

CORNERSTONE 2019 RESOURCE

Deconstructing Blessings + Prayers

Start Your Morning

AUTHOR(S):	Caroline Rothstein
SUMMARY:	In this interactive session, participants will unpack the formulaic phrase “ <i>Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha’Olam...</i> ,” which starts most Hebrew prayers and blessings, using movement and writing, in order to renew one’s ability to engage with Hebrew prayers and blessings at camp and beyond. All are welcome; participants do not need to have any Hebrew language skills to attend! – <i>Submitted by Caroline Rothstein</i>
TOPIC(S):	Prayer, Writing
LEARNING OBJECTIVE:	Regardless of a participant’s previous knowledge of and experience with the blessings and prayers, they will gain a fresh and expansive understanding of the words and contents of this formula, which opens most prayers and blessings. Participants will also gain tools for further exploring other prayers and liturgical texts using these modalities.
AUDIENCE:	Any age group – camper or staff; ideal size is 15 to 25 participants.
TIMING:	60 minutes
APPENDICES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baruch Ata - ENGLISH (FOR WALL) • Baruch Ata - HEBREW (FOR WALL) • Baruch Ata - HEBREW TRANSLITERATION (FOR WALL) • Baruch Ata - HEBREW & TRANSLITERATION (FOR FLOOR) • Baruch Ata - HEBREW & ENGLISH (FOR FLOOR)
MATERIALS NEEDED:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baruch Ata – ENGLISH (FOR WALL) • Baruch Ata - HEBREW (FOR WALL) • Baruch Ata - HEBREW TRANSLITERATION (FOR WALL) • Baruch Ata - HEBREW & TRANSLITERATION (FOR FLOOR) • Baruch Ata - HEBREW & ENGLISH (FOR FLOOR) • Writing utensils • Dry erase markers • 4 x 6 notecards • Tape

SET-UP DETAILS:

The ideal location/room is one with open space and walls, or places to hang things.

There should be space to lay things out in a big circle on the floor whereby participants can still move around the space. There will also need to be at least one wall or area where the session materials can be hung or taped to the wall/space in a line/row.

SESSION TIMELINE & OUTLINE:

- Preparations before beginning:
 - o Hang the Hebrew words of “Baruch ata...” out in order in a row on a wall from right to left.
 - o Hang the Hebrew transliteration of “Baruch ata...” out in order in a row below each corresponding Hebrew block letter word on a wall from right to left.
 - o Hang the English translation of the prayer on a wall near the Hebrew words.
 - o Place the Hebrew words of “Baruch ata...” and the corresponding Hebrew/English translation in a counterclockwise circle on the floor, so it reads right to left like Hebrew.
- Invite participants to find a spot in the circle and each have a writing utensil.
- Begin session.
- Welcome participants and share workshop goal and agenda (3 minutes)
 - o Workshop goal: to unpack the “Baruch ata...” prayer formula both in Hebrew and English translations to gain a fresh and renewed ability to engage with this prayer and others.
 - o Agenda:
 - Introduction
 - Read & discuss “Baruch ata...”
 - Movement activity
 - Writing activity
 - Debrief
 - Takeaway activity
 - Closing
 - o Guidelines and group agreements for creating a brave and safe(r) space:
 - Use “I” statements
 - Confidentiality
 - Ask clarifying questions
 - Meet risk with risk
 - It’s ok to be raggedy
- Introductions (5 minutes):
 - o Ask participants to share their name, their pronouns if they feel comfortable, and one thing for which they’re grateful today.
- Read & discuss “Baruch ata...” (7 minutes)
 - o Ask participants to share what their experience is of this prayer/blessing formula and phrase, “Baruch ata...”?
 - o Have a volunteer read the Hebrew (Hebrew and/or transliteration) of “Baruch ata...” that is pinned up on the wall.
 - o Have a volunteer read the English translation pinned to the wall.
 - o Ask if a volunteer wants to translate the prayer from Hebrew on their own.

- 'Movement Activity (10 minutes)
 - o Ask participants to move around the circle and choose one of the words of “Baruch ata...” that is in a circle on the floor, and then move next to it and create a movement for it.
 - o Ask participants to share their movement with a group person-by-person, counterclockwise in the circle while saying the word out loud if they are able.
 - o Once everyone has shared, begin to “recite” the prayer through movement only going around the circle several times until the group has reached a comfortable flow.
- Writing Activity (15 minutes)
 - o Ask participants to now take time moving around the entire circle and – with a writing utensil (or dry erase marker) – spend some time with each of the English translations of the various Hebrew words and add their own translations, phrases, ideas, opinions, or thoughts to each word. Perhaps entire memories come to mind. Perhaps single words. Remind participants that this is a time for them to generate their own language.
 - o Ask participants to arrive in front of one word in the circle, and then have participants read/share the words that were added on the papers around the circle.
- Debrief / Putting it all together (10 minutes)
 - o Relook at the prayer on the wall – and what does this all mean?
 - o Ask a volunteer to reread the original English translation on the wall.
 - How different is it from how the prayer has since been deconstructed?
 - How might you translate it differently now?
 - What is this prayer saying in a larger sense, beyond the literal words?
 - o Recap all of the modalities that were used in this session:
 - Gestures/movement.
 - Call/response.
 - Personal translation/writing.
 - Ask participants to consider: What else in Jewish life or Jewish text have you felt distanced from that you could deconstruct again to help find a renewed connection?
- Takeaway Activity (5 minutes)
 - o Ask participants to take a 4 x 6 notecard and now – using all of the deconstructed translations and cognates of each word – create their own translation of “Baruch ata...” to take away with them.
- Closing (5 minutes)
 - o Thank participants and ask them to share a single word about what they learned and/or are taking away.

ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR BRINGING IT BACK TO CAMP:

- The methods and modalities used in this session can be used for exploring, unpacking, or learning any prayer or piece of liturgical text.
- Utilizing the final debrief question – “What else in Jewish life or Jewish text have you felt distanced from that you could deconstruct again to help find a renewed connection?” – consider what texts or traditions at camp could be renewed or strengthened by using the methods in this session, and then implement the same program inserting that text, prayer, or tradition into the process of deconstruction via movement and generating language.