

## **BYOI: “Bring Your Own Instrument” service**

Ok, you’ve decided to take on a daring venture by inviting staff, campers—basically anyone in your camp community—to bring instruments and voices to an “all-music” service. This has the opportunity to be the most EPIC, memorable Tefilah that has ever been facilitated at your camp, with extended jam sessions, gorgeous harmonies and a true sense of inclusion and user-generated worship. BUT...it could also get out of control quickly. People will bring a wide range of musical abilities and expectations. Some will do their best to listen and blend with those around them; others will try to hijack every solo.

As the prayer facilitator and/or songleader, you will have to be extremely prepared and thoughtful before conducting this unwritten symphony. Here are a few reminders and pointers before you press play.

### **Tips & Tachlis for the Prayer/Song-Leader of a “BYOI” service**

#### **1. Give advance warning / post a sign-up sheet.**

If at all possible, find out who is planning to attend *before* the service happens. Try to get some of the music (e.g. recordings, chords, sheet music) to the musicians in advance so they can practice in the days leading up to it. Seek out some ‘ringers’ who you know will enhance the quality of the playing. Tell everyone to tune their instruments before arriving!

#### **2. Find a prayer space that is inviting and intimate.**

This is *not* a performance, but a collaboration. Do not set up the space so that you or a few select individuals are performing in front of others. Try to create a prayer space in which everyone can make eye and ear contact with each other. Like a drum circle or your living room.

#### **3. Don’t get too complicated.**

Select melodies that have simple chord patterns and rhythms. Anything that is too complex or syncopated may be a barrier to full participation.

#### **4. Project words and chords (if possible).**

While many camps object to the use of technology during prayer, this is one instance where it can enhance the experience profoundly. Putting lyrics and chords on a screen means that people do not have to look *down* or worry about pages blowing away. This (literally) keeps everyone on the same page.

#### **5. Don’t be afraid of silence or the spoken word.**

While you might advertise this as an “all-music” service, consider the advantages of inserting a well-timed reading or personal *kavanah* (intention). The same rings true for a moment of complete silence. Sometimes our ears, voices and fingers need a breather so that we can fully enjoy the musical moments on either end.

## **6. Not everyone has to play every piece.**

Certainly, there are some “full ensemble” numbers, especially the closing song, that benefit from lots of instruments and voices layering on top of one another. But there can be just as much power in having smaller segments of the group take the lead. Consider breaking the group into smaller “combos” (by seating, instrument groups, etc.) and feature these sub-groups at different points of the service.

## **7. Embrace the dissonance.**

There is likely to be some participants that sing in their own special key, or play to the beat of their own drummer. Don't fret. (Awful pun intended!) Accept and celebrate everyone's contributions, despite the moments of dissonance that may arise. They are just as, if not more, important than the pristine harmonies and perfectly aligned rhythms.

## **8. You are the leader – so Lead!**

As collaborative as you want the service to be, it is not free-form spontaneous jazz. Think of yourself (and your co-leaders) as the conductors of the experience. Cue participants when to start, end, and transition within a piece. Indicate dynamics/volume. If you are playing an instrument, it is fine for it to be amplified a little louder than the rest so that people can follow you for tempo and melody.

That's it! Have fun, reflect afterwards about what worked well and what needs 'tweaking', and schedule your next service. The more it becomes a part of camp culture, the more people will want to participate and lend their musical talents and passions. *Shiru l'Adonai!*