

Eat. Pray. Dance [Eat Pray Dare 1]

AUTHOR(S):	Erica Goldman
SUMMARY:	Participants will experience a taste of different kinds of movement activities and see what connects them to feelings of spirituality and prayer. - <i>Submitted by Erica Goldman</i>
TOPIC(S):	Movement, Prayer
LEARNING OBJECTIVE:	Participants will be introduced to some movement types they may not have experienced before. They will have the opportunity to embody their prayers through dance, and will tap into different ways dance is utilized in prayer.
AUDIENCE:	Any group of larger than five people
TIMING:	45 minutes
APPENDICES:	None
MATERIALS NEEDED:	Sound system and music
SET-UP DETAILS:	Best in an indoor space that can be made dark or light, with space to move around in, and a sound system to connect to.

SESSION TIMELINE & OUTLINE:

[15 minutes] - Name choreography / Birkot Hashachar (Morning blessings)

Have participants sit in a circle on the ground. Say your own name while doing a very brief movement, like clapping on each syllable of your name, or spinning around in place. Have participants repeat the name and movement. Ask the person to your left to make up a movement to do with their name, have everyone repeat it with them, and then do both yours and theirs in sequence. Continue until everyone has had a turn and you have a long sequence of movements and names. (It is not necessary to start from the beginning in between every person; three people could add their moves and then you can repeat from the start again, for example.)

Do the whole sequence very quickly. Then you will need to have mentally chosen five people from the circle – could be every other person if you have ten people, or those participants who seem most comfortable with this exercise, or you could ask for volunteers. Still remaining in the circle, assign each of them one of the following “new names”: 1. Handwashing 2. Creation 3. Waking Up 4. Study 5. Hand Raising. (If you have a large group and want to add more of these, use 6. Planting Seeds and 7. Rest.) Have them create a new move that expresses that “name” and go around the circle again slowly, substituting the new movements for those people’s names when it gets to them. Repeat the sequence again in silence (just movements, without saying names), slowly. Stand up and repeat, enlarging the movements now that everyone can use their whole bodies.

Play a slow, contemplative song and repeat the sequence to that music. Repeat again with energetic upbeat music; notice how the feeling of the moves changes with the music.

Quick debrief: Ask how participants felt. Ask if anyone knew what the five (or seven) new names were. (They were roughly equivalent to the blessings of the *Birkot HaShachar*, morning blessings, and the recitation of mitzvot that are often said immediately afterward. For more information on these, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birkot_hashachar is pretty brief and useful.) Ask what their feelings were about making blessings with their bodies instead of their mouths/reciting them.

[15 minutes] - Israeli dance

Teach some Israeli dances whose songs are from Jewish liturgy. Depending on the experience/skill level of the group, choose from:

- Mayim Mayim (Isaiah 12:3, said every week at the beginning of Havdalah)
- Ma Navu (Isaiah 52:7, which is read on Shabbat Shoftim which in 2018 will be August 18, while some camps are still in session)
- Sulam Yaakov (Based on Genesis 28:12)
- Katonti (Genesis 32:11,12) (Note this is a much harder dance than the others listed)
- Mizmor Shir (the Psalm for Shabbat, Psalm 92)

Quick debrief: Ask how participants felt. Ask what their feelings were about dancing choreographed steps to words found in the Torah and other Jewish texts. Explore the connection between ritual and choreography, whether that is comforting to some, whether repetition can become meditative in a prayerful way, etc.

[15 minutes] - Ecstatic dance

Darken the room as much as possible without it being pitch black. Play trancelike music, with less shape or meaning or rhythm than the previous songs. In the dark, invite the participants to dance freely, moving around the entire space as much as they want, with no choreography expectations, with a soft gaze (not eye contact). Give them the Guidelines:

1. “Keep the space talk free” (but noises and vocalizations such as hoots, laughter, crying and other non-talk noises are okay. There are some exceptions, including clear use of the word “No” if necessary to assert personal boundaries.)
2. “Take care of yourself and each other” - encourage participants to embrace the journey they might encounter, which could include strong emotions. This is a judgement-free space for participants to experience and to support each other in their experiences. Participants should maintain consciousness of their own movement in relationship to others, so as to avoid collisions.

Quick debrief: Ask how participants felt. Did they feel freedom or inhibition without choreographed steps? Did any emotions come up for them? Was the experience prayerful?

Optional: The dance in traditional prayer spaces

If there is time, or if this would be of particular interest to the participants, have a conversation about what choreography already exists in traditional prayer spaces, like a “typical” Conservative synagogue during Friday night services, for example. Participants might not think of any at first, but ask them to picture a congregation if they were standing to the side and couldn’t hear what was going on. What would they see? A large group standing up and sitting down in unison. Turning pages. What about during Aleinu? People bending their knees and bowing at the waist. What about kadosh kadosh kadosh? They go up on their toes three times. What about the Amidah? They stand with their feet close together, facing a certain direction, and begin by taking three steps backward and forward. See what other examples the group can generate, including Jewish movements beyond services (waving hands in front of the Shabbat candles and covering eyes, for example). There are lots more!

Closing: You may want to bring the group back together for any easy cheer or chant with movements to feel energized to begin the rest of the day. “Alive awake alert enthusiastic” is a good option for this.

ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR BRINGING IT BACK TO CAMP: