

# UNLOCKING WONDER IN EVERYDAY LIFE

## PREP FOR THE SESSION

### *Overview*

Through exploring the value of practicing wonder, particularly in our fast-paced, sometimes tedious, and goal-oriented world, learners will develop new insights that support their ability to slow down and experience a sense of connection to themselves, others and nature no matter where they find themselves.

### *At-a-Glance:*

How can we find wonder in both the novel and the mundane? Research shows that experiencing wonder has health benefits, calming our nervous system and releasing oxytocin, the “love” hormone that promotes trust and bonding. Feeling wonder draws us out of ourselves and toward others.

In this resource, learners will explore the ways we can practice more wonder in their lives - especially at times when it is not easy. They will look at a contemporary Jewish text about finding wonder in the mundane and experience wonder through either journaling or a mindful walk followed by reflection.



#### **Time Estimate:**

- 40-60 minutes



#### **Best Uses:**

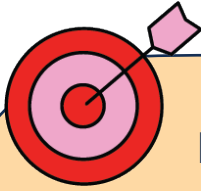
- Can be done for Hillel students, young adults professionals or parent



#### **Materials Needed:**

- For Activity A - paper and pencils and a place to take a walk, ideally outdoors. Set out a few “surprising” things along the walk - like small pieces of artwork or quotes or a pile of stones.
- For Activity B - journals, pencils and crafting supplies

## LET'S GET STARTED



### FRAME THE ISSUE

Various lists of the **Wonders of the World** have been compiled throughout history to catalogue the world's most spectacular natural features and human-built structures. For example, the Taj Mahal Palace in India appears on the list of 7 wonders of the modern world, and the Great Barrier Reef in Australia appears on the 7 wonders of the natural world.

#### *Facilitator prompts group:*

- What is special about these official “wonders of the world?” (e.g. the skill it took to build, or the uniqueness of the form)
- Have you visited any Wonders of the World? Or do you personally feel pressure or desire to visit them?
- Do you personally need to be in a specific place to feel wonder?

#### *Facilitator shares a definitions of wonder and prompts discussion:*

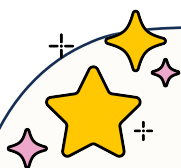
WONDER is a feeling of surprise and great admiration, often caused by something beautiful or unexpected. What moves us to a state of wonder can be surprising, even to ourselves.

- What do you think of this definition? What might you add or change?
- What is a time that you felt wonder? Describe the situation.
- What gets in the way of feeling wonder?

10 min



20-25  
min



## EXPLORE THE VALUE: WONDER AND AWE

### JEWISH WISDOM

Jewish tradition has much to say about wonder and awe, from the awe-inspiring story of creation to blessings we can say when witnessing natural phenomena such as seeing the ocean after a long time, or witnessing a crack of lightning across the sky. Rabbi Danya Rutenberg wrote a book called *Nurture the Wow; Finding Spirituality in the Frustration, Boredom, Tears, Poop, Desperation, Wonder, and Radical Amazement of Parenting*. Her focus is on parenting but the wisdom she talks about in the book can apply to people in all stages of life. She wrote:

*"The messy repetition of life can perhaps bring us to the sacred. As Emma Kiple-Ogman put it, "changing diapers and doing laundry are not," on the surface anyway, "challenging theologically the same way that illness and pain is" and yet in the seemingly never-ending nature of these tasks deep in the grit of what it is to be a human being she says there is a deep teaching: "I get a sense of what the infinite is about these processes." ....*

*"Certainly even just thinking about that pile of laundry or sink full of dishes as a link to the infinite can sometimes pull you out of the mindset of boredom into a far more interesting headspace. But the Jewish mystical tradition has another line of thinking that I find useful as well. Some traditional texts talk about how every act has the potential to release holy sparks - aspects of the transcendent into the universe."*



#### **Facilitator prompts the group:**

- What stands out to you from what Rabbi Danya Rutenberg wrote?
- What do you find helpful or challenging about the idea of seeking out wonder in the tasks we do each day?

Rabbi Rutenberg acknowledges that "even opening up a conversation about the drudgery has the potential to make things worse." There are all sorts of expectations put on parents and women especially to do the bulk of the household work. Her invitation is not to add one more task on people's plates (e.g. I need to do the chores AND I need to enjoy them too?) but rather to make these difficult and tedious moments a little more meaningful.



- Consider a mundane, tedious, or even unpleasant task that you wish you could find more meaning in. What would it look like to elevate that task? (E.g. dish washing can be elevated by using it as an opportunity for meditation by bringing your attention back to the feeling of water on your hands, you could say a blessing before eating a meal.)

### ACTIVITY

**Note to facilitator:** The following are two options to choose from. Both take 10-15 minutes. The first focuses on the natural world, the second on our relationships with others.

#### OPTION A:

**Facilitator prompts group to reflect on the following with a barometer activity:**

- How often do you stop and notice things that you find beautiful or mysterious?

**Then, the facilitator invites participants to take a walk in a contained area. On the walk they should jot down notes or drawings of any “wow moments,” which can be identified with the following questions:**

- What feels familiar and what feels new?
- What is something that invites you to say “wow!”
- What makes you stop and pause? Maybe it is something you have seen before but have not appreciated. Maybe it is something new. When you have a “wow” moment, capture it by drawing it or describing it in words.

**Facilitator prompts the group - turn to a partner and share after five minutes of walking:**

- Share one “wow” moment or phenomena you observed on the walk.

#### OPTION B:

The days are long, but the years are short. In the midst of hectic schedules, it can be easy to miss the “wow” moments.

**Facilitator prompts group to journal about the following prompts:**



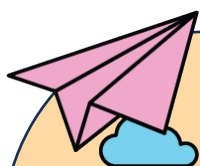
- What is a time you have felt intense curiosity about or connection to another person?
- What helps you to connect with others?
- If you could design an experience - for you and someone else you care about - where you would feel wonder, what would it look like, sound like, taste like, smell like?

Around the room are various supplies - blank journals and crafting supplies. I invite you to decorate a WOW journal to give to someone else in the room. The journal should have some surprises in it for that other person, possibly some prompts to help them feel wonder in their everyday lives, some images or stickers to prompt surprise or excitement. Or anything else that you feel would spark wonder for someone else.

Once you are finished with your journal, I will collect them and then pass them out to their new owners.

**After time to work on the journals, facilitator gathers the group back together and prompts everyone to turn to a partner and share:**

- What was something that stuck out to you that you journaled about and would like to share?
- What do you notice in your journal that makes you surprised, excited, curious, or sparked wonder?



## REFLECT AND PROMPT ACTION



***Facilitator prompts group to reflect:***

- What is one new idea you heard or came up with that could help you bring more wonder into your days and into your relationships?
- What are practices that might facilitate adopting any of these ideas? What do you think will be a continued challenge?
- Share a three-word summary with the group that describes a perspective you now have about wonder.

10 min

