

Discussion Group Guidelines for

Here I Am:

Using Jewish Spiritual Wisdom for Becoming
More Present, Centered, and Available for Life

By Leonard Felder, Ph.D.

Flexibility

These questions and guidelines can be used as a 1 session, 2 session, 4 session, or 8 session group discussion or class. Or they can be used as a two-person weekly or monthly conversation with a study partner, or as a solo exploration of these topics.

Mutual Respect:

Please appreciate that each person will have different and completely valid answers to these questions. By respecting each person's unique ideas and experiences, we can learn from one another without requiring one fixed way of believing or practicing.

An Important Ethical Consideration:

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Thank you for giving this your consideration.

Kavannah/Intention:

May these questions and these conversations help you and your loved ones to go deeper into Jewish spiritual wisdom regarding how to live each day with even more love, health, creativity, insight, and courage.

Discussion Topics and Conversation Starters
While Reading Chapter One
“A Re-Centering Method for Any Stressful Moment”

(Please choose two or more of the following)

- What do you define as “too little stress,” “too much stress,” or “just the right amount of challenge” on a given week?
- What are the moments in your life currently when you feel most rushed, overloaded, pulled in opposing directions, or knocked off center?
- What have you found to be useful, or not very useful, for regaining your center and your clarity during an especially tense or upsetting moment?
- When you have experimented with the calm breathing, the “Where Are You” question, and the “He-neh-nee, Here I Am” phrases discussed in Chapter One, what did you notice about your eyesight, your clarity of mind, your energy, or your ability to be more present and compassionate? Did it work for you right away, or did it take repeated practice?
- As a child, what were you taught about how a conversation with the Divine Presence, or with the Still Small Voice Within, can help you stay centered? What do you currently believe or not believe about how to align yourself with the Source of Life?
- What are the obstacles, distractions, and habits that make it harder to connect with your strong, pure center? What might be your next steps for moving forward on the journey to a more genuine and alive sense of “He-neh-nee, Here I Am.”

Discussion Topics and Conversation Starters
While Reading Chapter Two
“Outsmarting the Anxious Moody Brain”

(Please choose two or more of the following)

- When have you experienced the Zeigarnik Effect (that the human brain is more interested in problems and doesn't tend to notice or absorb what's going right or what has positive possibilities)?
- Do you sometimes have an extra dose of vigilance or problem-seeking that has benefits in one area of your life, but it causes friction in another area of your life?
- When have you experienced Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel's moments of "Radical Amazement?" What is your particular method of noticing and taking to heart the beauty, the blessings, the small triumphs, and the mysteries of life?
- What is your favorite method or phrase for saying "Thank you" to the Source of Life, or to feel re-energized on a busy day? Do you prefer a consistent way of expressing gratitude and awareness, or do you prefer a spontaneous response that changes often?
- When you are in a prayer service or a spiritual gathering, do you tend to connect with the words that praise and thank a mysterious Source? Or do you struggle with those words and ideas?
- What tends to cause you to feel more or less grateful? What are the moments when your mind reverts to seeing what's missing or frustrating? When are the moments when you're noticing what's positive and nourishing around you and within you?

Discussion Topics and Conversation Starters
While Reading Chapter Three
**“Becoming Healthier So You Can Deal
with Stressful Days”**

(Please choose two or more of the following)

--When have you or a loved one experienced a blockage of some crucial flow in your body and how did you attempt to resolve the problem?

--What were you taught and what do you currently believe (or not believe) about the possible connection between your thoughts, your daily actions, and your health?

--What would you change about your eating, your water intake, your exercise, or your way of dealing with stress if you were to take a quick moment of conversation once a day with the Source (whatever you believe that Source to be) who gave you this vulnerable and intricate body?

--What is the one habit or behavior that is hardest for you to change with regard to your health or vitality? (Please keep all answers confidential and private within the group, or please do this question silently).

--What kind of additional support, reminders, or next steps will help you take better care of the gift of life that has been entrusted to you?

Discussion Topics and Conversation Starters
While Reading Chapter Four
“Discovering When to Intervene and When to Let Go”

(Please choose two or more of the following)

--What have been your most satisfying and most frustrating experiences with trying to delegate to others, or to encourage others to lighten your load?

--When do you tend to give up too much control, or you are too trusting, and you feel let down by the results?

--When do you tend to exert too much control or you micro-manage at times, and it has caused someone to do less than he or she could be doing, or to build up resentments toward you?

--What would your daily life be like if you could hold onto the tasks you want to do in your own style, while letting go of certain tasks that others can do with just a minimum of guidance from you?

--How do you feel about the mystical idea of a Creative Source needing to pull back somewhat in order to allow for free will, partnership, and some spontaneity in life?

--If you could use the idea of Tzimtzum (to pull back somewhat while at the same time making room for others to come forward), how might it improve your family relationships, your work life, or your volunteer teamwork at your non-profit activities?

Discussion Topics and Conversation Starters
While Reading Chapter Five
“Responding with Wisdom When Someone
Treats You Harshly”

(Please choose two or more of the following)

--Even though you are probably a tolerant person, what is a particular behavior or character trait (in yourself or others) that causes you to feel impatient, upset, judgmental, or intolerant?

--Without naming names or spreading gossip, what comes to mind as a situation in which someone seemed to be draining your energy, blocking your best efforts, or getting on your nerves? (Please talk about the behavior rather than the person’s name or anything that might reveal someone’s identity).

--What do you think might be the possible benefit of the Pirke Avot statement in Chapter Five that “the wise person is the one who learns from each human being?” What might be the hidden benefit of your interactions with the person or people who came to mind earlier? For example, is this person giving you much-needed practice on how to be firm and compassionate when dealing with a difficult individual?

--When you think about this person who gets on your nerves, is there any possibility that this individual might be offering you a clear picture of who you don’t want to be? Is it possible to learn a lot about what you want to prevent pro-actively by studying this person’s actions and the impact he or she causes in others?

--Could there be a hidden or diminished part of yourself that this other person has in excess? For example, what irritating quality does this person exhibit way beyond what is tolerable, and yet you have been so afraid to exhibit any of that same character trait and it has been costing you in certain situations? What would happen if you found a decent and appropriate way to expand just a little the quality that you have been suppressing (and without becoming hurtful like this other person tends to be)?

Discussion Topics and Conversation Starters
While Reading Chapter Six
“Being Open to a Hidden Gift in the
Most Painful Moments”

(Please choose two or more of the following)

--What were you told in the past is the “Jewish explanation” for why tragedies and traumas happen to good people?

--Which of the several Jewish teachings in Chapter Six seems to you most likely or least likely as the spiritual possibility for why painful things happen to decent people?

--When would you feel comforted and guided by the phrase “Gam zu l’tovah, even this might someday become for the good,” and when would you feel hurt, or upset as a result of someone saying these words to you at an especially vulnerable moment?

--What painful event, loss, or trauma in your own life have you somehow managed to turn into something insightful, healing, or positive?

--What hurt, loss, or trauma in your own life still feels unresolved and possibly in need of some way of creating a small or large tikkun or repair that might prevent future suffering for yourself or others?

Discussion Topics and Conversation Starters
While Reading Chapter Seven
“Finding the Quiet Peaceful Place
Underneath the Agitation”

(Please choose two or more of the following)

--What is your way of envisioning the Jewish idea of a “pure soul” and what do you currently believe (or not believe) about the existence of a spark of holiness or goodness contained within each human being?

--When have you found it difficult (and when have you found it easy) to reach a level of deep inner calm and peacefulness on a stressful day?

--What tends to be the habit, distraction, or numbing escape that sometimes causes you to forget or lose touch with the pure soul that is deep within you? (Please keep all answers confidential and private within the group, or do this question silently).

--When you have experimented with the “Elohai neshama” prayer during a challenging moment, what do you notice about your internal state of being?

--In the next few days or weeks, what kind of reminder, note-card, or wording would you like to utilize that will give you a better chance to connect with your pure soul on a busy day?

Discussion Topics and Conversation Starters
While Reading Chapter Eight
“Seeing New Possibilities in Each Moment”

(Please choose two or more of the following)

--What moments in your life have started to feel repetitive, uninspiring, or no longer as interesting as they once did?

--What do you experience when you use the blessing in Chapter Eight to open up to a new way of seeing or expanding on these particular moments? Do they stay the same or do they turn into something a bit different with these words in mind?

--What are the moments in your life recently when you do feel a sense of newness, curiosity, vitality, or spontaneity?

--What do you experience if you use the blessing in Chapter Eight as an added boost for those particular moments? Do these moments have an added depth or joy when you say these particular words?

--When you are doing something creative or trying to come up with an innovative solution to a dilemma, do you ever stop and say a prayer or a meditation for seeing the issue with new eyes and a new perspective? What do you notice about yourself and your approach to a dilemma when you use this method?

--What moments in the near future with the people you care about, or with the activities that mean a lot to you, might be enhanced by saying specific words that are about boosting your creative openness?

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