

Acrostics of Awe: Crafting Tokens of Radical Amazement

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SUMMARY: Explore the text of the *Ashrei* prayer and create our own acrostic poems of radical amazement. We will then create a physical token using art to serve as a reminder of the awe and inspiration all around us.

GOALS:

- A. To explore the meaning of a prayer included with daily *mincha*.
- B. To see daily prayer as a place for self-exploration and connection.
- C. To see awe in everyday things.

AUDIENCE: Age 10 and up, group size only limited by the quantity of supplies available.

TIMING: 45 minutes

MATERIALS:

- [Ashrei Text Study](#) (1 per pp, double sided, stapled, B&W)
- [Sculpey](#)
- [Letter cookie cutters](#)
- Toothpicks
- Parchment paper
- Toaster oven
- [Keychain rings](#)
- [Jump Rings](#)
- Toothpicks or skewers (only need a couple)

SET-UP:

- Table and enough chairs for each participant
- Plastic tablecloths or plastic tables that can be wiped down (no wood tables)

SESSION TIMELINE

- 00:00-00:05 – Warm Up Game – Blessings of Gratitude
- 00:05-00:15 – Ashrei Text Study
- 00:15-00:20 – Write Your Name Acrostic
- 00:20-00:45 – Sculpey letters

SESSION OUTLINE

00:00-00:05 – Warm Up Game – Blessings of Gratitude

100 blessings a day activity (originally from Julie Finkelstein)

1. In the book of Deuteronomy, we encounter Moses giving his final speech to the Israelites, telling the Jewish people: “What (*mah*) does God ask of you?” The Talmud (Jewish commentary) tells us that the word “*mah*” can be read as “*me-ah*” (100). In other words, God obligates us to recite 100 blessings every day.
2. If one were to say 100 brachot a day, that is approximately one blessing every 10 minutes. Now I don’t say 100 blessings a day, but I do try to stop and appreciate what is around me. To take these meditative moments of awe.
3. So that’s what we are going to do. We are going to go around and say 100 blessings collectively. Using one word, say something you are in awe of, or something you are grateful for. I will start and then we will go around the room X times (however many we need to reach 100 based on who is in the room).
4. Go around the room.
5. Say “Amen” at the end.

00:05-00:15 – Ashrei Text Study

With a partner, I invite you to read the text of the [Ashrei](#). After reading, discuss:

- What do you notice about the text?
- What do you wonder?
- What do you appreciate?

Come back together as a group and discuss. Review the questions they discussed. Make sure it is mentioned that the prayer is Acrostic using the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Did anyone notice that the Hebrew letter *nun* is missing? Why do you think that is? There are many thoughts about this from scholars (see [here](#) for a summary). A few ideas from this summary are:

- There is a major thematic break between the mem line (emphasizing G-d’s rule) and the samech line (emphasizing God’s graciousness)—omitting a nun line underscores this.
- By omitting the nun line, the letter sequence spells out the word “king” (mem, lamed, kaf) in reverse order, and omitting the nun line underscores this.
- By omitting the *nun* line, we are left with 21 verses, and therefore a middle verse, verse 11 kaf: *kevod malchutecha yomeiru*, “They will tell of the glory of Your sovereignty and speak of your greatness” arguably the main theme of the entire psalm.
- While this could be the focus of Ashrei, we are instead going to focus on the bigger picture, awe of God’s creation and gifts.

00:15-00:20 – Write Your Name Acrostic

Write the letters of your name vertically. One letter per line. Write an acrostic poem using your name. For each letter, write a line about something in which you find radical amazement or an appreciation of G-d’s creations.

00:20-00:45 – Sculpey Letters

Using Sculpey, make a 2-inch letter and decorate it to reflect the line you wrote. It will serve as a reminder to you for your own personal moment of awe. Put it somewhere that will remind you to always be amazed and awe inspired!

When people finish, bake them (and ask them to help clean up), but also note that I will bake these and return them to you later in the day. A table will be set up at lunch to turn into keychains.

After session:

Poke hole, bake (200 degrees, 12 minutes), make into keychains or put out supplies for participants to later turn into keychains.

BRINGING IT TO YOUR CAMP

This could be done anywhere and with any material. It could be clay you dig from the ground, it could be paper mâché, it could be a collage you make from magazines. The idea is that we each create some sort of reminder to be amazed. It would make an excellent tefilla (prayer) alternative!