

Just as nothing is too big for God, so, too, nothing is too small for God. Nothing is insignificant or small enough to go unnoticed, because God has an all-encompassing view that contains absolutely everything.

—Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz



God



Arguing with God

Testing God

The PJ Library: Bagels from Benny



Arguing With God

Ecclesiastes (Kohelet) 8:2-4

Obey the king's orders and the uttering of the oath of God. Do not hasten to leave his presence; do not tarry in a dangerous situation for he can do anything that he pleases; inasmuch as a king's command is authoritative, and none can say to him, "What are you doing?"

Numbers 14:11-16

And the Lord said to Moses, "How long will this people provoke Me? How long will they be without faith, in the face of all the signs I have done among them? I will send disease on them for their destruction, and I will make of You a nation greater and stronger than they." And Moses said to the Lord: "Then it will come to the ears of the Egyptians; for by Your power You took this people out from among them; and they will give the news to the people of this land: they have had word that You, Lord, are present with this people, letting Yourself be seen face to face, and that Your cloud is resting over them, and that You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if You put to death all these people as one man, then the nations who have had word of Your glory will say: Because the Lord was not able to take this people into the land which He made an oath to give them, He sent destruction on them in the wasteland."

Ecclesiastes and Numbers Navigator

- Compare the depiction of a king's power in Ecclesiastes to God's power in the Book of Numbers.
- What is Ecclesiastes describing, and how is God depicted?
- Why do you think that God is limited in ways a human king isn't?

1 Samuel 15:10-11

Then came the word of the Lord unto Samuel, saying: "It makes Me regret that I have set up Saul to be king; for he is turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments." And it upset Samuel; and he cried out to the Lord all night.

Samuel Navigator

- What made Samuel so upset? After all, God was angry at Saul, not Samuel. Please speculate. The Sages of the Talmud are going to fill in the blanks; why shouldn't you?

Talmud, Ta'anit 5b with Steinsaltz translation

Samuel said: "Sovereign of the Universe! You have given me the status of Moses and Aaron, as it is written: 'Moses and Aaron among His priests, Samuel, among those who call on His name' (Psalms 99:6). Just as Moses and Aaron did not

have their mission undone during their lifetime, that at least during their lives their mission continued to exist, please do the same for me! Do not undo my achievements during my lifetime! Because I am the one who appointed Saul king, please do not remove his kingship!" The Holy One said: "What should I do? If I bring death to Saul now, Samuel is not letting me because he is praying that Saul should not die. If I make Samuel die while he is still young, and only then cause Saul to die, people will gossip that maybe Samuel had committed a sin that caused his early demise. I can't cause

either Saul or Samuel to die now, but it is already time for David's kingship to begin, and one kingdom is not allowed to infringe on another for even a second." The Holy One, blessed be He, said: "I will make him (Samuel) prematurely old."

Ta'anit Navigator

- What aspects of the dilemma does this solution answer?
- Why do you think this was the solution chosen?

Arguing with God

Hebrew Sources

וַיְהִי דְבַר ה' אֶל שְׁמוּאֵל לֵאמֹר: נִחַמְתִּי כִּי הִמְלַכְתִּי אֶת שְׂאוּל לְמֶלֶךְ, כִּי שָׁב מֵאַחֲרַי וְאֵת דְּבָרֵי לֹא הִקִּים. וַיַּחֲר לְשְׁמוּאֵל וַיִּזְעַק אֶל ה' כָּל הַלַּיְלָה.

שמואל א טו, ג-יא

אמר ליה [לו] רב נחמן לר' יצחק: מאי דכתיב [מהו שנאמר], מה פירוש הכתוב: "ויהי כאשר זקן שמואל" (שמואל א' ה, א), ומי סב [והאם זקן] שמואל כולי האי [כל כך]? והא בר חמישים ותרתי הוה [והלא בן חמישים ושתים שנה היה] שמואל במותו, שאמר מר [החכם]: מי שמת בן חמישים ושתים שנה אין זה סימן רע לו, שאין זו מיתה בקיצור שנים כעין מיתת כרת, כי זהו מיתתו של שמואל הרמתי. אמר ליה [לו]: הכי [כך] אמר ר' יוחנן: זקנה קפצה עליו, על שמואל, שהלבין שערו ונראה היה זקן מגילו, דכתיב [שנאמר]: "נחמתי כי המלכתי את שאול למלך כי שב מאחרי ואת דברי לא הקים ויחר לשאול ויזעק אל ה' כל הלילה" (שמואל א' טו, יא). אמר לפניו שמואל: רבונו של עולם! אתה שקלתני כמשה ואהרן, דכתיב [שנאמר]: "משה ואהרן בכהניו ושמואל בקראי שמר" (תהלים צט, ו), מה משה ואהרן לא בטלו מעשה ידיהם בחייהם, שמה שעשו, נשאר על כל פנים קיים בחייהם, אף אני לא יתבטל מעשה ידי בחיי וכיון שהמלכתי את שמואל לא תתבטל מלכותו. אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא: היכי אעביד [איך אעשה]? לימות [שימות] שאול עכשיו – לא קא שביק [יניח] לי שמואל לעשות כן, שהרי הוא מתפלל שלא ימות. לימות [שימות] שמואל אדזוטר [בעודו צעיר] וימות שאול מיד אחר כך – מרנני אבתריה [ירננו אנשים אחריו] שמה עבירה שהיתה בשמואל גרמה שימות בקיצור ימים. לא לימות [ימות] שאול ולא לימות [ימות] שמואל – הרי כבר הגיעה תקופת מלכות דוד, ואין מלכות נוגעת בחברתה ונוטלת ממנה אפילו כמלא נימה (חוט). אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא: אקפיץ עליו זקנה, שילבינו שערותיו ויחשבו כולם שהוא זקן מאוד.

תענית ה, ב מהדורת שטיינזלץ

אני פי מלך שמור ועל דברת שבועת אלקים. אל תבהל מפניו תלך אל תעמד בדבר רע כי כל אשר יחפץ יעשה. באשר דבר מלך שלטון ומי יאמר לו מה תעשה.

קהלת ח, ב-ד

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה: עַד אַנְהָ יִנְאַצְנִי הָעָם הַזֶּה, וְעַד אַנְהָ לֹא יֶאֱמִינוּ בִּי בְּכֹל הָאֲתוֹת אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי בְּקִרְבּוֹ? אֲכַנּוּ בְּדַבְּרֵי וְאוֹרְשָׁנוּ, וְאֶעֱשֶׂה אִתָּךְ לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל וְעָצוּם מִמֶּנּוּ. וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל ה': וְשָׁמְעוּ מִצְרַיִם כִּי הֶעֱלִיתְ בְּכֹחַךְ אֶת הָעָם הַזֶּה מִקִּרְבּוֹ, וְאָמְרוּ אֶל יוֹשֵׁב הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת, שָׁמְעוּ כִּי אֲתָה ה' בְּקִרְבֵּי הָעָם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר עֵין בְּעֵין נִרְאָה אֲתָה ה' וְעַנְנְךָ עֹמֵד עֲלֵהֶם וּבָעַמַּד עָנַן אֲתָה הַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵיהֶם יוֹמֵם וּבָעַמּוּד אֵשׁ לַיְלָה, וְהִמַּתָּה אֶת הָעָם הַזֶּה כְּאִישׁ אֶחָד, וְאָמְרוּ הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר שָׁמְעוּ אֶת שְׁמֶךָ לֵאמֹר: מִבְּלַתִּי יָכַלְתָּ ה' לְהַבִּיא אֶת הָעָם הַזֶּה אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לָהֶם וַיִּשְׁחָטֵם בְּמַדְבָּר.

במדבר יד, יא-טז



Testing God

Nachmanides on Deuteronomy 6:16

This forbids the subsequent generations from testing the Torah or the Prophets, for it is not appropriate to serve God with conditions, or with the request for miracles or tests. It is not God's will to perform miracles for each individual at any time, and it is not fitting to serve Him on the condition of receiving a reward. For maybe, one will find through his service, and his following the Torah, pain and calamity. In this case it is fitting for him to accept everything as righteous judgment.

Exodus 17:1-7

And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, by their stages, according to the commandment of the Lord, and encamped in Rephidim; and there was no water for the people to drink.

The people quarreled with Moses, and said: "Give us water that we may drink." And Moses said to them: "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?" And the people were thirsty there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and

our cattle with thirst?" And Moses cried unto the Lord, saying: "What shall I do with these people, they are almost ready to stone me."

And the Lord said to Moses: "Pass on before the people, and take with you the elders of Israel; and your rod, with which you struck the river, take it in your hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there upon the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it that the people may drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. And the name of the place was called Massah (testing), and Meribah (quarreling), because of the quarreling of the children of Israel, and because they tested the Lord, saying: "Is the Lord among us, or not?"

Maimonides, Rambam, Laws of the Foundations of the Torah 10:5

A prophet who is known for his true prophecy, and his words have been believed time after time, or his being a prophet has been corroborated through testimony, and he walks in the ways of prophecy—it is forbidden to second guess him, and to question his prophecy lest it might not be true. One should not put him through too many tests, and we shouldn't ever be skeptical and test him, as it is written: "Do not test the Lord your God as you did in Massah when you said, is the Lord among us or not!" Rather, once it has been ascertained that he is a prophet, they should believe, and know that God is among them, and no second guessing or skepticism should follow him.

Deuteronomy 6:16

Do not test the Lord your God as you did in Massah.

Suggestions for Study Questions

For Biblical Sources

How do you understand the prohibition to test God?

For Maimonides (Rambam) and Nachmanides (Ramban)

1. How does each commentator understand what the prohibition of "testing God" is?
2. Which one of the commentators is more relevant for us today?
3. In a world without prophets, what does Maimonides (Rambam) have to teach us about testing God?

Testing God

Rabbi Menachem HaMeiri

When it says: You tithe so you will become wealthy and the Talmud asks if it is possible to test God, and replies that the case of tithing is an exception...This does not mean that one is allowed to test God and give tithes on the condition that one will be rewarded. Rather, it means that in other actions, even though one is secure that he will be rewarded, nevertheless, he is not directly dependent on those actions for his reward. In this case, however, he can be totally secure that if he tithes he will be taken care of, because the way of the Lord is to give measure for measure.

Ta'anit 9a

Rabbi Yochanan found the young son of Resh Laqish. He said to him, "What verses have you learned at school?" The boy answered, "You shall tithe, yes tithe [your income]." The child asked, "What does 'you shall tithe (Hebrew: AhSehR), yes tithe (Hebrew: tAhSehR)' [your income] mean?" (or what do you make of the repetition of the word tithe?) He answered, "It means AhSehR (tithe) so you will become wealthy (titAhSHehR)."

The boy then asked, "Is it permissible to test the Holy One in this way? Is it not written: Do not test the Lord your God?" Rabbi Yochanan answered: "This is what Rabbi Hoshaya says: 'This is an exception [where you are allowed to test God] as it is written: You bring the whole tithe into the store-house, that there may be food in My house, and then test Me now immediately, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall be abundance beyond what is necessary'" (Malachi 3:10). The child retorted: "If I had learned this verse I would have no need for you or your teacher Hoshaya."

Suggestions for Study Questions

For the Talmud (Ta'anit 9a)

1. What does testing God mean in the context of this story?
2. The child is Rabbi Yochanan's nephew; what might that explain in this narrative?
3. What does it mean for Rabbi Yochanan to tell a child who has nothing of his own from which to tithe to go and test God in this fashion?
4. Why do you think that tithing would be an exception for testing God?
5. Try to speculate how the commentator read this story.

For Rabbi Menachem HaMeiri

1. How does R. HaMeiri understand the conclusion of the narrative?
2. Can one reconcile his understanding of the prohibition with that of Maimonides and Nachmanides?
3. Now, how do you understand the prohibition against testing God?
4. Whose opinion resonates with you the most and why?

Testing God

Biographies of Medieval Thinkers

Maimonides (Rambam)

Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (or Moses Maimonides), known also by the acronym Rambam, was a preeminent medieval Jewish philosopher, and one of the greatest Torah scholars of all times. He was born in Córdoba, Spain, in 1138, and died in Egypt in 1204. He worked as a rabbi, physician, and philosopher in Morocco and Egypt. Although his writings on Jewish law and ethics met with opposition during his life, he was posthumously acknowledged to be one of the foremost rabbinical arbiters and philosophers in Jewish history, his copious work a cornerstone of Jewish scholarship. His fourteen-volume Mishnah Torah still carries canonical authority as a codification of Talmudic law.

Nachmanides (Ramban)

Nachmanides, Rabbi Moses ben Nachman, also known by his acronym Ramban, was born in Spain in 1194, and died in the Land of Israel about 1270. He studied medicine which he practiced as a means of livelihood; he also studied philosophy. During his teens he began to get a reputation as a learned Jewish scholar, and began his writings on Jewish law at age 16. Nachmanides was forced by the King and the Church authorities to defend Judaism in a disputation against the apostate Pablo Christiani. After defending the faith, he was forced to leave Spain and ended his days in the Land of Israel. Nachmanides' writings encompass all areas of Jewish knowledge—Bible, Talmud, law, philosophy and Kabbalah.

R. Menahem HaMeiri

Menachem HaMeiri was born in 1249 in Barcelona and died in 1315. He was one of the greatest Torah scholars of France in his time. His commentary, the Beit HaBechirah (the building of choice), is one of the most monumental works written on the Talmud.

Testing God

Hebrew Sources

וַיִּסְעוּ כָּל עַדְת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּדְבַּר סִינַי לְמִסְעֵיהֶם עַל פִּי ה', וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּרִפְיָדִים, וַאֲיִן מִיָּמִים לְשִׁתַּת הָעָם. וַיִּרְבַּ הָעָם עִם מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמְרוּ: תָּנוּ לָנוּ מִיָּמִים וְנִשְׁתָּה! וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם מֹשֶׁה: מַה תִּרְיִבוּן עִמָּדִי? מַה תִּנְסוּן אֶת ה'?... וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם "מִסָּה וּמְרִיבָה", עַל רִיב בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל נִסְתָּם אֶת ה' לֵאמֹר: הֲיֵשׁ ה' בְּקִרְבָּנוּ אִם אֵינָּה.

שמות פרק יז, א-ז

לֹא תִנְסוּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם כְּאֲשֶׁר נִסִּיתֶם בְּמִסָּה.

דברים פרק ו, טז

ולכך אסר לדורות לנסות התורה או הנביאים, כי אין ראוי לעבוד השם על דרך הסתפק או שאלת מופת ונסיון, כי אין רצון השם לעשות נסים לכל אדם ובכל עת, ואין ראוי לעבדו על מנת לקבל פרס, אלא אולי ימצא בעבודתו ולכתו בדרכי התורה צער ואסון וראוי שיקבל הכל במשפט צדק.

רמב"ן דברים ו, טז

נביא שנודעה נבואתו והאמינו בדבריו פעם אחר פעם או שהעיד לו נביא והיה הולך בדרכי הנבואה אסור לחשב אחריו ולהרהר בנבואתו שמא אינה אמת, ואסור לנסותו יותר מדאי ולא נהיה הולכים ומנסים לעולם שנאמר לא תנסו את ה' אלהיכם כאשר נסיתם במסה שאמרו היש ה' בקרבנו אם אין, אלא מאחר שנודע שזה נביא יאמינו וידעו כי ה' בקרבם ולא יהרהרו ולא יחשבו אחריו.

רמב"ם הלכות יסודי התורה פרק י הלכה ה

אשכחיה [מצאו] ר' יוחנן לינוקא [את בנו הקטן] של ריש לקיש, אמר ליה [לו]: אימא לי פסוקיך [אמור לי את פסוקיך] שלמדת היום בבית הספר! אמר ליה [לו] הילד: "עשר תעשר". אמר ליה [לו] הילד: ומאי [ומה פירושו] "עשר תעשר"? אמר ליה [לו] רבי יוחנן: פירושו עשר בשביל שתתעשר, אמר ליה [לו] הילד: מנא [מניין] לך שכך הוא? אמר ליה [לו] ר' יוחנן: זיל נסי [לך ונסה]. אמר ליה [לו]: ומי שרי לנסוייה [והאם מותר לנסות] את הקדוש ברוך הוא? והכתיב [והרי נאמר] בתורה: "לא תנסו את ה' אלהיכם" (דברים ו, טז)! אמר ליה [לו]: הכי [כך] אמר ר' הושעיא: חוץ מזו שבה מותר לנסות, שנאמר: "הביאו את כל המעשר אל בית האוצר והי טרף בביתי ובחוננוי נא בזאת אמר ה' צבאות אם לא אפתח לכם את ארבות השמים והריקתי לכם ברכה עד בלי דל" (מלאכי ג, י). אמר ליה [לו] התינוק לר' יוחנן: אי הוה מטי התם להאי פסוקא, לא הוה צריכנא לך ולהושעיא רבך [אם הייתי מגיע לשם לפסוק זה, לא הייתי צריך אותך ואת הושעיא רבך], שהרי הדבר מפורש שם, ואין צורך בדבריו.

תענית ט, א מהדורת שטיינזלץ

Testing God

Hebrew Sources

ומה שאמר כאן "עשר בשביל שתתעשר", והקשה התלמוד: "ומי בעיי לנסויי קודשא בריך הוא?!", והוא השיב "חוץ מזו, מדכתיב ובחנוני נא בזאת וכו'" – לא שאף בזה יהא מותר לנסות ולעשות על מנת כך; אלא שאף על פי שבשאר יעדים לבו של אדם בטוח בשכרם – מכל מקום אינו סמוך בהם מכל וכל. אבל בזו יהא בטוח לגמרי, שכל מידותיו של הקב"ה מידה כנגד מידה.

בית הבחירה לר' מנחם המאירי לתענית ט,א



Bagels from Benny

Bagels from Benny
Aubrey Davis

Age Appropriate:
3–6 year olds

Class Length:
1–1½ hours



Look Closely and Select a Book

WHY THIS BOOK WAS SELECTED

- Engaging and developmentally appropriate topic—preschool children think about “big questions” often, though they don’t always have the language to ask them aloud.
- Young children may think of God as an entity with human characteristics; this story begins to change that concept and offers much space for discussion.
- As long as their own needs are met, children in this age bracket like to be helpful. They care about animals and about special days such as birthdays, so projects linked to these events become ways they can help and say “thank you” to God.

Identify Big Ideas

VALUES TO HIGHLIGHT

1. **Ma’akhil re’evim/tzedakah**: feeding the hungry/giving to those in need
2. **Tikkun olam**: making the world a better place
3. **Derech erez**: behaving the right way
4. **Ahavat HaShem**: loving God

GOALS OF PROGRAM

1. Highlight and connect the major themes of this book to daily life
2. Involve families in a project to continue the *mitzvot* at home, encouraging them to continue to “care and share” and to say “thank you”



This book-based Program curriculum was developed by The PJ Library.

The **L-I-S-T-E-N** rubric was initially developed by Ina S.G. Regosin, Director, Hebrew College, Early Childhood Institute, with input from Rachel Raz and Sherry Grossman.

Program submitted by Iris Koller, Syracuse, NY: iriskoller@gmail.com

Set the Scene

{ Preplanning and Selecting Locations }

SUGGESTED LOCATIONS

1. **Large room with separate reading and work spaces.** You can use the power of dramatic storytelling to bring the “awe” of the sanctuary into this reading space.
 - If possible, arrange for the loan of a Torah. Get “up close and personal” by showing families the outside and inside of the scroll (see active participation on page 5).
2. **Space in a congregation** that has a captivating sanctuary and a room (ideally with a sink in the room or nearby) for some “messy work”
 - *Bima* or space in front of *bima* should be large enough for all to be seated for story and conversation
 - Work room will need tables where families can spread out (2 or 3 families/table for the first project)
 - Speak with the congregational staff prior to program to understand any rules about who can/cannot open the *Aron HaKodesh*—the Holy Ark where the Torah is kept (or, as Benny says, where God’s special book is)
 - Ask if the children and/or adults will need to wear a *kippah*
 - If you are bringing in snacks, check with the synagogue staff to be sure you are complying with their *kashrut* policies

ASK FAMILIES TO BRING:

1. A cake mix and frosting (and whatever else they’d like to add, such as candles) to create a special birthday care pack for families who visit a food pantry when a family member’s birthday is coming up
 - Bring a few extra sets on hand for those who might have forgotten theirs.

Bagels from Benny

{ Introductory Activity } Birthday Care Packages

Materials Needed:

- Little slivers of tissue or construction paper for “sprinkles”
- Crayons to spread out among the tables
- 1 brown paper bag sheet/child

Advance Preparations:

- Gather paper bags from a local grocery store (most will be glad to donate)
- Cut off bottom of bags and cut the bags open down one side so you will have big sheets of brown paper for each family to use

Adaptations for Group Size and Age

Larger Groups

Have enough space and supplies available.

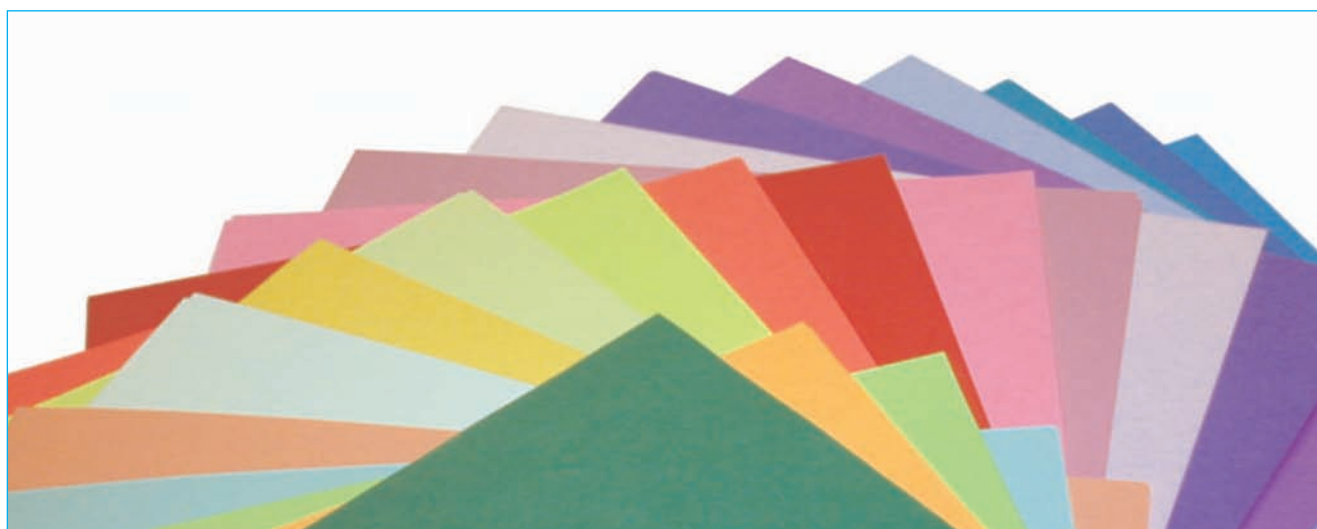
Younger Children

More parent involvement.

Directions:

Note: if you have a shorter time period you might consider only doing this craft and not both of them. In that case, begin the project before the story by just decorating the paper, and then finish wrapping it and adding a message after snack as part of the “Enhancing the Experience.”

1. Have someone stationed at the entrance to the synagogue to direct families where to put their coats and then where they will find The PJ families. (This program starts in the work room space.)
2. Welcome each child and parent at the doorway of the room. Have them sign in and make nametags for themselves. Help them find a seat at one of the art tables, and then ensure others at the table welcome them, fill them in on directions, and all introduce themselves as they work with their children.
3. Invite families to use crayons to decorate the paper with a giant birthday cake. They can also put down a spread of glue stick and “sprinkle the cake” with tissue paper sprinkles, pressing them down to stick to the glue.
4. Parents (and older children) can write a birthday message such as “Enjoy your birthday and your cake... from the PJ Library families” or “From Emily & her mom” (encourage families not to use last names to keep it a somewhat anonymous gift).
5. Once done with their decorations, families can wrap their bundle and leave it on the table.



Bagels from Benny

Tell the Story

{ Props }

Begin to move to the sanctuary or reading space and ask permission to open the ark (if applicable).

READER'S INTRODUCTION

{ Transition }

When most everyone is done, ask everyone to go and wash their hands and then to come sit by you. Let those still working that they can finish their wrapping later. Welcome everyone and invite them to introduce themselves to the group. Ask the children about what they just made. See if they can tell you what they made and why. As you rephrase their comments, be sure they or you talk about wanting to help people, to be sure that other people get to celebrate their birthday with cake. “Sometimes doing nice things to help others is a way to say ‘thank you’ for having all the nice things we have.”

Let them know that the story you will soon read is about a little boy who also says “thank you” by doing something nice for someone else.

If you are **using space in a synagogue**, let everyone know that you will be going to a special, very big room to visit and share a story. Grownups and children can come to this room. Some people come here to learn; others might come to think quietly; some come to sing and others come to pray. This is one place where people pray, which means they talk to God. It is a place called the sanctuary. Invite them to repeat the word.

If you are **not meeting in a synagogue**, explain that some of this story takes place in a bagel shop, some in a school, and some in the sanctuary of a synagogue.

If children ask about what or who God is and you are comfortable answering them, you might share that some people think that God is like a parent who helps to take care of all the growing things in the world—people, plants, and animals; others think that God is who created everything in nature; some think God is like a little quiet voice we can hear inside that helps us make good choices—we can’t see God, but we can see a bit of God inside each one of us when we do the right things and treat people, animals, plants, and everything in the world with care.

If they ask about what “prayer” is, you might share it is when people talk to God. You don’t need to be in a sanctuary to talk to God. You can be in your room, outdoors, or anywhere. People might be saying thank you to God for all the good things in their life. Some might be asking God to help give them the energy to deal with the hard things in life. Others might be asking God to help them make good choices.

Bagels from Benny

Ask if anyone has ever been to the room in a synagogue where people pray. If so, ask them to tell you something they remember about it. You can prompt with questions about what it looked like, what the people were wearing, etc.

Ask if anyone knows how we should behave in such a special place. Make sure they get to things such as speaking in quiet voices, sitting still—it isn't a place to run.

Walk to the sanctuary. Stop in the middle of the room so that everyone can just “hear” the quiet. Then head to where you will read the story, ideally on the *bima*.

ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

Use movement to engage the listeners. Invite them to help sweep the floor (sitting down); dust the shelves; put the baked goods on the shelf; pull open the doors of the ark (all with silent miming); etc.

At the end of the story you can ask, “What did you like best about the story?” encouraging both children and parents to answer. If they mention something that relates to one of the values, it would be a nice follow-up to mention the value (e.g., that's right, it is certainly important to share what we have with other people who are hungry).

If you have permission, or one of synagogue professionals is there to do it (and you have planned enough time into your program), ask all to stand and invite the children to come up to help you open the ark. If possible, take out and undress a Torah scroll so that all can see one up close. It is wonderful if someone knowledgeable about the Torah is there, as there will be many questions!

Some Rabbis will allow the children (and adults) to touch the back of the scroll parchment. **Be sure to check before inviting anyone to do so.**

Once done in the sanctuary (remind the children about proper behavior as you leave), head back to the craft room for a snack...ideally for bagels (either to eat whole or with cream cheese, margarine, and jelly spreads) and water (and/or milk & juice).

Remember to say “thank you” for the treat. (You can ask the children who they might want to thank.) You can either use the traditional *Motzi bracha* (blessing) or the words Benny used in the story. (*All can repeat after you, word by word, *Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech HaOlam, HaMotzi lechem min HaAretz*. Blessed are You, Adonai, our God, Who brings forth bread from the earth.)

Adaptations for Group Size and Age

Larger Groups

If there is not room on the *bima* for all, consider sitting in the front pews, or read the story in the project room before or after you visit the sanctuary.

Younger Children

Be sure to plan to engage them in appropriate movements to enhance their experience and keep them engaged (see above).

Enhance and Extend the Experience

{ Follow-up Activity }

“Bird Feeders”

{ Transition }

SAMPLE INTRODUCTION TO ACTIVITY:

Invite families to clean up from snack and then to bring the birthday cake packages they made earlier and come sit by you.

Remind them that in *Bagels from Benny* the man in the story had said he could barely feed his family. I bet he didn't have enough money for a birthday. Sometimes people, like the man in the story, go to a place called a food pantry where they can get some groceries for free if they don't have enough money to buy all that they need. Most food pantries don't have special things like birthday cakes. We can help by giving them our birthday cake packages. Just like Benny helped the man who didn't have a job have food for his family, we will be helping other people too; we'll be making this world a little bit better. That sounds like a way of saying *Thank You for all the things we have*. So, can each of you come put your birthday cake package in this basket so I can take it to a food pantry?

If you have time, you can ask everyone (and encourage parents to respond, as well) to share what else they do that are ways of saying *Thank You* to God.

If the congregation you are in has a food collection barrel you can have the children place their bundles in there. Share that you have another idea of a way to say *Thank You* to God (or for all that we have [if you sense some participants, or you, are struggling with too much focus on “God talk”]). Remind them that the trees and birds are all part of this world that God created and that by caring for them, we are showing that part of God that is inside us.

{ Follow-up Activity }

Materials needed:

- Bagel halves that have had the chance to dry out a bit (by sitting out overnight)
- Peanut butter or shortening

Do not open peanut butter until you have asked if there is anyone with a peanut allergy in the group

- Birdseed
- A rectangular pan with sides to put the birdseed in
- Plastic knives for spreading
- Yarn
- A pair of scissors (or pre-cut the yarn into strips long enough to loop through the bagel with enough left to hang on a tree)
- Small zipper-style plastic bags to carry craft home in
- Basket to hold the birthday cake packages
- Thin paper plates for each family to work on

Directions

1. Put the yarn through the bagel and tie it close to the bagel, then tie the ends to create a big loop so they can loop it into a tree branch.
2. Spread bagel half with peanut butter or shortening.
3. Once it is well covered, bring your bagel (on the plate) to the birdseed tray.
4. Help child cover the bagel in birdseed, pressing it so it stays on the bagel.
5. Take it out and shake it gently over the tray.
6. Place it into a zipper-style bag for the family to take home.

Bagels from Benny

{ Activity }

Show a sample of the bird-feeder project and explain the directions, and then send them back to their tables. Parents can gather the materials to the tables.

Adaptations for Group Size and Age

Parents will need to provide more hands-on help for younger children.

Nurture the Family

{ Try This at Home }

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Have everyone gather back with you. Children can show their bird feeders with each other. Tell them that you hope they will send pictures to you when they are putting it on a tree for the birds.

You can sing Mr. Rogers' *Tree Song* (see last page) and then, perhaps, Doug Cotler's *Thank You God* using suggestions from the children (and parents) as to what we should be thankful for. (You can find the song on Doug Cotler's CD *It's So Amazing* and on Shira Klein's *ShirLaLa Shabbat* CD.)

Sing a song that perhaps you have created as your "end of program ritual," such as a "*Shalom Chaverim*" (see last page for words; sheet music can be found in basic Jewish music songbooks; videos of song being sung can be found on www.youtube.com.)

{ Try This at Home }

Along with saying *Thank You*, you can encourage them to continue, with their children, to give special things like birthday cake bundles to local food pantries, continuing to feed the birds, etc.

- Be sure to tell them you will send a link to some web sites that have some of the *brachot* of gratitude on them, as well as sites that describe more about how to talk with their children about God.

Bagels from Benny

WEB SITES TO LEARN FROM AND SHARE

Rabbi David Wolpe's Advice about Talking about God with Children

www.myjewishlearning.com/beliefs/Theology/God/About_God/Speaking_about_God/Speaking_to_Kids.shtml

A Parent's Struggle about Talking about God with Children

www.peachesandcoconuts.com/2009/05/omg.html

Brachot/Blessings Information

www.akhlah.com/cybersiddur/blessings/blessings.php

The Tree Song by Mr. Fred Rogers

Melody can be found at www.youtube.com/watch?v=H68OMQyar3Y

Tree, tree, tree; tree, tree, tree Tree, tree, tree; tree, tree, tree We love you; yes, we do. Yes we do; we love you. Tree, tree, tree; tree, tree, tree Tree, tree, tree; tree, tree, tree

"Thank You God" by Doug Cotler

Baruch Ata Adonai, Thank You God

Baruch Ata Adonai, Thank You God

Thank You for my mommy; Thank You for my dad;

Thank You for their hugs; they always make me glad

Baruch Ata Adonai, Thank You God Baruch Ata Adonai, Thank You God

Thank You for... (invite children and parents to fill in with their thoughts)

"Shalom Chaverim"

Shalom Chaverim, Shalom Chaverim Shalom, shalom L'hit-ra-ot,

L'hit-ra-ot Shalom, Shalom.

Goodbye my friends, Goodbye my friends, Goodbye, goodbye We'll meet again soon. We'll meet again soon, Goodbye, Shalom.