SOUND-BEFORE-PRINT

#ONWARDHEBREW has gathered data[1] that demonstrates the benefit of learning prayers aurally and orally before learning to decode the printed page. Since this practice has been slow to catch on in synagogue/part-time Hebrew programs, this resource was developed to support educators who would like to teach their students the words of Hebrew prayers first, without use of a page of Hebrew font or transliteration.

There are two parts to this short document – a LIST OF ACTIVITIES that lessen the burden and boredom of reciting lines of Hebrew over and over again and A SAMPLE LESSON (pages 64-66) that demonstrates how the ideas can be integrated for use in a class session or two.

IN USING THIS RESOURCE, NOTE THAT

- The activities are written for groups of students, but many are easily adapted for one-on-one learning. They may be used with in-person learning and many will work well in a virtual environment (e.g., Zoom).
- Some of the activities have a fair amount of movement, which could create behavior challenges for some children. To mitigate these:
    - Choose activities that you feel your learners can reasonably handle.
    - Use teen assistants to anticipate potential challenging behavior.
    - Make sure your learners know that you will stop any activity that becomes unsafe.
- Teen assistants could be empowered to lead some of these activities. They would have fun!

AFTER using sound-before-print activities, when students begin working on decoding the printed text of the prayer/blessing, be sure to tell them that they may use the words now in their head to help them decode the print on the page. [Note that one of the reasons we can read English smoothly is because we know the words. Sound-BEFORE-Print gives our Hebrew students that advantage.]

BEFORE MOST OF THE ACTIVITIES CAN BE USED FOR A SPECIFIC PRAYER, THE STUDENTS NEED TO BE BRIEFLY INTRODUCED TO THE PRAYER'S HEBREW. You should first recite/sing a small segment, repeat it, have the learners echo it back, and then, over time, build up to the full text. Here is how this might work with the first three words of *Oseh Shalom*:

1. Clearly pronounce a word and have students repeat it back. For example:
    Leader: עוֹשֶׂה
    Students: עוֹשֶׂה

[1] #OnwardHebrew video: "Does Sound to Print Hebrew Learning Really Work?" https://tinyurl.com/Does-S2P-work

Leader: שָׁלוֹם
Students: שָׁלוֹם

2. If a word is long or complicated, break it down into segments so that learners clearly hear all the letters and vowel signs within.
   Leader: בְּמְ
   Students: בְּמְ
   Leader: רוֹ
   Students: רוֹ
   Leader: בְּמְרוֹ
   Students: בְּמְרוֹ
   Leader: מָיו
   Students: מָיו
   Leader: בְּמְרוֹמָיו
   Students: בְּמְרוֹמָיו

3. Build up to a few words or phrases.
   Leader: עוֹשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם בְּמְרוֹמָיו
   Students: עוֹשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם בְּמְרוֹמָיו

THEN, ONCE STUDENTS HAVE THE BASIC SOUNDS OF A PRAYER OR BLESSING (they do not have to be perfect), **REINFORCE THE PRAYER AURALLY/ORALLY USING ANY OF THE ACTIVITIES, BELOW.** The goal is to help learners acquire great familiarity with the prayer so that when they finally work with the Hebrew print, they can match what is now in their head to the words on the page.[2]

1. **Copycat**
   Recite a line in a dramatic way, for example: mysterious, silly, confident, sad, slow and drawn out, etc. Have students copycat your exact tone and actions. [*Teen assistants would be great at making a list of dramatic voice possibilities for class use. In addition, teens willing to practice in advance could offer the lines to students quite dramatically.*]

2. **Echo Chain**
   Say one line of the prayer and have one student repeat it. Then ask a second student to repeat the line, passing the echo down the line or around the room. A variation could be to have the group mimic an echo – the first person says it strongly, the next a little softer, the next even softer, etc.

[2] We learn to read our native language fluently and accurately because we know a large number of English words and know how they are pronounced. These activities give our learners the (almost) same benefit with Hebrew prayers and blessings.

3. **Whisper-Talk-Shout!**
   Start by offering words, phrases or lines using different volumes – whisper, normal, shout. Ask the students to repeat what you say, matching your volume. Then, ask them to recite the prayer or blessing, following your cues for the level of volume (*perhaps pretend to push on the volume buttons of a remote control so that students know when to shift the sound up or down*).

4. **Freeze!** *For those who have learned Hebrew Through Movement, call this*: לַעֲצוֹר *(la'atzor, stop)*
   As teacher, clearly recite the words/phrases previously learned while everyone walks in a circle. When you (or a teen assistant) say "Freeze" (or לַעֲצוֹר) everyone must freeze and say the next word or next line (whatever you choose).

5. **Catch!**
   Say the first word in the prayer/blessing and then roll or toss a soft/light ball to one of the learners. That person says the second word or phrase in the prayer. They then roll or lightly toss the ball to another student who offers the third word. Keep the pace up so that students can get into the flow of reciting the prayer/blessing. For 1-on-1 learning, simply pass or roll the ball between you.

6. **All Together, Now!**
   Recite a prayer or blessing together, like a chorus, but use different styles:
   - Whisper
   - Opera voice
   - Robot voice
   - Call and response
   - Etc.

   Note: Teen assistants could develop a robust list! Bonus might be standing on chairs or on the steps of your bimah (central part of the sanctuary).

7. **Conducting the Choir**
   Divide students into two or more *k'vutzot* (קְבוּצוֹת – groups). Say a phrase and ask one *k'vutzah* (קְבוּצָה, group) to repeat it. Say the next segment/phrase for another *k'vutzah* to repeat. Continue until each *k'vutzah* has had a chance to participate AND the prayer/blessing being worked on has been heard/repeated at least twice.

   Then, take the stance of a conductor, say a line and point to a *k'vutzah* randomly. Their task is to repeat it. Continue with other phrases/lines, pointing each time to a different *k'vutzot* to repeat.

Finally, without you reciting the opening words, point to a *k'vutzah* to recite the first line of the prayer and then point to other *k'vutzot* to recite the second line. Continue until the end.

8. Last One Standing

After students learn a phrase (or two) from a prayer or blessing, have them all stand up. In turn, ask each student to say one word from the phrase (it is okay to prompt them if needed). The person who says the last word in the sequence sits down. Continue playing with those still standing, one word at a time. Again, the person who says the last word sits down. The last person standing wins the game! If you play again (yes, please!), the person who won the last round may start off by reciting the first word in the sequence. A video that demonstrates this activity is here.

9. We've Got Rhythm!

Use claps, drums, tambourines or feet stomping to create a slow beat that matches the pacing and (perhaps) mood of the prayer being worked on. Have learners chant the prayer with the rhythm. The beat may have to be slowed down, but eventually might be sped up to better match "synagogue speed." This activity could also be done with students marching around or dancing to the beat of the rhythm.

NOTE: Do not create a beat that matches the segments/syllables of words, but rather create one that matches the rhythm of normal recitation. For example, if working on the middle of Avot V'Imahot, the beats (indicated by ^) might be:

הָאֵל הַגָּדוֹל
^ ^

הַגִּבּוֹר וְהַנּוֹרָא
^ ^

10. Starting with a Whisper

Ask one student to whisper the first line or phrase. Then have the next student join in, also whispering. Keep going until the whole group is whispering together.

Then shift to normal voices and perhaps ending with projected voices as actors might use on stage in a theater.

11. Oy, I Forgot!

The leader starts by reciting a prayer or blessing (the students just listen), then stops in the middle with an "oy, I forgot" look on their face and the students fill in

the next word or line. This could be done as a group, or as individual students who are called on.

12. Oopsie!

The leader recites the line with an intentional mistake. The students have to catch the mistake, correct it and recite the full line from the beginning.

****

מִי כָמֹכָה

(a sample lesson)

Note that this lesson introduces מִי כָמֹכָה aurally (by listening) and orally (by speaking). It is assumed that the students have had a lesson or two on the meaning of this song/prayer prior to working on the Hebrew. Depending on your available time and pacing, the nine steps offered below might be accomplished in one lesson or split into two or more.

STEP ONE: Introduce the first phrase

Tell students that you'll be saying one line of the prayer and that you would like them to listen for any familiar words.

(Slowly, clearly)

מִי כָמֹכָה בָּאֵלִים יְהוָֹה

Check to see if anything sounds familiar – there is a chance that students will recognize the last word, *Adonai*, meaning God. Say the word again and have them repeat it.

Break the line into segments, offering each word slowly and clearly one at a time and having the students repeat it, call-and-response. [*If your students are not too familiar with this prayer, break it down as offered below. But, if they have sung this before, the learning process does not have to be so detailed.*]

מִי

כָ
מֹ
כָמֹ
כָה
כָמֹכָה
מִי כָמֹכָה

בָּאֵלִים
יְהוָֹה
בָּאֵלִים יְהוָֹה

מִי כָמֹכָה
בָּאֵלִים יְהוָֹה
מִי כָמֹכָה בָּאֵלִים יְהוָֹה

.

STEP TWO: Copycat

Remind students that מִי כָמֹכָה is found in the Torah. It is the song that was sung after Moses, Miriam, Aaron and the Israelites escaped Egypt and crossed the parted waters of the Reed Sea. Ask students to offer some emotions the Israelites might have felt when standing safely on the other side of the waters. With the emotions that students

suggest, say the line dramatically using that feeling, in voice and action. Thus, if the students said they would have been amazed, offer the line with big eyes and a surprised tone – then, have them copycat you. Repeat with a number of emotions.

STEP THREE: Introduce the second phrase
As you did before (or with any modifications you wish), introduce the second line:

מִי כָּמֹכָה נֶאְדָּר בַּקֹּדֶשׁ

STEP FOUR: Echo Chain
Say the first two words of this phrase (*mi kamo<u>kh</u>a*) in a normal voice and in turn, ask each student to repeat it a little softer than the person before, as an echo would fade out. Repeat with the next word (*ne'edar*) and then with the last word (*ba-kodesh*).

Then, do the echo chain with the entire first line (learned in STEP ONE) and then with this second line (introduced in STEP THREE).

STEP FIVE: Introduce the last phrase (*or, if you feel that two lines are enough, move onto STEP SEVEN*)
As you did before (or with any modifications you wish), introduce the third line. Before you begin with the repetitions, you may wish to tell students that this line offers powerful praise to God for bringing them to freedom after being in Egypt for so long. The lines say that God is:

נוֹרָא תְהִלֹּת ("really awesome")
עֹשֵׂה פֶלֶא ("Maker of wonders")

STEP SIX: Start with a Whisper (*being in awe*)
Say the first word (*nora*) in a whisper and have everyone whisper it back. Repeat the whisper. Repeat for the other three words (*t'hilot, oseh, feleh*). Then say the first two words together (*nora t'hilot*) in a whisper – ask the first student to whisper them both with you, then have the next person join in with the two of you, then add the next student. Repeat for the last two words together (*oseh feleh*).

STEP SEVEN: Freeze!
Have everyone stand in a circle and start walking in a clockwise direction. As teacher, start reciting the three lines from the beginning and at some random point say "Freeze" (or לַעֲצוֹר). Everyone together has to say the next word in the sequence. Repeat several times. Option: ask for two students to say the next word together, instead of the whole group.

STEP EIGHT: Last One Standing
Ask everyone to stand up. In turn, each student says one word (in order) from the three lines you have taught (it is okay to prompt them if needed). The person who says the

last word (פֶּלֶא) sits down. Those that are still standing continue to repeat the line word-by-word. The winner is the last one standing.

Reset the game by asking everyone to stand up again and start, word-by-word – the person who "won" the last time gets to say the first word. Feel free to repeat this game another time or two.

STEP NINE: Summary

Recite all three lines together – confidently and feeling awesome in thanks for God saving the Israelites from their life in Egypt. [*If your students are working on decoding skills, now is the time to offer the printed prayer. How do they do?*]