes;

<http://www.paperairplanes.co.uk/planes.php>

i. **cut out strips of paper** and write on them:

- Being Born
- In the sky
- Over the clouds
- Heaven

ii. Place each of the strips on the floor at intervals of 1 metre, in order.

iii. Ask everyone to throw their paper aeroplane and see whose plane flies the furthest. Most people's planes should pass 'being born' and 'in the sky' and the winners will probably approach 'Heaven'.

iv. Collect in the aeroplanes. Hand out paperclips - ask everyone to put a clip on each wing of their plane. They then have to throw the aeroplanes again.

Look at how the planes are weighed down for their second flight



#### 4. Discuss

Judaism teaches that we have a body and a soul. The body is called the 'guf' and the soul is called the 'neshama'. The rabbis teach that our soul lives forever and the body is only temporary. In some ways the body is like a piece of clothing that the soul wears during one's lifetime and it takes it the body off at the end of life like you take your clothes off when it's time for bed. The neshama (soul) is part of God and is perfect and eternal.

- a) how are the paper aeroplanes like the soul?
- b) how is the body like the paperclips? (e. g. weighing down the soul and preventing from reaching the heights).
- c) how do think you can make you your soul fly?

#### 5. Why not have a big class project to build a golem?

You could have lots of fun building it with clay or paper and cardboard, and you could also make a display telling people about the soul.

**6. Ask everyone to copy out this prayer that appears at the beginning of the morning service 'My God, the soul you placed within me is pure. You created it, you fashioned it. You breathed it into me, you safeguard it within me, and eventually you will take it from me'.**

#### Discuss:

- i. Do you like this prayer?
- ii. Why do we say this first thing in the morning?
- iii. How might we behave differently if we remember that we are a soul as well as a body?



## PROJECT 3

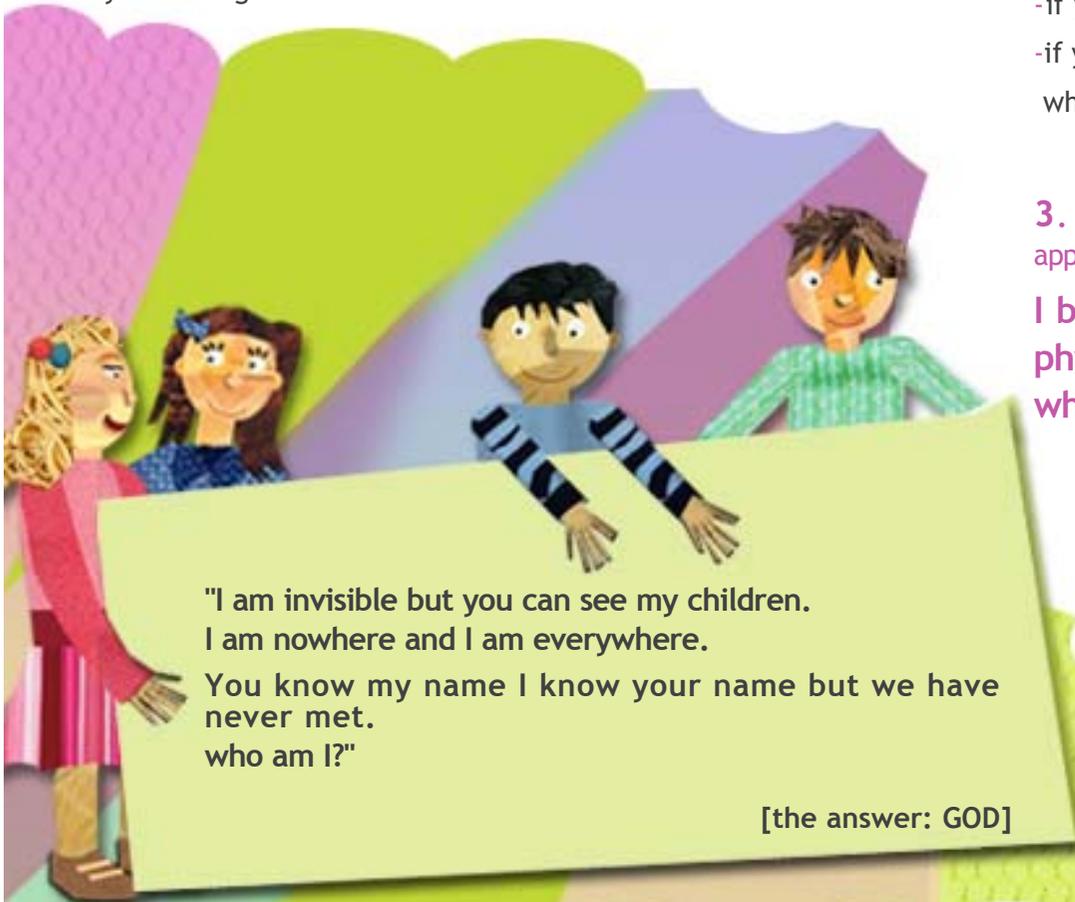
### How to see God

#### Objective

to begin to understand God - he/she is out of this world and beyond the World but is it possible to " see' God?

**Materials:** Apple, mirror, pens and paper.

**1. Introduction:** Present your group with the following riddle which they have to guess the answer to:



#### 2. Discuss:

- who believes in God?
- why?
- How can you describe God?
- What do you think God does for you?
- what would your life be like without God?
- if you were to meet God and could ask one question, what would it be?
- if you were to meet God and could ask him or her to do something for you, what would you ask?

**3. Look at this extract from Rambam's 'principles of faith' that appear in the song 'yigdal', that we sing at the end of the Friday night service**

**I believe with perfect faith that G-d does not have a body. physical concepts do not apply to Him. There is nothing whatsoever that resembles Him at all..**

- It describes God as not having a body and says what God is not. Why do you think this is?

(one possible answer: God is so big and so many things that to describe him in words then it would be impossible as there just aren't enough words!

#### 4. Activity:

- i. Ask your group to sit on one side of the room.
- ii. Take an object such as an apple or a teddy bear and place it behind a large book or a folder, so that the group cannot see it.
- iii. position a mirror so that the group can see the object 's reflection (but not the object itself ).
- iv. check that everybody can see the object.

#### Discuss these points:

1. What can you see reflected in the mirror?
2. If you had to describe it to someone who was blind how would you describe it?
3. Can you touch the object in the mirror?
4. Why not?
5. How are you absolutely certain that the object isn't actually inside the mirror?
6. Hand out the following piece of text or write it up on a board:



7. what does it mean that we are made ' in the image' of God?

One possible meaning is that we are all reflections of God. Each of us is like a mirror that reflects God's qualities.

8. Ask everyone to sit and look at a partner and count how many things you can see on their head ( i.e. ears eyes nose hairs freckles etc.. )..

Describe your partner's face to the group

-if we are all made in the image of God and there are all of these different faces what does that tell us about God?



## PROJECT 4

### God in Relationships

#### Objective:

to consider how the qualities of God can be understood in terms of human relationships: with children, grandparents, husbands and wives, and friends.

**Materials:** picture of a globe, cardboard, strips of paper and sellotape.

**1. In teams of four or five make a short play which is based around a family argument. Each group should focus on a different part of the family: parents, husbands and wives, siblings and grandparents.**

**2. i. Act the scenes out.**

**ii. Discuss-**

-what qualities help to make a relationship work?

E.g. kindness

-what qualities stop a relationship from working

(eg- anger )

**3. Explain that the Torah speaks of God's qualities and tells us that God is**

'compassionate and gracious,  
slow to anger, and abundant in  
kindness and truth...'

(Exodus 34:6-7)



**4. Cut out a picture of world and stick it onto a piece of cardboard.**

i. cut out strips of paper and write the following qualities of God on to them.

slow to anger

giving

loving

truthful

forgiving

ii. make the strips into a circle and stick them together so that they form a band.

iii. cut out a picture of the world and explain that God supports the world with all of these qualities.

iv. Place the globe inside the band..

**5. Say - together the first line of the Shema**

**'Hear Oh Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One'.**

Discuss: why is it good that there is only one God?

**6. Finally ask everyone to write a letter to God praying asking for anything they want.**

Further reading:

Let me count the Ways - Carol Starin (published by TorahAura)



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