



# A SPIRITUAL CHECK-UP

## BODY AND SOUL

∞ *Facilitators' Guide* ∞

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**Illustrations by Maria Radacsi**

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## WELCOME

Welcome to the “spiritual check-ups” designed and written for Hillel’s Joseph Meyerhoff Center for Jewish Learning by Rabbi Aryeh Ben David, Director of Spiritual Education at the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem.

In the same way that we all look after our *bodies* by having physical check-ups, these “spiritual check-ups” are designed to help students take care of their *souls*, and think about the things that give meaning to their lives.

These workshops are ready-made activities for use on campuses of all kinds. We hope that they will spark conversations, enrich the students with some experience of studying Jewish thought and help them feel connected to their Jewish identities.

All the workshops have been tested many times and run successfully on campuses all over North America and in Israel.

The spiritual check-ups in the series are:

- The Inner Voice
- Body and Soul
- Radical Amazement
- Preparing for Passover

They can be used in many ways; as a whole series focused on Jewish spirituality (the order in which you do the workshops is not important); as a curriculum for a retreat (choose 2 or 3 workshops over a Shabbat); as a one-time evening activity. They can also be broken up and the parts integrated into other activities. More ideas for how to adapt these activities is at the end of this document.

## BEFORE THE SESSION

### *1. Marketing and Targeting the Spirituality Check-Up*

- a. Which students would you like to participate in this session? Do you want your student board and other empowered students to have the opportunity to think deeply? Or are you going to use the topic of spirituality to attract students who don’t usually come to Jewish events? Have you thought about partnering with organizations on campus who are interested in spirituality?
- b. Some students are attracted to the word “spirituality”, some are turned off. Make sure that you think about the words you use on the publicity. Don’t forget to tell people that this is

For the sake of clarity and convenience, each Spiritual Check-Up includes the **Facilitator’s Guide**, **Student Guide** and **Experiential Exercise**. The Facilitator’s Guide is the same for each Check-Up. Background on the **history and philosophy** of these guides may be found at the end of this packet.

a workshop that requires their full participation for the whole time (usually 3 hours). It is very disruptive for the whole group if people come late and leave early.

- c. As with all Hillel events, students will be much more likely to come to this event if they have had personal contact with someone involved. Think about sending personalized invitations in advance, or calling people personally. This is the kind of event that requires the personal touch. You could also advertise that there will be dinner served, which makes it into a whole evening program.

## *2. Selecting a Location*

Who are the students you are targeting? Where are they? Which location would be the best for them? Sometimes hosting events at Hillel will deter unaffiliated students from coming. Think about the best place to host the event, remembering that it should be comfortable and with a relaxed and quiet atmosphere.

## *3. Preparing the Room*

- a. **Most importantly – make sure that it doesn't resemble a classroom.** Is the setting friendly? Are the chairs in a circle? Can you pull a couch into the circle? Are there pillows on the floor to sit on? Students walk into a classroom and automatically go into an academic mode of detachment. We want a warm, inviting atmosphere to help them unwind, and maybe even open up their hearts.
- b. How is the lighting? Don't try to make it too moodful or dark. They'll just fall asleep.
- c. Is the room clean? Are there any newspapers, magazines, or flyers lying around? Coffee cups or candy wrappers? Get rid of them. We don't want any distractions.
- d. Do you have name tags? This is very important. Hopefully there will be some new faces and they won't know each other. It eliminates the feeling that there are "insiders" and "outsiders."
- e. Will you need a white board or an easel with markers that work? Double check.
- f. How about pens and paper for the writing exercise? Or are they readily available?
- g. Do you have the booklets copied and ready? If you don't have enough, are there enough to share?
- h. Snacks? Not essential but create a friendly atmosphere.

## ☞ DURING THE SPIRITUALITY CHECK-UP

### *1. Preparing to be the Facilitator*

Nervous? Relax. Remember - it's not about you.

- ☞ You don't have to dazzle them with your erudition or charisma.
- ☞ You don't have to be funny.
- ☞ You don't have to know everything.
- ☞ You don't have to have an answer for every question. Remember that at the Pesach Seder we start off by asking four questions. Then we read the *Haggadah*. We only answer three of the questions, one of the questions we never answer.

You just have to be personal and sincere. Your job is to:

- ☞ Guide them through the booklet and facilitate the writing exercise in order to bring them to the personal *chevruta* (one-on-one dialogue) at the end, which always works, because it's completely dependent on them.
- ☞ Make sure that the evening keeps moving. Don't let it get bogged down. Don't let anyone monopolize the evening.
- ☞ Try to bring in people who appear to be on the outside, without drawing attention to the fact that they are an outsider, or that it is their first time.
- ☞ Encourage people to ask questions, and help to make them inclusive so that everyone understands and can participate.

You can do it. So relax and enjoy it. If you are transformed by the workshop, then for sure it will work for everyone else.

### *2. The Welcome*

Are the students seated comfortably? Can you make eye contact with everyone?

- ☞ Find the people who chose to sit on the outside. They're nervous. They're not sure if they really want to be here. They're checking things out. They're not just sitting on the outside; they're emotionally on the outside. They're the most likely to leave.
- ☞ Give them a big smile and bring them into the circle. Start a conversation with them.

Everyone seated? Let's get them talking. Ask someone: "Why did you come here tonight?"

Just point and shoot. Ask someone else. Try to bring in the people who are looking distant. It will help warm them up. It should give you a feel of the crowd.

The students are coming from all different places – classes, sleeping in their rooms, exercise, coffee shop, etc. Your job now is to bring them together and to help them focus on the

program. For this program to work, everyone will need to concentrate. Look serious. Even better, be serious.

### *3. Get Personal*

**You, the facilitator, now have to set the tone by saying something personal about yourself.** If you don't lead the way, then they will not fully engage.

1. Talk about why this is an important subject for **you**. Try to be as specific as possible. Offer a moment – positive or challenging – that has affected your spiritual life. It's a great opportunity to deepen the bond you have with the students, and to show new students that you can create an engaging and welcoming space for them to discuss meaningful issues. Most of their professors do not share their personal side.
2. You're giving them permission to bring their hearts and souls (not just their minds) to the activity.
3. Don't (!) talk too long. Three minutes is plenty. Remember, it's not about you. It's about them. You're just the catalyst.

#### 4. Timing and the Components of the Session

The program is relatively long, but each piece is crucial. You may need to tell students that they have to commit to staying the whole time. If they come late or leave early it will distract the whole group.

Think of the program as two 75-minute parts. (If there are less than 10 participants it will take less time.)

These are the elements of the program:

<p><b>Introduction</b> The introduction is read by the participants; just follow along in the <i>haggadah</i>.</p>	15 minutes
<p><b>Learning and Review of the Sources</b> In small groups of 4 or 5. All you need to do is divide the participants into these groups, tell them to follow the directions in their <i>haggadah</i>, and the discussion will run itself.</p>	60 minutes
<p><b>Break (optional)</b> You might want to add a short game to lighten the mood and get people moving.</p>	
<p><b>Experiential Component</b> An art or writing exercise which you facilitate (see the document entitled "experiential exercise" at the end of this facilitator's guide) and which is then followed by sharing in small groups of 4 or 5. These need not be the same groups as the previous part.</p>	30 minutes
<p><b>Personal Chevruta</b> One-on-one dialogue between two participants. Encourage the participants to choose a partner from among the people they know the least.</p>	30 minutes
<p><b>Closing Words</b> (the <i>afikomen</i> and anything else you want to add)</p>	15 minutes
<p><b>Total</b></p>	<b>150 minutes</b>

Your most important responsibility is to continually check the time. Work backwards. Figure out what time you want to finish. Then subtract 15 minutes for closing words. Then subtract 30 minutes for the personal *chevruta*. Then subtract 30 minutes for the writing exercise and sharing. Then subtract 5 minutes for a break. That means that the second half of the program (writing, personal *chevruta* and closing) is 75 minutes. So you can't get bogged down during the first half of the program (introduction, *chevruta* on sources, and reading of booklet's analysis of

sources). Remember - if you shorten the personal *chevruta* at the end the whole evening will be diminished. That's almost always the most powerful part of the evening. It works well to have dinner for them beforehand. Then the whole evening becomes 3 hours. Typically we ran it from 6:30 – 9:30. Don't serve dinner in the middle; the program will lose its flow.

### After the Session

One of the most important parts of these workshops is what you do *afterwards*. How are you going to capitalize on the success of the workshops? How can you involve these students in future activities? How can you build on their interest and energy? Even before the session starts, invest some time in thinking about what will happen afterwards. Here are some ideas of how to continue the connection with the students who participate.

### *Ideas for Follow-Up*

- a. Invite all those who participate to have coffee with a Hillel staff member in the week following the workshop. Call them up and make a date to talk about their interests and how this workshop affected them.
- b. Encourage the students to start meeting on a regular (perhaps once a month), informal basis to learn and discuss issues of spirituality. They could meet in a dorm room and study together.
- c. Invite other religious leaders in the campus community to join you for similar activities in the future. They make good partners for future events.
- d. Think about planning a retreat based on similar activities, later in the year.
- e. Encourage the students who participated this time to bring a friend to the next workshop, and to help organize and publicize.
- f. Involve your Jewish student board, and lay board, in activities of this type. Brainstorm ways to integrate pieces of these spiritual check-ups into regular Hillel events (personal *chevruta* at a Friday night dinner or other events, etc.).

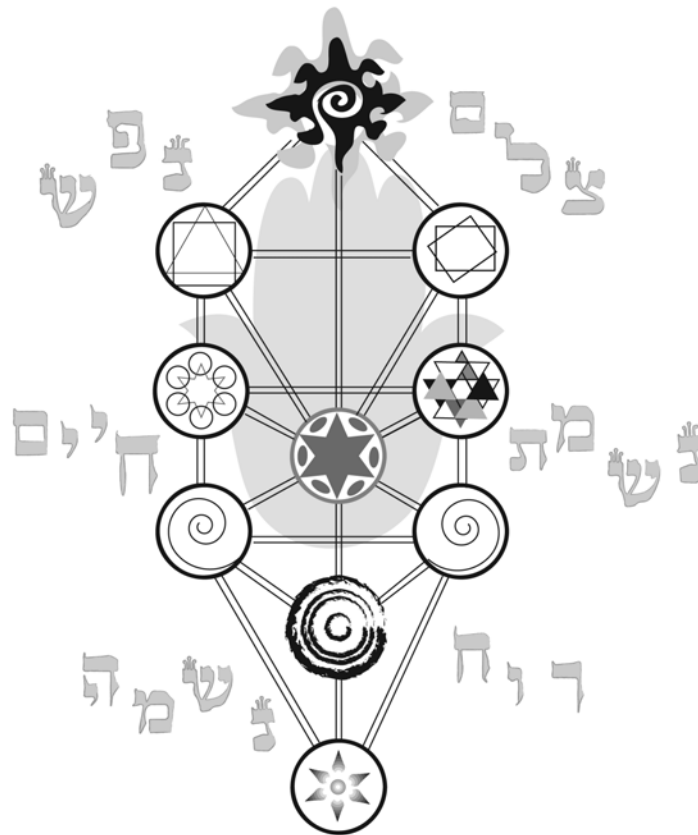
### ADAPTING AND “TWEAKING” THE SPIRITUAL WORKSHOPS

The spiritual check-ups are written in a “*haggadah*” format, meaning that they are ready to use and don't require any additional material. You simply take the “*haggadah*,” make copies for the participants, and start!

But, you should also feel free to take the material and adapt it to suit your needs, your students and your own personal style. Make it personal, add individual touches, and do whatever you need to make it work. The following are some ideas taken from things that other Hillel professionals have already done to make these workshops work for them.

- a. Begin the whole evening with a moment of reflection. You could end with one too.
- b. Dim the lights and have candles and chocolates to create a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere. You could also have pillows on the floor and soft music to start (although you won't want it to distract you during the workshop itself).

- c. Start with a *nigun* (a song without words).
- d. Begin with a personal story about your life, your soul or a spiritual moment.
- e. Ask a small number of students to share their spiritual moments at different times during the evening.
- f. Ask everyone to write down a word describing how they feel at the start of the evening, and then do this again at the end, comparing how the feelings are different.
- g. Have people introduce themselves by saying something about their souls.
- h. Don't be afraid to ask people to "just sit with this idea for a moment" if something interesting comes up. Ask them to reflect on this at the end.
- i. Add an ice-breaker game at the start or in the middle.



☞ BODY AND SOUL  
EXPERIENTIAL COMPONENT  
DRAWING EXERCISE

*For the Facilitator*

**☞ Supplies needed:**

1. Pastels or pens
2. Blank white paper

**Warm-up:**

1. Everyone needs a piece of paper and a few crayons of your choice. Everyone needs a partner. Look at your partner. Now put the crayon in your non-writing hand and draw your partner's face.
2. Ready, one crayon and a new piece of paper. Look at your partner. Now, without looking at the paper, draw your partner's face. No looking!!

**Actual:**

1. Look at your partner. We all have a body and a soul. Somehow, the spiritual side of a person shines through their face, their eyes. Look at your partner and now don't draw what you physically see, rather draw whatever energy, soul, "special-ness", speaks to you. You don't have to draw in the shape of a face. You can do a "modern-art" kind of representation. Look deeply at your partner – what do you sense? What part of the face draws your attention? What does it make you think of? How does it make you feel? You're drawing a spiritual portrait.
2. When you're both finished, show what you've drawn to your partner. Explain what you drew, why you drew it.



# A SPIRITUAL CHECK-UP

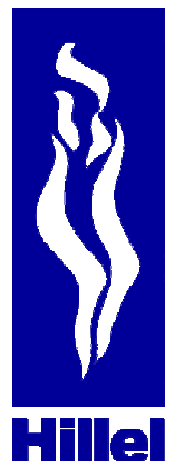
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☞ *First Reader:*

## ☞ HISTORY OF THIS WORKSHOP

Aryeh Ben David, the writer of this workshop, explains what brought him to think about this subject:

*I was in Milwaukee for my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, spending Shabbat with the Hassidic Rabbi, Michel Twersky. I mentioned to him that it was a special day for me, that turning 40 was a kind of rite of passage. He asked me how I was going to celebrate this special birthday. I told him that all of my friends had told me the same thing. “You’re turning 40, you have to be responsible. It’s time to get a ‘physical.’” Rabbi Twersky looked at me and just smiled. I wasn’t sure what he was thinking.*

*Finally he said to me, “Do you know what I think people should do when they turn 40?”*

*“I have no idea.”*

*“I tell people. It’s a rite of passage, an important time. It’s time to get a ‘spiritual.’ You’re right to go get a physical. You should take care of your body. But you also have a soul. You also need to take care of your soul. Go get a ‘spiritual’ too.”*

*I had no idea where to go or what to do to get a “spiritual.” But I had a sense that he was right.*

Tonight, we’re going to give each other a “spiritual check-up.”

☞ *Next Reader:*

## ☞ GUIDELINES FOR THE READING OF THE BOOKLET

These booklets are modeled after the *Haggadah* of the Passover Seder; the book that we use to tell the story of the Exodus from Egypt.

Just like the *Haggadah*, this text will be read by the participants of the evening.

Just like at the Seder, if anyone has any questions or comments on what is being read, please share them with all of us. It’s our evening.

Guidelines for Readers:

1. Try to read loudly and slowly.
2. Try to add a bit of life to what you’re reading. Relax and enjoy it. Have some fun.

At the ☞ *Next Reader* sign, pick the next reader of your choice.

☞ *Next Reader:*

## ☞ READING OF THE BOOKLET

*There was a time in our history when we were strangers in a strange land.  
Today, we are often strangers to our own souls.*

The very first question asked in the Torah is God's question to Adam after Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good & Evil. God asks Adam "Ayeka? Where are you?" Adam doesn't answer. He hides. Adam goes into denial. Eventually Moses will offer the correct answer to God's question. Moses answers, "*Hineni*. Here I am." This is considered a paradigm for all of us. We need to ask ourselves the question "Where are we?" We shouldn't hide. We are all in different places, but we all need to be fully present. We all need to answer "I am here."

We may never have answers to questions like: "Why do bad things happen to good people? Where was God in the Holocaust? Is there an ultimate truth?" But those are not the questions for tonight. Tonight we're looking inward, into ourselves. Tonight, the primary question for each of us is "Where am I?"

We give so much attention to our bodies. We use our minds. But we're often strangers to our own souls. The goal of these evenings is to take small steps to become more aware of our own souls. To become more of the person that we would like to be.

So, let all who are interested in having a "spiritual check-up" come and participate.

☞ *Next Reader:*

## ☞ ORDER OF THE EVENING

How is this workshop going to be different from all others? It will have 3 components:

1. *Neshama* – a learning component
2. *Nefesh* – an experiential component
3. *Ruach* – a personal component

There are three words in Hebrew for soul: *Neshama*, *Nefesh*, and *Ruach*. Three voices of the soul. *Neshama* – the intellectual voice. *Nefesh* – the physical voice. *Ruach* – the emotional voice. Tonight we are going to try to listen to all three of these voices.

But first we have to prepare ourselves appropriately. Just like on *Pesach* (Passover) when Jews traditionally get rid of all *hametz* (leavened products), so too, tonight we must get rid of something in order for this workshop to be meaningful. Tonight, our *hametz* is our cynicism or sarcasm. For the duration of this workshop we will be functioning in a cynicism-free zone. Why? It's very hard for one person to raise the mood of a whole group, but it is very easy for

one person to bring down the mood of the whole group. Tonight, we'll have to work together to make this evening productive.

We have all been in a group setting in which someone makes a very personal remark and another person rolls his/her eyes. Everyone sees the eyes rolling. It only takes a second but at that moment, everyone else in the room shuts down. No one is willing to become the next target of rolling eyes.

Just like we replace *hametz* with *matzah*, so too tonight we're going to replace cynicism with tolerance and support. No judging each other. No criticizing each other. No attacking each other. We may have talked about a lot of things together, but I'm not sure if we've shared with each other where we are holding regarding this issue of our souls. This can be a very personal subject. Keep in mind that people may be in very different places, and that we have to maintain mutual respect for each other for this to work. So let's celebrate the diversity of this group.

Okay, let's start. Two reminders:

1. Please turn off cell phones.
2. All participants need to stay until the end of the workshop. The workshop is one whole unit. You won't understand it unless you stay till the end. Also, leaving in the middle will be a distraction to others.

*☞Next Reader:*

## ☞ GETTING STARTED

*Instructions to reader: Pick 2 people and ask them the following question:*

"We don't really know each other, so let's begin to get acquainted. "Where are you from?"

*Instructions to reader: Pick another 2 people and ask them the following question:*

"What's your major? What are you studying?"

*Instructions to reader: Pick a person and asks him/her the following question:*

"Who are you? What is your essence? What makes you essentially you?"

*Instructions to reader: If they can answer this question easily – great. If not, help them out with the next question:*

"Okay, let's make it even easier. Presumably you are human being. How are you, in essence, different from an animal?"

*☞Next Reader:*

This question: "what is the essence of a human being?" has played a major role in world history. Why have cultures or societies differed? It is not simply the result of geographic location.

Societies have differed not because one was near the ocean or one was near mountains. Cultures and nations consciously or sub-consciously answer this question.

A few examples:

If we were in Athens 2,500 years ago and asked Socrates our question, he might have replied: “The essential quality of a human being is his ability to think.” Thus the philosopher held a pre-eminent role in ancient Greece.

If we were in Florence during the Renaissance and asked Michelangelo this question - “what is the essence of a human being?” – He might have answered that our premier quality is our capacity to create. Therefore being an artist was a valued calling in Italy.

If we were in Vienna over a 100 years ago and asked Sigmund Freud what was the essence of a human being, he might have answered: “we are conflicted beings, torn between our swarming libidinal (sexual) energy and our conscience (and our mothers!).” The psychologist now assumed a principal position in his society.

However we answer this question will have major ramifications for our society. It will determine who the most valued person is, who we would like to become, and what kind of things we talk about.

What is the Jewish answer to this question? We’ve been dwelling on this issue for about 3000 years. Let’s see what Judaism has to say about this question: “What is the essence of a human being?”

☞*Next Reader:*

## ☞LEARNING OF THE SOURCES

Instructions for learning the sources:

1. One person should read the sources aloud (the most tired person should read). Take turns.
2. Often the first tendency is to challenge or disagree with a new idea. These are provocative subjects. Try to keep an open mind. Before criticizing or questioning what is written, first summarize the idea and make sure you understand it.
3. Don’t dwell on the details of each day’s creation.
4. Focus on the bold verses, and use the guiding questions to help direct your conversations
5. Don’t be afraid to brainstorm, to say what you understand and what is unclear to you.
6. Work together, listen to each other. Help each other clarify what the sources mean. Think of yourself as a team.
7. Let’s divide into groups.

## *Sources*

### GENESIS CHAPTER 1

- 1 In the beginning God created heaven and earth.
- 2 The earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep, the spirit of God sweeping over the water.
- 3 God said, Let there be light; and there was light.
- 4 God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness.
- 5 God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, day one.
- 6 God said, Let there be an expanse in the midst of the water, that it may separate water from water.
- 7 God made the expanse, and it separated the water which was below the expanse from the water which was above the expanse. And it was so.
- 8 God called the expanse Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.
- 9 God said, Let the water below the sky be gathered into one area, that the dry land may appear. And it was so.
- 10 God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering of waters He called Seas. And God saw that this was good.
- 11 And God said Let the earth sprout vegetation: seed-bearing plants, fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it. And it was so.
- 12 The earth brought forth vegetation: seed-bearing plants of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that this was good.
- 13 And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.
- 14 God said, Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate day from night; they shall serve as signs for the set times the days and the years;
- 15 and they shall serve as lights in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth. And it was so.
- 16 God made the two great lights, the greater light to dominate the day and the lesser light to dominate the night, and the stars.
- 17 And God set them in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth,
- 18 to dominate the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that this was good.

- 19 And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.
- 20 God said, Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and birds that fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.
- 21 God created the great sea monsters and all the living creatures of every kind that creep, which the waters brought forth in swarms, and all the winged birds of every kind. And God saw that this was good.
- 22 God blessed them, saying, Be fertile and increase, fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.
- 23 And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.
- 24 God said Let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature: cattle, creeping things, and wild beasts of every kind. And it was so.
- 25 God made wild beasts of every kind and cattle of every kind, and all kinds of creeping things of the earth. And God saw that this was good.
- 26 And God said; Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth.
- 27 And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.
- 28 God blessed them and God said to them, Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.
- 29 God said, See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food.
- 30 And to all the animals on land, to all the birds of the sky, and to everything that creeps on earth, in which there is the breath of life, [I give] all the green plants for food. And it was so.
- 31 And God saw all that He had made, and found it very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. What do you think “Created in the Image of God” means?
2. Look at the order of the six days of Creation. Do you see a pattern?

(An important question is raised: Why does the Torah speak in the plural: “in our image. Let us a make man?” Unfortunately, the many answers to this question are beyond the purview of this session)

## GENESIS CHAPTER 2

- 1 The heaven and the earth were finished, and their entire array.
- 2 On the seventh day God finished the work that He had been doing, and He ceased on the seventh day from all the work that He had done.
- 3 And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation that He had done.
- 4 Such is the story of heaven and earth when they were created. When the Lord God made earth and heaven
- 5 When no shrub of the field was yet on earth and no grasses of the field had yet sprouted, because the Lord God had not sent rain upon the earth and there was no man to till the soil,
- 6 but a flow would well up from the ground and water the whole surface of the earth
- 7 The Lord God formed man (*adam*) from the dust of the earth (*adamah*). He blew into his nostrils the soul of life (*nishmat chayim*), and man became a living soul (*nefesh chaya*).

### GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. What does the expression “dust of the earth” convey to you? What motivation and actions do you think it includes?
2. How do you think these two components, dust & soul, function together?

☞ *Next Reader:*

## ☞ REVIEWING OF THE SOURCES

There are so many ideas to explore in these first two chapters. We're going to touch on just a few of the many points that are worth talking about.

### *Chapter 1*

Chapter 1 talks about being created in the Image of God.

Does this answer help us? Do I know what God is, or what the Image of God is? At first glance, this is a terrible answer. What do we know about God?

The word "Image" in Hebrew is *Tzelem*. It is connected to the word *Tzeil*, which means shadow or trace. We have "a trace" of God in us. What is that? If we can discern qualities of God in chapter 1, then we will also tap into what it means to be created in the Image of God. We will have revealed what are some of our primary characteristics.

Let's look at just the first chapter and see if we can come up with any qualities of God.

- 1) God is Creative. Created the whole world. So too I have the power to create. I can't create something from nothing. But if I'm created in the Image of God, then I too have some power of creation. I too can, in my own way, influence the world.
- 2) God creates for the good. God doesn't create wantonly. God judges the creation and desires a good creation. "And it was good."

☞ *Next Reader:*

- 3) God plans for the future.

Look at the order of creation. Do you see an order in the days of creation? Unlike the year (solar cycle) or the month (lunar cycle), there is no natural unit of time denoting a week. Why does the world organize itself around a 7-day week? One source of the idea of a 7-day week is the Torah. If so, we can ask why did it take God so long? Why should there have been divisions or units in time at all? Was God tired (!) after working so hard? Imagine if God had created everything in one day! Then we would have a one-day work week and Shabbat every other day. Take a look at the order of creation. Do you see a pattern?

Instructions to reader: Give everyone a moment to look for a pattern. Ask for one or two suggestions.

Day 1: Light & Dark	Day 4: Sun, Moon, Stars
Day 2: Waters, Skies	Day 5: Fish & Birds
Day 3: Land	Day 6: Animals, People

There are really two sets of three-day creations (first three days, second three days). During the first three days the site was created. During the second three days the inhabitants of that location were created.

God creates with the future in mind. When creating the 1<sup>st</sup> day God is already thinking of the 4<sup>th</sup>. When planning out the 2<sup>nd</sup> day, already thinking of the 5<sup>th</sup>. When creating the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, already envisioning the creation of the 6<sup>th</sup>.

Summary of the first chapter:

I am created in the image of God.

I have the power:

- 1) To create
- 2) In the future
- 3) For the good.

☞*Next Reader:*

## Chapter 2:

Chapter 2 talks about the creation of the body and the soul. “The Lord God formed man (*adam*) from the dust of the earth (*adamah*). He blew into his nostrils the soul of life (*nishmat chayim*), and man became a living soul (*nefesh chaya*).”

How does Chapter 2 answer the question: “Who am I?”

I am composed of two elements, dust and soul. These two elements are two drives within me. Two voices that are always talking to me. What are these voices transmitting to me?

The “dust voice” is the voice of mortality. “From dust to dust.” It’s concerned with my survival. It tells me to eat, sleep, have sex, and defend myself. It’s concerned with me, at this moment, right now. It’s the voice of my physicality.

The “soul voice” is different. It’s a bit more difficult to define. Since it is non-physical, it is not limited by time or place. Its voice is without limitations. It is not obsessed with my physical survival. It wants to add meaning to my survival. It’s often understood as the voice of greater concern. It is not just concerned with my own survival. It’s the voice of giving. The voice of compassion for others. The voice of connecting to something much greater than myself. It’s the voice which impels me to get involved in causes, whether communal, national, or universal. It’s difficult to describe, but often people grasp the idea even without a clear definition.

**☞Next Reader:**

The drives of the body and the soul can live in great tension, each vying to dominate the other.

There are four ways to resolve this tension, reflected by four kinds of students: the hedonist, the (too) holy, the manipulator, and the balanced.

Instructions to Reader: Pick four different participants to read each other “the four students.”

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>The hedonist student says:</b></p> <p>“Soul?! Never saw it. It’s all make-believe. They just made it up to give you a guilty conscience. I’ll tell you what’s true – you only go around once in this life, so might as well enjoy it. If it feels good – do it.” He only listens to his body.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>The manipulating student says:</b></p> <p>“I’m interested in the bigger picture. I really want what’s best for you. I want to give to you. I’m only thinking of you.” He’s giving, but he’s really only giving in order to receive. He listens to his body and his soul, but his physical drives are really directing his soul.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>The (too) holy student says:</b></p> <p>“Waste my time with physical things?! Feh! Low. I only concern myself with my soul. My body – I ignore it. Why listen to those animal urges when I can be like the angels? I’m the holiest.” He only listens to his soul.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>The balanced student says:</b></p> <p>“I’ve been given two drives. They’re both good. I’m not going to deny or repress my physical drives. But I’m not going to let them control me either. I’m going to try to let my soul direct my physical drives. I’ll totally enjoy this world, but I’m going to think of the bigger picture also.” He lets his soul direct his body.</p>

Just like the Four Sons of the *Pesach Haggadah* are really four different attitudes of each of us, so too these four students are really four parts of each of us.

The question that we have to perpetually ask ourselves is: “What is my motivation?” In Hebrew we would say, “What is my *Kavanah*?” Am I doing this act in order to take or to give? Is this act expressing more “dust voice” or my “soul voice?” Even when I am engaging in the most physical of acts, if the motivation for doing them is giving, if the motivation comes from the perspective of the ‘bigger picture,’ then it becomes a physical act which is brought about by my listening to my ‘soul voice.’

There are some acts which clearly are selfish, taking acts. On the other hand, when a person does an anonymous act of kindness, without seeking any reward or acknowledgment, it is clearly an act of giving. But the vast majority of our acts and interactions are a mixture of these two drives, of taking and giving. The goal is to allow the voice of our soul to become more influential, to become a more giving person.

☞ *Next Reader:*

Let's summarize of the second chapter:

We live in perpetual tension between these two voices. The combination of these two drives creates the potential for free-will. We can let the body voice control us and deny the soul voice. Or we can let the soul voice control us and deny the body voice. The response of Judaism is that both voices were created by God, both are good, and have to work together. Ideally, the soul voice directs the body voice. Then we have a full physical life, but live in a giving way, in the context of the "big picture."

☞ **BOTTOM LINE**

What have we learned about our questions of "Who am I? What is my essence?" from the first two chapters of the Torah?

The tension between our body and our soul creates the possibility of our free-will, our choosing, through which we express our being created in the Image of God.

☞ **FIVE-MINUTE BREAK**

☞ *Next Reader:*

## ☞ WRITING EXERCISE

We said that there were going to be 3 parts to the evening. We used our minds. Now is the time to do something physical – some writing exercises.

Don't get nervous. We are not all writers. We're not interested in the quality of the writing. We're not going to examine the grammar or syntax. This is not English 101. We're not going to compare or judge. The writing exercise is simply a form to express ourselves. Let's enjoy it.

First, let's divide ourselves into groups of four or five.

Instructions to reader: Ask facilitator how to run the writing session.
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∞ WARM-UP EXERCISE

✎ WRITING EXERCISE

☞ *Next Reader:*

## ☞ PERSONAL *CHEVRUTA* (ONE-ON-ONE DIALOGUE)

Okay. We've used our minds. We've written something. Now comes the last and most important part of the evening.

We're going to divide into pairs. In a moment, everyone should get a partner.

We're going to give each other a "spiritual check-up." It's very similar to a physical check-up.

These are the ground rules:

1. **Confidentiality.** Just like with a doctor, everything that is said between the two of you stays between the two of you.
2. **Total respect.** No judging or evaluating each other. No giving advice. We're not trying to fix each other. We're trying to create a "safe space" so that each other can sincerely express where they're holding spiritually.
3. **Deep listening.** Focus on each other. Most people today just listen, but don't deeply listen. There are some people in the world who are blessed to be exceptional listeners. When someone deeply listens to us that enables us to deeply listen to ourselves.
4. **Reflective Questions:** If you ask your partner a question, make sure that it is a reflective, open-ended question. Not a question in which you are looking for a certain answer. Examples of good open questions: "How long have you felt like that?" "How does that make you feel?" Examples of non-reflective, non-open-ended questions: "Why don't you ...?" "Have you ever considered doing this . . . ?"

Take turns. Listen to each other. Let's divide into pairs and here are your questions.

## ☞ THE FOUR QUESTIONS

1. How do you feel about the way that you resolve the tension between the voice of the body and the voice of the soul?
2. When was the last time that your body expressed the voice of your soul? What helps you get to that place?
3. How would your life be different if you could better hear the voice of your soul?
4. What does the expression "Created in the Image of God" mean to you?

☞ *Next Reader:*

## ☞ *AFIKOMEN*

This workshop is coming to a close. The reading of this *haggadah* is almost over. Hopefully we have gained, individually and collectively, from this experience.

At the end of the Passover Seder we look for the *afikomen*. It is the last piece of the Seder, which leaves us with a final “taste”, a summing-up of what we have done. How appropriate. In the end, we are always searching. Searching for our true selves.

We are always seeking to return to the Garden of Eden, to rediscover paradise. In a sense, every time we understand a bit more about our true selves we come closer to paradise. Let’s continue to help each other search. Let’s continue to inspire each other to keep on seeking our true selves, to harmonize our bodies and souls, to fully live in the Image of God.

*Good night*





# A SPIRITUAL CHECK-UP

## HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY

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This series of “spiritual check-ups” were written for Hillel’s Joseph Meyerhoff Center for Jewish Learning by Aryeh Ben David. Aryeh is an Israel-based educator who has taught for many years at the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies.

These workshops are a partnership between Hillel, Pardes and the Nathan Cummings Foundation. In this document Aryeh describes the philosophy and rationale behind them.

## INTEGRATED AFFECTIVE LEARNING

I have been involved in Jewish education for over 20 years now teaching full-time Torah, Talmud, Jewish philosophy, prayer, interpersonal ethics, and other seminars. I come from an academic type of family, and felt at home sitting with books for seemingly endless periods of time. I have thoroughly loved the challenge and process of teaching. I have been very comfortable with it in every way.

But after a number of years in the classroom it began to feel too comfortable. I have felt in the last number of years a particular shortcoming in the classroom. We were learning well. Information was being conveyed. But something was missing

I felt that not enough was happening within the students’ beings. And not enough within myself also. The learning remained either in our heads, or in our notebooks. Restlessly, I carried these thoughts with me for a number of years. I experimented with different ideas and approaches in the classroom, some things worked, and some things didn’t.

The approach now adopted in these seminars emerged out of my learning kabbalistic sources during the last few years. According to the *Kabbalah*, we have three primary voices of the soul within us. In Hebrew they are called: *nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neshama*. The *neshama* is considered to be our intellectual voice, the voice of our mind. The *ruach* is considered to be our emotional voice, the voice of our heart. The *nefesh* voice is considered to be our physical voice, the voice of our body.

I reflected on this idea and came to the conclusion that if this indeed was the case, then Jewish education should reflect this understanding, this deep wisdom. Programs were then designed to include these three components: for the mind, the heart, and the body.

Each of these workshops contains these three elements. First we learn sources and use our minds. Then there is an experiential element, usually writing or art, for our bodies. Listening to the voice of our bodies does not necessarily mean dance or exercise, but rather the process of creating something physical. Allowing what has been heretofore internal to take on its own being, its own reality. The third part of the workshop is the “personal *chevruta*,” which offers expression to our emotional side. In the personal *chevruta* the students are invited to take a partner and in strict confidentiality to speak to each other from their hearts.

These workshops have now been run for over 3,000 participants, with overwhelmingly positive results. Not only have the students internalized the ideas discussed, but the sharing and bonding between the participants has helped to foster language and an environment conducive to the further contemplation of the subjects at hand.

## ☞ THE HAGGADAH APPROACH

The second innovation arose while contemplating the most feasible method for Hillel professionals to facilitate the workshops. Originally I wrote a “facilitators’ guide.” This included sources, trigger questions, ideas to incorporate, metaphors, stories, and tricks to maintain the focus of the students. After looking at this guide I came to a single irrefutable conclusion: it wasn’t going to work! It really is very difficult to teach someone else’s sources. Secondly, the degree of preparation required plus the pressure to control the discussion would have made the whole endeavor too difficult. At the Joseph Meyerhoff Center for Jewish Learning we’re very aware that the professionals in the field are already working 110% and sometimes don’t have the time to start preparing something from scratch.

So I went back to the drawing board and contemplated how we can make this potentially great workshop feasible.

I tried to think of the kind of programs that Jews already run themselves, with an easy-to-use format. The answer was obvious – the Pesach Seder. Most Jews know the *Haggadah*. It gives us the instructions and runs itself. Of course, we can always add more. We can be creative and insert ideas, stories, and experiential elements. But the basic Seder also can be run straight from the *Haggadah*. And it works! At least it seems to me that it works. Growing up in my family we pared the *haggadah* down so that Seder would run about 15 minutes. Yet it was still important and memorable.

So I wrote *haggadot*. Word by word, including instructions to the readers. Now, the program virtually runs itself. The major points can’t be missed. Now there is much less of a concern regarding the facilitating of a discussion of the sources. The *haggadah* runs the discussion. Now there is much less worry over someone either monopolizing the conversation, or of someone being left out. And most important, the time of preparation and pressure to facilitate the program has been cut to a minimum.

We discussed this approach at the Joseph Meyerhoff Center for Jewish Learning and honestly we were all a bit skeptical over whether it could work. It seemed a bit contrived. It seemed overly structured, too limiting, too stilted. But we decided to try it out and see.

The first guinea pigs were University of Maryland, American University, U.C. Berkeley, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Indiana University, and University of Wisconsin (Madison). And the results were – “wow.” They liked it! They said that they liked it. The *haggadah* format felt familiar to them. They liked being in charge. They liked reading from it and choosing the next reader. They even liked “hamming it up” at times. And they liked that when the program was over they had something in their hands to take home (with additional reading suggestions).

