

Blooming Blessings: Crafting Beauty for Our Teachers

Start Your Morning

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SUMMARY:	As the Harry Chapin song goes, "There are so many colors in the rainbow, so many colors in the morning sun, so many colors in a flower, and I see every one!" There are so many kinds of blessings, can you see every one? Join in a reflectoin on the ways our teachers have impacted us, how we want to impact our own future generation of campers, and creating a garden of joy and gratitude (aka pipe cleaner flowers). - <i>Submitted by Jill Goldstein Smith</i>
TOPIC(S):	Community Building, Prayer - Alternative, Visual Arts, Tefillah, Jewish Values
LEARNING OBJECTIVE:	Participants will consider how others influence their intentions and how the power they have in influencing others (and responsibility that comes with it). They will also learn some music, make art individually to contribute to a community project, and learn about different kinds of prayers according to various religious traditions.
AUDIENCE:	Can be adapted for small, medium, and large groups (5-80 people). Good for staff or teens. Could be adapted for younger.
TIMING:	60 minutes
APPENDICES:	Lyrics Page: Flowers are Red, Yotzer Or, Beautiful the Sun Shines Down Instructions/Samples of Pipe Cleaner Flowers
MATERIALS NEEDED:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10-15 pipe cleaners Per Person • 4-8 green styrofoam blocks (https://www.amazon.com/Greenbrier-Gentle-Floral-Blocks-blocks/dp/B076GV4MBT/ref=sr_1_27?ie=UTF8&qid=1545882715&sr=8-27&keywords=styrofoam+blocks+for+crafts) • Laptop, Projector & Screen with speakers • Optional: guitar & songleader • Optional: gift bag tags with twine (https://www.amazon.com/100pcs-Kraft-Paper-Natural-Ripple/dp/B01767EKXC/ref=sr_1_4?keywords=luggage+tags+paper&qid=1553790893&s=gateway&sr=8-4)
SET-UP DETAILS:	Sit in a circle in comfy couches or chairs. Have table space for writing and making pipe cleaner flowers.

SESSION TIMELINE & OUTLINE:

00:00 - 00:10 Welcome & Watch "Flowers are Red"

00:10 - 00:20 Reflect & Discuss

00:20 - 00:35 Create, Garden, Plant

00:35 - 00:45 Beautiful the Sun Shines Down - Yotzer Or

00:45 - 01:00 An Abundance of Blessings - to Give Away

Welcome & Watch “Flowers are Red” (10 minutes)

Welcome everyone and invite them into the circle. Pass around the lyrics to “[Flowers are Red](#).” Explain that you’ll be listening to the song from an animated video made to illustrate the story being sung. If folks know the song, they are invited to sing along.

Play the video with the music: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nHm2KdTTKUw> (5 minutes long).

Reflect & Discuss (10 minutes)

Lead a discussion (or if the group is massive, write up some of these questions and have people discuss in trios or quads):

- What’s a time you’ve been told there’s only one way to do something, to see the world?
- How about a time that someone helped you see the world in a different, new way? Opened your eyes to a new possibility?
- Thinking back to the story in the song - What was the difference, in any, of the two different teachers? How were their intentions and their actions different?
- What other reflections do you have about the song? How does this relate to your role at camp this summer?
- If you could be that child’s teacher in the song, what is one blessing you’d want to give them about following their own intention?

Introduce the idea from Christian writer, Anne Lamott, who says there are 3 essential kinds of prayers: Help/Please/Ask, Thanks, and Wow. The NYC-based Jewish community Lab/Shul also adds a fourth kind of prayer, an “Oops” kind of prayer for forgiveness.

Hawaiian Tradition of [Ho’oponopono](#) : “[m]any people have understood ho’oponopono to be a mantra where one repeats the words ‘I’m sorry, please forgive me, thank you, I love you’ as a form of mental and spiritual cleaning that could be compared to buddhist techniques for clearing karma.”

Creating, Gardening, Planting (10 minutes)

Have table space already set with pipe cleaners, flower-making instructions, scissors, luggage tags, thin sharpies. Display the styrofoam blocks

Explain: This morning I’m going to ask you to set an intention that is aligned with one of the kinds of blessings: Help, Thanks, Wow, or Oops. This can be a prayer to yourself, to a Divine Source, to someone you love, or to the world as a whole. In a moment, I’ll ask that you take a tag and write that blessing, or just the word “Help, Thanks, Wow, or Oops” using the colorful sharpies.

Then, take some pipe cleaners and make a flower to PLANT in our Garden of Blessings. The flower can be any shape or color - after all, there are so many colors in the rainbow, so let’s use every one. By planting these Blessing Flowers, we do a few things. We help our prayers take root, making our *kavanah* - our intentions - more focused. We also provide company to the blessings around us, rather than a prayer standing alone. Finally, we also allow others to be inspired by our blessings. No flower is exactly the same. No prayer is exactly the same, even if we say the same words, because the *kavanah* behind it is unique to each of us.

There is a line of 4 blocks, each labeled with: Help, Thanks, Wow, and Oops. Once you’ve written your blessing and created a flower, tie on your blessing tag and “plant” your flower into the styrofoam block. If time left, invite folks to volunteer and share if willing. (Later, you can display these little Gardens of Blessings - see the “additional notes for camp” at the bottom!)

Yotzer Or, Creation, "Beautiful the Sun Shines Down" (10 minutes)

Bring everyone back together. Explain: Each morning, there is a Jewish tradition of expressing a prayer of "Thanks" and "Wow" for the Creation of the world - particularly light from the sun.

Recite/Read the Yotzer Or blessing in Hebrew and/or English depending on the group preference.

Discuss:

- What are some of the themes in this blessing? What are some possible intentions we might hold as we say it? (Perhaps please, thank you, wow, sorry?)

Here are some links to look through if you want more details and context about the Yotzer Or blessing:

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yotzer_ohr
- https://www.learnhebrewpod.com/jewish-prayers/Yotzer_Or (a translation)
- <http://ourtemple.org/youth-education/hebrew-school-prayers/yotzeir-or/> (recording)

Sing or read (like a poem) the lyrics to "Beautiful the Sun Shines Down."

- Optionally, share the history of the song: Written by Herschel Bleefeld as an entry in a NFTY Song Competition in 1992. Before he performed it for the conference of fellow teenagers, he shared his own *kavanah* in the form of a dedication. He shared with me:
 - "before I sang it, I dedicated it to my grandfather who was supposed to be at the concert (they literally lived 20 minutes from Kutz) [the URJ Camp where the conference was being held] but he was sick and at the last minute had to bail... it was documented that it was for him. So the song is really a journey of one person's journey back to their own sense of belonging and connection... someone who is trying to reconnect with the good in the world by reminding them of their younger less jaded self. The lyrics keep referring to what the "narrator" is trying to reconnect with and the "child" within keeps resurfacing and reminding him of the beauty in the world. That it sometimes takes stripping away the life experience and being present in a way that sometimes only a child can... and that's why a kid keeps appearing in the lyrics. It was all motivated by my grandfather who was always a kind, larger than life, positive person... and then he got sick and he said to me one day: "Herschel, getting old is no fun" and I remember it vividly because it was the first time I ever heard him say a negative thing about life... and I wanted to write a song that preserved my positive memories of him."

Ask for any reflections on the song (which is sang at some camps as an interpretation of the spirit of the Yotzer Or blessing).

An Abundance of Blessings - to Give Away (10 minutes)

Share the story of the two water buckets:

There was once an elderly individual who had two large buckets. Each bucket hung on the ends of a long pole, which she carried across the back of her neck. One of those buckets had a crack in it and the other bucket was perfect. The perfect bucket always delivered a full portion of water at the end of the long walk, uphill, from the stream to the house. But the cracked bucket arrived only half full. For a full two years they went each day down to the stream with the two buckets, and she would arrive home with one and one half buckets of water. Of course, the perfect bucket was proud of its accomplishments. The cracked bucket however, was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it could only do half of what it had been created to do.

After two years of what the cracked bucket perceived to be bitter failure, it spoke to the human one day by the stream. "I am ashamed of myself, because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your house and you work so hard."

The person smiled and said, "Did you notice that there are flowers all along your side of the path, but not on the other bucket's side? I have always known about your flaw, so I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back, you water the flowers. For two years, I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate the table. Without you being just the way you are, there would not be this beauty to grace my house and give me so much joy."

Each of us has our own flaws, and also our own way of seeing the world. When we are grieving, we feel that those flaws are magnified. We are unable to meet the demands of others or ourselves. We begin to look at our flaws and feel out of control and uncertain about our future. We see ourselves as helpless and often feel hopeless. We are afraid to trust our feelings and may even feel we are alone in our community or in the world..

But, if we can just accept ourselves for who we are and allow ourselves to experience the feelings we feeling, and embrace the unique perspective we hold, we, too, can blossom into something new and different.

During our last 10 minutes, I'll ask that you take a moment to set a new intention - but this time, for someone else. What is a blessing you want to bestow upon someone else? Turn your *kavanah* towards them.

You may choose to write this *kavanah* blessing down on a tag, or not. But once you're holding that intention and that blessing for someone, make a second flower. This one won't go IN our garden here, but I'll ask that you give it to the individual you're holding in your heart. Perhaps it's a THANKS blessing to someone for their creativity, or to say OOPS I'm sorry, to sweeten your ASK for HELP or assistance or support, or to just tell them WOW.

If time left, invite folks to volunteer and share if willing.

ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR BRINGING IT BACK TO CAMP:

Consider bringing the "blessing gardens" (flowers in styrofoam blocks) back to your cabin or display in your dining hall or prayer chapel or another public space. You can make extra flowers to say thank you to camp Office Staff or Kitchen Staff, or others in your community you might not typically interact with but may want to say "thank you," "please," "wow," or "sorry" to.