



A SHOT OF SPIRITUALITY

INNER VOICE

∞ *Facilitators' Guide* ∞

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Sponsored by:

The Joseph Meyerhoff Center for Jewish Learning
Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life
The Nathan Cummings Foundation
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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. **The program should last about 75 minutes.** Make sure to leave about 20 minutes for the personal *chevruta*.
- ∞ 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.

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

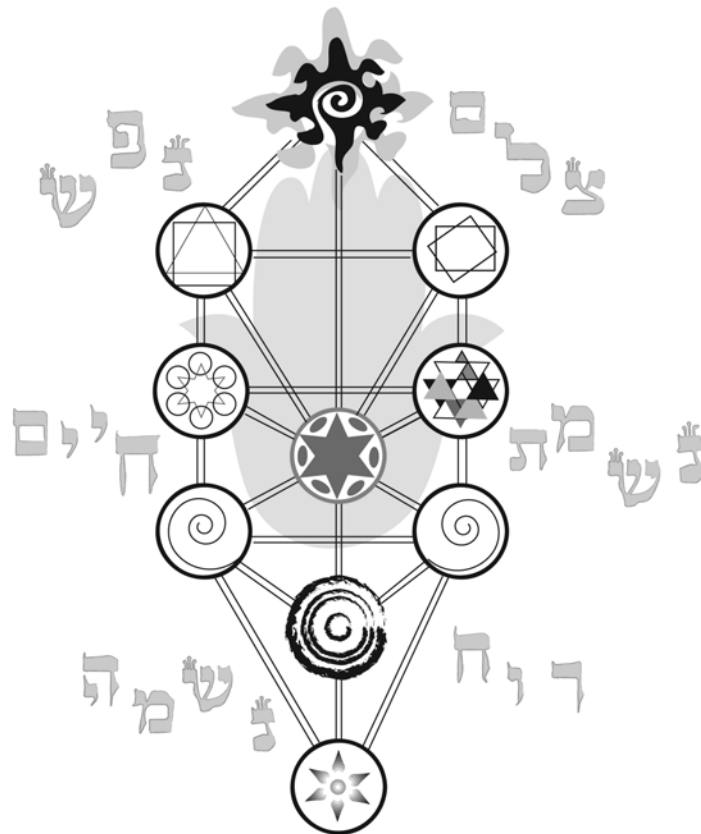
The spiritual check-ups are written in a “*haggadah*” format, meaning that they are ready to use and don’t require any additional material. You simply take the “*haggadah*”, make copies for the participants, and start!

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.

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- 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.





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❧ STUDENTS' GUIDE ❧

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☞ Someone please volunteer to be our *First Reader*, thanks.

☞ 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.

Guidelines for Readers:

1. Some people get nervous when they read aloud and end up reading very quickly. Try to read loudly and slowly.
2. Try to add a bit of life to what you're reading. Relax. Have some fun.
3. Please don't read ahead. The *haggada* works better when we're all on the same page.
4. Occasionally there will be "Instructions to the Reader" directions, don't be alarmed, enjoy it.

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

☞ *Next Reader*

☞ ORDER OF THE EVENING

First – we have to prepare ourselves appropriately. Just like on *Pesach* (Passover) when Jews traditionally get rid of all their *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 sure this evening is productive.

We have all been in a group setting in which someone makes a very personal remark and another person rolls his or 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 want to create an environment of "safe space." We may have talked about a lot of things together, but I'm not sure if we've shared with each other what we think and believe regarding our souls. This can be a very personal subject. Often people feel reticent and uneasy talking about their spiritual life. Keep in mind that the participants 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. First, please turn off cell phones.

☞ *Next Reader*

☞ A CHECK-UP

What would you think if someone told you that he had not gone to a dentist in 10 years? What would you think if he said to you, “I’m not going to a dentist. No way. What if the dentist found something wrong with my teeth?”

What would you think if someone told you that she never goes to a doctor? What would you think if she said, “What if the doctor found something wrong with me? I don’t want to hear that!”

You’d probably be thinking to yourself: “These people are idiots. They are being really irresponsible. How could they not take care of their teeth or their bodies?! They’ll end up being a mess.”

Most of us go to dentists and doctors even if there is nothing wrong. Just a yearly check-up. People are even careful to bring their cars in for a yearly check. But what about our souls? When was the last time any of us had a “spiritual check-up?” Shouldn’t we also take care of our souls?

But who would give this spiritual check-up? What kind of questions would they ask? Would it hurt?

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

☞ *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 “Where are you?” Adam doesn’t answer. He hides. Adam goes into denial. Eventually Moses will answer God’s question. Moses answers, “*Hineni*. Here I am.” This is considered to be a paradigm for all of us. Just like God asked Adam “where are you?” so too 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 question is not “What is God?” Tonight, the question is “What is God to me?” 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 spiritual life.

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

☞ *Next Reader*

🌀 GETTING STARTED

Okay, let's get started. Tonight's topic is spirituality. We all use the same word but we may be intending very different things. So let's see what we think:

Wow. I know someone who is soooooooooooooo spiritual. He's the most spiritual guy you can imagine. Everything about him, the way he eats, the way he dresses, what he does. Oooooooooooooooooo. He's just Mr. Spiritual (who's best friend is Ms. Spiritual).

Okay. Without thinking - what went through your mind when you heard that description? What kind of person did you envision? What does he eat? How does he dress? What activities do you think he engages in?

Instructions to Reader: Call on a few people for responses. What crossed their minds?

🌀*Next Reader*

We're all walking around with a subconscious stereotype of what is spirituality today. If we don't recognize this and move beyond it, then we will continue to limit ourselves.

Words often used in connection with this spiritual stereotype are: vegetarian, organic, vegan, meditation, yoga, singing, dancing, white flowing clothes, peaceful, serene, not practical, not grounded, tie-dye, spacey, etc. How many of us fit this stereotype? Most likely very few, if any of us, fit this mold.

This is a crucial point: Consciously or sub-consciously, most of us have bought into this stereotype. What does this mean? Because we do not fit the image of this spiritual person, we may be saying to ourselves, "I'm not the spiritual type." How many of you have ever said to yourselves that you were not the spiritual type?

Instructions to Reader: Ask people to raise a hand if their answer is yes to this question.

If we do not let go of this spiritual stereotype, then we will never really believe that we can be spiritual people.

"What is spirituality?" Let's see how one of the leading Jewish thinkers of the last 1,000 years answers this question.

🌀*Next Reader*

🌀 LEARNING OF THE SOURCES

Rav Kook (1865 - 1935), Mystic, Writer, First Chief Rabbi of Israel

Rav (Rabbi) Kook was born in 1865 in Lithuania. He had finished learning the entire Talmud eight times by the time he was 17. He moved to Israel (Palestine at that time) in 1904. In 1919 he was appointed the first Ashkenazic chief Rabbi of the country. He passed away in 1935. He was a mystic, a writer, a poet, and according to some scholars – the most significant Jewish thinker of the last 1,000 years. These are some of his thoughts:

“The perpetual prayer of the soul continually tries to emerge from its latent state to become revealed and actualized, to permeate every fiber of life of the entire universe. . . . All of one's efforts to learn Torah and her wisdom is in order to generate the continual revealing of the concealed prayer of the soul.

Prayer is only correct when it arises from the idea that the soul is always praying.

When many days or years have passed without serious prayer, toxic stones gather around one's heart, and one feels, because of them, a certain heaviness of spirit.

In terms of time, repentance (change of oneself) may be divided into two parts: sudden repentance and gradual repentance.

Sudden change comes about as a result of a certain spiritual lightning bolt that enters the soul. At once the person . . . is transformed into a new being; already he experiences inside himself a complete transformation for the better. This form of change dawns on a person through the grace of some inner spiritual force, whose trace points to the depths of the mysterious.

When one forgets the essence of one's own soul, when one distracts his mind from attending to the innermost content of his own personal life, everything becomes confused and uncertain. The primary role of change, which at once sheds light on the darkened zone, is for the person to return to himself, to the root of his soul.”

Everyone please take a moment and reread these thoughts to yourselves. They are not easy to understand, but express several beautiful ideas.

☞Next Reader

☞ REVIEW OF THE SOURCES

Rav Kook focuses on the idea of “the perpetual prayer of the soul.” The prayer of the soul may be latent, but it is not dormant or static. It is active. It is always doing something. It is always talking. It is always communicating to me.

What do I have to do to be a spiritual person?

It's really very simple.

All I have to do is listen. Listen to this inner voice. (Someone could joke and say that for a Jew listening is one of the least natural things to do.)

What is the soul saying? What is it trying to convey to me? Imagine that you have a radio inside yourself. There are many stations, all broadcasting at the same time. There is the “School-station,” the “Parent-station,” the “Exercise-station,” the “Relationship-station,” the “Career-station,” the “Fun-station,” and more. Each one is always talking to you. And there is also the “Soul-station.” While you are tuned into one station, the other stations are still playing, but it is much harder to hear them.

What is playing on the “Soul-station?”

Let’s look at the last source: **“The primary role of repentance, which at once sheds light on the darkened zone, is for the person to return to himself, to the root of his soul.”** What is the “Soul-station” saying?

What are the most daunting questions that we face in our lives? What are the questions that haunt us from the time that we begin to think for ourselves until we die? We may be consumed with questions like: “what should I study? What graduate school should I go to? How will I support myself?” These are important questions. But ultimately I want to know: “What is my purpose in life?” “Why am I here?” “What do I have to offer the world? Why am I unique?”

☞*Next Reader*

According to the *Kabbalah* (Jewish mysticism), our soul waits in the “world of souls” until it is needed in this world. Then it is matched with the appropriate body, with parents, country, time and place. It comes into this world to fulfill a unique purpose. No one else in the world can deliver this divine message. But the dilemma I’m always facing is: what is this message that I was put here to deliver? What am I being called to do?

We were all created as unique beings. We have unique fingerprints, unique voices, unique taste buds and unique faces. We are all uniquely ourselves. And also we all have a unique contribution to offer the world. We each have a unique mission. We each have a special calling.

The inner voice of our souls is always trying to answer this question, to convey to us what this mission is. All we have to do is to hear, to deeply listen.

(It’s interesting to note that the watchword of Judaism begins with the word “*Shema*,” and that the one mitzvah that we do on *Rosh HaShana* to start the year is to listen to the voice of the *shofar*. It symbolizes that we need to listen to our inner voice to begin the year.)

☞*Next Reader*

What prevents people from listening to this “inner voice?”

The first Jew, Abraham, listened to God and did the mind-boggling crazy thing of leaving his homeland at the age of 75 and traveling to an unknown destination. According to some mystical commentaries, God did not talk exclusively to Abraham. Rather everyone in the world had the same dream that night, but only Abraham listened. Abraham heard his inner voice and became the first Jew. What do you think everyone else thought or said when they woke up that morning?

Instruction to Reader: Ask a few people to speculate what people might have thought.

What happens to people who do not listen to their inner voices? Look at the third paragraph: **“When many days or years have passed without serious prayer, toxic stones gather around one’s heart, and one feels, because of them, a certain heaviness of spirit.”** Toxic stones around my heart. What adjectives would you use to describe this mood?

Instruction to Reader: Ask a few people to offer adjectives.

Is it a good thing or a bad thing if we feel physical pain in our body? The pain we feel is a message to us from our body that something is wrong, something must be fixed. It's a good thing that we feel the pain. If we didn't feel the pain then we wouldn't be motivated to go to a doctor and get checked out.

Our soul works in a similar way. But it doesn't send us a physical pain somewhere in our body. It sends us a mood. These "toxic stones around our hearts" is a gloomy, depressing mood that is a message from our soul. This depressing mood may be a message from our soul, which is saying: "Listen to me! You're not listening to me! If you're not going to be yourself, then of course you'll get down."

Have you ever felt that you were just going through the motions? That something was missing, but you didn't know exactly what? That exercising or shopping or whatever didn't help you to get out of the bad mood?

People who listen to their "inner voice" tend to live passionate lives. You can see it in their eyes. People who are afraid or reluctant to listen to this inner voice may lead successful lives, but very often they are leading "dulled lives." Something is missing. They are not following their passion.

☞ *Next Reader*

The "darkened zone" that Rav Kook writes about can be understood to be those times in the middle of the night when we cannot fall asleep because we are plagued by personal doubts about our self-worth. How do I shed light on this darkened zone?

Let's return to our original question: What is playing on the "Soul-station?"

It's saying, "Hello, this is the true you. This is what you should do. This is what your unique gift and mission is in the world. Believe in yourself. This is why you were put into the world in the first place. You need to return to yourself."

It's saying – "return to the root of yourself, to your true self." This is why Rav Kook placed such an emphasis on these spiritual lightning bolts, on these epiphanies, these moments of intuition and clarity. These moments that I cannot explain to anyone else, maybe not even to myself, why I need to do this. But it feels completely right. Rav Kook was a great scholar, but here he is encouraging us to trust our intuition. Sometimes we just think too much.

(If someone asks: What if my soul station is telling me to do something terrible or crazy? That's why we have friends and mentors. But the problem is usually not listening enough to myself, rather than listening too much.)

☞ *Next Reader*

☞ **BOTTOM LINE**

What is spirituality? According to Rav Kook, spirituality is not dependent on our clothes, eating habits, musical abilities, etc. According to Rav Kook, anyone can be spiritually

attuned all the time. It entails listening to the inner voice of our souls which is perpetually transmitting to us how we should fulfill our unique purpose in life.

☞ *Next Reader*

☞ WRITING EXERCISE

Okay. Everyone needs a pen.

Instruction to Reader: Check to make sure that everyone has something to write with.

I am going to read a sentence and ask everyone to fill in the blank with the first things that come into their mind. Try not to censor your thoughts. Just write immediately upon hearing the sentence. Feel free to write a few things. Ready? Here's the first one. Complete this sentence:

1. I am uniquely gifted because I _____.

Instruction to Reader: When you think that everyone has finished, go on to the next question.

Ready? Here's the second one:

2. I am spiritually stuck because I _____.

Instruction to Reader: When you think that everyone has finished, go on to the next question.

Last one. First things that come into your mind to complete this sentence:

3. If I were to listen to my inner voice it might say to me: _____.

☞ *Next Reader*

☞ PERSONAL CHEVRUTA (ONE-ON-ONE DIALOGUE)

Okay. Now comes the 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 the "spiritual check-up" that we spoke about. 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 of you can sincerely express where you are 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.

Instruction to Reader: Check that everyone has a partner. Invite people to spread out in the room, so that there is some privacy for the conversation. If there are an odd number of people, someone can triple up. After 20 minutes check and see if people want more time with their partner. Decide when to call them back to regroup for closing.

☞ THE FOUR QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe the condition of your spiritual life today?
2. How would you like it to be? How would your life be different if you were more spiritually connected?
3. What is holding you back from becoming more spiritually connected? What holds you back from listening to your inner voice?
4. Share with your partner something that you wrote during the writing exercise.

☞ *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.

Instructions to Reader: Ask if anyone has any reflections on the evening.

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. Rav Kook writes that “the sin of Adam, which estranged him from his true self, was that he turned to the advice of the snake, and lost his true essential self. He did not know how to clearly answer the question ‘Where are you?’ because he did not know himself (his soul), because his true “I-ness” was lost to him.”

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, to listen to our inner voices, and to hear them with our minds, hearts, and bodies.

Good night

RABBI ABRAHAM ISAAC KOOK

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Qualities of Rav Kook:

1. **Love:** Rav Kook was known for his unqualified love for all Jews and for their love of him. He visited and cared for the secular Zionists of his time. After his visit to Deganyah, a secular anti-religious kibbutz, its members commented “We felt that a pillar of fire had been uprooted from Mount Sinai and had descended upon us.” Rav Kook wrote: “I love all. I cannot but love all creatures, all nations. I desire with all the depth of my heart the glory of all, the well-being of all. I have no need to coerce this feeling of love. It flows directly from the holy depth of the wisdom of the Divine soul.”
2. **Israel:** Rav Kook is considered to be the father of religious Zionism. He wrote extensively about the historical and spiritual meaning of the return of the Jewish people to the land of Israel.
3. **Breadth of writing:** Unlike most rabbis, Rav Kook wrote about virtually every topic. The subjects of his writings include: vegetarianism, Buddhism, exercise, art, love, agriculture, evolution, contemporary philosophy and politics. He also wrote poetry.
4. **Style:** Rav Kook would enter mystic trances and write for hours, never rewriting a sentence. If there were no Hebrew words to express his thoughts he would create them. The poet laureate of Israel, Hayim Nachman Bialik remarked that if one wanted to read the perfect Hebrew sentence, then one should read the writings of Rav Kook.
5. **Unity:** The idea of unity permeates Rav Kook’s thought. Unity of the individual, the nation, and the world. He wrote “whoever said about me that my soul is torn was correct. It is definitely torn. We cannot describe with our intellects a person whose soul is not torn. Only the inanimate is whole, but man is a creature of contradictory aspirations, and there is a constant battle within him. The entire mission of man is to unite the contradictions in his soul by a unifying idea, which in its greatness and exaltation encompasses all and achieves total harmony.”
6. **Tefillin:** Rav Kook was known for wearing *tefillin* for a longer than usual time during the day. *Tefillin* (“phylacteries” in English are two small leather boxes containing verses from the Torah that are worn for a short time every morning by traditional Jews – usually just men - strapped to the head and the arm. They symbolize being in daily covenant with God). He also wrote a book about the physical placement and meaning of *tefillin*. Being worn on top on one’s head, *tefillin* for him symbolized a form of higher understanding that superseded intelligence. They were a source of intuition and mystical insight.
7. **Mysticism:** As well as being a Talmud scholar, Rav Kook was a kabbalist (mystic). His father came from the rational line of Jewish thinkers and his mother from the *Hassidic* (mystical) line. He considered himself to be a synthesis of these two worlds.