

Oooh, That Smell: Sniffing With Intention

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SUMMARY: In this session we will learn what Judaism has to teach about our sense of smell (hint: it involves the soul) and will explore ways to take in a variety of scents with intentionality and gratitude. Hands-On and Noses-On.

GOALS:

- Participants will know that...
 - there is an obligation (or however they understand 'mitzvah') to recite a blessing over smells, much like we recite a blessing over food
 - They will know that according to at least one text this blessing is only recited when one "intends" to smell
 - They will know that according to the Talmud, smells benefit the soul, but not the body
- Participants will....
 - Consider what it means to them to smell with intention
 - Consider what it means to them for a smell to benefit the soul
 - Feel inspired to do some deep smelling (and possibly say the *Bracha*)

AUDIENCE: Can be adapted for any age or group size

TIMING: 45 min

MATERIALS:

- A variety of naturally scented items, prepared ahead of time or gathered as part of the session (or both)
- [Source sheet](#).

SET-UP: This session could be held in any setting, but near a garden or other area with plants and trees if planning to gather some materials from nature.

SESSION TIMELINE

1. 00:00-00:05 - Introductions, setting group norms
2. 00:05-00:25 – Text study/discussion
3. 00:25-00:40 – Experiencing Scents
4. 00:40-00:45 – Bringing it back to camp: discuss

SESSION OUTLINE

00:00-00:05 - Introductions, setting group norms

Leader introduces themselves and topic of session: Our session is going to focus on smell - and specifically, what Judaism has to say about what I'm going to call "mindful smelling." In a traditional daily prayer book there is a section of blessings to be recited over scents.

Group has time for everyone to share their name and the answer to the question, "What is something that you love the smell of?"

00:05-00:25 – Text study/discussion

Review source 1 together

Take a minute or two to look these over - we **aren't** going to dig into the specifics of these blessings, but want to be sure everyone is familiar with them. These blessings are similar in many ways to blessings over food. And just like food blessings, they have the possibility of increasing our mindfulness and sense of gratitude. Discuss anything folks notice about the blessings...

Author's comment: My experience of food blessings is that reciting the blessing alone does not really ensure that I'm really engaging in mindful eating - does that resonate for anyone?

So, my guess is the same is true for smells. Besides "uttering" the formula of the blessings, what can we learn about mindful smelling from our tradition?

Review source 2 together

At what point is a blessing over scent recited?

Let's unpack this idea of "intent" to smell. What do you think that means?

We've established that one component is saying a *bracha*/blessing - (saying the "right *bracha*") and one component is smelling with "intent"

- How did the rabbis see blessing smells as different from blessings we say over food?

Review source 3 together

"kol haneshama" ("the whole soul")

- How does that answer the question of why to say a blessing over smell and how it is different from eating?

"THE SOUL BENEFITS" - what does that mean to you? discuss

00:25-00:40 – Experiencing Scents

Let's do some smelling/sniffing!

Explore some of the items provided, identify which blessing/*bracha* might be appropriate, and try techniques for smelling with an emphasis on appreciation.

Reflect on experience/ What heightened your appreciation? What didn't?

00:40-00:45 – Bringing it back to camp: discuss

BRINGING IT TO YOUR CAMP

One example of how this program can be incorporated into multiple parts of the day at camp; encouraging your campers to take in smells as they move throughout camp and using the *bracha* to recognize and appreciate the smells of nature, upcoming meal, grass after rain, morning air, etc.