

Imagine a typical day or week of yours. Rank these activities in order of spiritual importance (no ties!). [These should be given out in little strips of paper, so that people can best remember their exact order.] Each teen in a group should make their own list (max 3 minutes), then they come together as a large group and discuss agreements and disagreements:

Taking a shower
Eating (meal, snack)
Praying to God in a meaningful way and feeling a connection while doing so
Schoolwork (pick a class you like)
A Judaic studies class that you like (Chumash, Halacha, Jewish Thought, Talmud, etc.), or a chavruta (Torah learning session) with a friend, advisor, etc.
Sports, athletic practice (basketball, wrestling, soccer, dance, etc.), working out
Practicing an instrument, painting
Community service, giving time to a chessed organization
Listening to music
Going on a hike with friends
Watching a football game
Sleeping
Reading a fascinating book
Doing an interpersonal mitzvah, such as honoring your parents, cheering up a friend who is feeling down
Doing a mitzvah which is not interpersonal, such as wearing tzitzit, lighting the menorah, shaking lulav and etrog
Fill in the blank- What is an activity that you think you have a special talent in or fits your personality very well?

Come together as a group. First look around at each other's lists, let them react if anything seems surprising. Advisors should help facilitate this discussion, with the background of the sources provided.

## Source Sheets for Advisors

*Note- The concepts that we will be going over in this session are incredibly fundamental in the life of a Jew, but are also very deep and complex. If you are not prepared for the session and don't approach the conversation with the requisite depth, the NCSYers will be able to tell. Please go over these sources and the discussion points so that we can maximize this session and discussion to its fullest.*

*We are focusing on several things in the session. One is the idea of בכל דרכיך דעהו, investing everything in our lives with spiritual meaning, even seemingly mundane actions. However, even beyond that, we have our own personal talents, which, while they may not technically be on the list of mitzvot, are part of our personal portfolio, what we have to offer the world (and to give back to Hashem). These are especially elevated when we maximize our talents with the proper purpose.*

*Everything that we do is broken up into the categories of **Mitzvah** and **Reshut**. There are certain naturally spiritual actions that we do (mitzvot), but which are imbued with much more meaning when you do them with a purpose. Then there is the category of Reshut, which gets its spiritual meaning specifically based on the purpose that we are doing this action for.*

### Part I - Focusing our Actions

*This first group of sources tell us how everything that we do in our lives can and should be devoted to the service of Hashem. Even eating, sleeping, or relaxing can be considered spiritually significant actions.*

Mishlei Chapter 3 Verse 6

בְּכֹל דְרָכֶיךָ דַּעְהוּ וְהוּא יִשְׁרֵךְ אַרְחֶיךָ

Know Him (Hashem) in all of your ways, and He will make your roads smooth.

Pirkei Avot Chapter 2 Mishna 12

רבי יוסי אומר... וכל מעשיך יהיו לשם שמים

Rabbi Yossi said, all of your actions should be for the sake of Heaven.

*It is important to point out that **one has to be honest with himself**. You can't say that what you are doing is for the sake of Heaven, when it is something that is immoral and forbidden by the Torah. These sources are talking about something which is inherently neither good nor bad; then, we are able to elevate its status to something holy. However, if the action is inherently reprehensible, then no amount of positive intent can redeem this action.*

*This is quite possibly the most important Rambam that one can ever learn.*

Rambam, Hilchot Deiot, Chapter 3 Halacha 3

המנהיג עצמו על פי הרפואה, אם שם על לבו שיהיה כל גופו ואבריו שלמים בלבד ושיהיו לו בנים עושין מלאכתו ועמלין לצורכו אין זו דרך טובה, אלא ישים על לבו שיהא גופו ושלם וחזק כדי שתהיה נפשו ישרה לדעת את ה', שאי אפשר שיבין

וישתכל בחכמות והוא רעב וחולה או אחד מאיבריו כואב, וישים על לבו שיהיה לו בן אולי יהיה חכם וגדול בישראל, **נמצא המהלך בדרך זו כל ימיו עובד את ה' תמיד**, אפילו בשעה שנושא ונותן ואפילו בשעה שבועל, מפני שמחשבתו בכל כדי שימצא צרכיו עד שיהיה גופו שלם לעבוד את ה', ואפילו בשעה שהוא ישן אם ישן לדעת כדי שתנוח דעתו עליו וינח גופו כדי שלא יחלה ולא יוכל לעבוד את ה' והוא חולה, נמצאת שינה שלו עבודה למקום ברוך הוא, ועל ענין זה צוו חכמים ואמרו וכל מעשיך יהיו לשם שמים, והוא שאמר שלמה בחכמתו **בכל דרכיך דעה והוא יישר אורחותיך**.

Someone who conducts himself according to [the dictates of] medicine - if he only puts it into his mind that his body and limbs be wholesome and that he should have children that do his work and toil for his needs, that is not a good path. But rather, he should put it into his mind that his body should be wholesome and strong, in order that his soul be upright to know God - as it is impossible for him to understand and observe the wisdoms when he is hungry or sick or one of his limbs hurts - and he should put it into his mind that he should have a son that will maybe become a sage and a great man in Israel. **It comes out that the one who walks on this path all of his days, is always serving God** - even during the time that he giving and taking (in business), even when he is having sexual relations - because his intention in everything is so that he finds that which he needs to the point that his body be wholesome to [best] serve God. And even during the time that he sleeps, if he is sleeping purposefully in order that his mind rest and his body rest so that he not get sick and [then] not be able to serve God when he is sick, it comes out that his sleep is service to the Omnipresent, may He be blessed. And about this matter the sages commanded and said (Avot 2:12), "**All of your actions should be for the sake of Heaven.**" And this is what Shlomo said in his wisdom (Proverbs 3:6), "**In all your paths know Him, and He will make your roads smooth.**"

*This upcoming source **can be skipped**, as he basically makes the same point as the above Rambam (and it is quite long). However, it is helpful to know that in the middle of one of the most incredible Halachic works of all time, a book which we use to guide our everyday Halachic decisions, the author tells us this seemingly "fluffy" concept that all of our actions, even if not Mitzvot, should be for the service of Hashem. This tells us that this is also Halacha, just as much as knowing what we should or shouldn't do on Shabbos.*

Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim Chapter 231 Law 1

אם אי אפשר לו ללמוד בלא שינת הצהרים, יישן... ובלבד שלא יאריך בה... ואף בזה המעט לא תהא כוונתו להנאת גופו, אלא להחזיק גופו לעבודת השי"ת; **וכן בכל מה שיהנה בעולם הזה, לא יכוין להנאתו, אלא לעבודת הבורא יתברך**, כדכתיב: בכל דרכיך דעה (משלי ג, ו) ואמרו חכמים: כל מעשיך יהיו לשם שמים, שאפילו דברים של רשות, כגון האכילה והשתיה וההליכה והישיבה והקימה והתשמיש והשיחה וכל צרכי גופך, יהיו כולם לעבודת בוראך, או לדבר הגורם עבודתו, שאפילו היה צמא ורעב, אם אכל ושתה להנאתו אינו משובח, אלא יתכוין שיאכל וישתה כפי חיותו, לעבוד את בוראו; וכן אפילו לישב בסוד ישרים, ולעמוד במקום צדיקים, ולילך בעצת תמימים, אם עשה להנאת עצמו והשלים חפצו ותאותו, אינו משובח אלא אם כן עשה לשם שמים; וכן בשכיבה, אין צריך לומר שבזמן שיכול לעסוק בתורה ובמצות לא יתגרה בשינה לענג עצמו, אלא אפילו בזמן שהוא יגע וצריך לישן כדי לנוח מיגיעתו, אם עשה להנאת גופו אינו משובח, אלא יתכוין לתת שינה לעיניו ולגופו מנוחה לצורך הבריאות שלא תטרף דעתו בתורה מחמת מניעת השינה; וכן בתשמיש האמורה בתורה, אם עשה להשלים תאותו או להנאת גופו הרי זה מגונה, ואפילו אם נתכוין כדי שיהיו לו בנים שישמשו אותו וימלאו מקומו אינו משובח, אלא יתכוין שיהיו לו בנים לעבודת בוראו או שיתכוין לקיים מצות עונה כאדם הפורע חובו; וכן בשיחה, אפי' לספר בדברי חכמה צריך שתהיה

כונתו לעבודת הבורא או לדבר המביא לעבודתו. כללו של דבר, חייב אדם לשום עיניו ולבו על דרכיו ולשקול כל מעשיו במאזני שכלו, וכשרואה דבר שיביא לידי עבודת הבורא יתברך יעשהו, ואם לאו לא יעשהו; ומי שנוהג כן, עובד את בוראו תמיד.

If it is impossible for someone to learn without an afternoon nap, he should sleep, so long as he does not sleep for too long. And even this little amount should not be for the sake of the benefit of his body, but rather to strengthen his body for the service of Hashem. Similarly for anything that he benefits from in this world, he should not intend to do these things for his own benefit, but rather for the service of Hashem, as it says, “Know Him in all of your ways”, and the Sages said, “Let all of your actions be for the sake of Heaven”. For even the mundane actions, such as eating, drinking, walking, sitting, getting up, marital relations, conversations, and all the needs of your body, should all be for the sake of service of God or for something that causes that service. For even if one is hungry or thirsty, if he eats and drinks for his own benefit, he is not praiseworthy; rather, he should have intent that he is eating and drinking to survive, in order to serve his creator. Even if one is doing mitzvot, if he is doing it for his own benefit and to complete his desires and wants, he is not praiseworthy, unless he does them for the sake of Heaven. Similarly for sleeping, even at a time that he needs to sleep in order to rest from his toil, if he does it for the pleasure of his body, this is not praiseworthy; rather, he should have intent to sleep and rest for the sake of health so that he should not go crazy while studying Torah without any rest...Similarly for speaking, even if one is speaking words of wisdom, his intention must be for the service of his Creator or for something that will lead to that service. **The rule of the matter is, a man is obligated to focus his eyes and his heart on his actions and weigh each of them on the scales of his intellect, and when he sees that something will bring towards service of Hashem, he should do them, and if not, he should not do them. One who follows these words is serving his Creator constantly.**

## ***Part II - Maximizing our Talents***

*This next group of sources will kick the discussion up a notch. Now, we aren't just saying that all of a person's actions should be for a holy purpose. We are saying that doing the things which speak to your own personal talents and capabilities take on greater value in the eyes of Hashem, for He created you with these abilities, for a specific purpose. The talents that He gave you can and should be utilized in the service of Hashem. **Judaism doesn't seek to make us clones; it seeks to have each of us be the best person that we alone can be.***

Gemara Masechet Taanit Page 22a

רבי ברוקא חוואה הוה שכיח בשוקא דבי לפט, הוה שכיח אליהו גביה, אמר ליה: איכא בהאי שוקא בר עלמא דאתי?...אדהכי והכי אתו הנך תרי אתי. אמר ליה: הנך נמי בני עלמא דאתי נינהו. אזל לגבייהו. אמר להו: מאי עובדיכו? - אמרו ליה: אינשי בדוחי אנן, מבדחינן עציבי. אי נמי, כי חזינן בי תרי דאית להו תיגרא בהדייהו - טרחינן ועבדינן להו שלמא

Rabbi Beroka Hoza'a was often found in the market of Bei Lefet, and Elijah the Prophet would often appear to him. Once Rabbi Beroka said to Elijah: Of all the people who come here, is there anyone in this market worthy of the World-to-Come?...In the meantime, two brothers came to the marketplace. Elijah said to Rabbi Beroka: These two have a share in the World-to-Come. Rabbi Beroka went over to the men and said to them: What is your occupation? They said to him: We are jesters, and we cheer up

the depressed. Alternatively, when we see two people who have a quarrel between them, we strive to make peace.

*This source tells us that even if our job seems to be mundane, it can be extremely holy and very deserving of reward in the World to Come, as these jesters used their specific talents to cheer up others and prevent disagreement and increase peace in the world.*

***Ask your group if they can think of other examples in their lives which to which this idea would be applicable.***

Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook, Olat Reiyah Volume 2, Tefillot Yom Kippur

אלקי, עד שלא נוצרתי איני כדאי, ועכשיו שנוצרתי, כאילו לא נוצרתי! לפני שנוצרתי, כל אותו הזמן הבלתי מוגבל שמעולם עד שנוצרתי ודאי לא היה דבר בעולם שהיה צריך לי. כי אם הייתי חסר בשביל איזו תכלית והשלמה הייתי נוצר. וכיון שלא נוצרתי עד אותו הזמן הוא אות שלא הייתי כדאי עד אז להבראות. ואילו הייתי מייחד מעשי עכשיו אל תכלית בריאתי, הנני עכשיו כדאי. אבל כיון שאין מעשי מכוונים לטוב התכליתי, הרי לא הגעתי אל תכלית בריאתי. ואיני עדיין כדאי, כמו קודם לכן.

“My God, before I was created, I was not worthy, and now that I was created, it is as if I was not created.” [These are words from the Yom Kippur prayers, when we confess our sins and unworthiness.]

Before I was created, there was certainly nothing in the world that needed me, for if I was needed to complete any particular lacking in the world, I would have been created. And since I was not created until this time, it is a sign for me that it is only now that it is the proper time for me to be created. If I would have devoted my actions now to the purpose of my creation, then I would now currently be worthy of creation. However, since my actions have not been devoted towards my purpose, I therefore have not reached the purpose of my creation, and I am still unworthy, just like all these years before I was created.

*This source tells us that it is crucial that we understand that we were put on this world at this very moment for a specific purpose. Nobody else can do our job but us, and if we don't complete our mission, then there is no point in us having been created.*

Rabbi Akiva Tatz; The Thinking Teenager's Guide to Life, pg. 79-80

If you were placed on a building site with a bag of tools by an intelligent foreman, all you need do is look around and see what is being built in your immediate vicinity and what tools you have been given and you will know immediately what you should be doing. Obviously, you have been given exactly the tools you need for the job; life is not a joke – you have a task to accomplish and you have definitely been given all you need to accomplish it. A careful examination of your place in the world and your personal character tools will give you a clear picture of who you are and what you must do... We understand that the One who creates the whole enterprise gives every individual exactly what he or she needs to carry out the work that is necessary.

*This tells us that if you want to realize what your purpose is in life, it would be helpful to look at your talents, what you are good at. Hashem gave you the specific talents and capabilities that you have for a*

*reason, and knowing these talents can give us a good clue as to how we should best serve Hashem and improve the world.*

*But what if we aren't happy with our own talents? What if we would rather trade our gifts for someone else's gifts? This source tells us that we have to trust in Hashem, as He knows us better than anybody else possibly can, and He chose to give us our specific talents and traits for a reason.*

Rabbi Shlomo Volbe; Alei Shur, Vol 1 pg. 37

An individual who knows himself and is aware of his nature, and who knows that whatever God has given him is a wondrous gift – if he will only take advantage of his talents and strengths he will attain all desirable traits. Such an individual does not suffer from jealousy or envy another person's lot in life! ...Do not compare yourself to others. Have faith in your Creator that He has given you all of your spiritual needs!

*The sources above show that in the category of Reshut, we have the things which fit specifically to us, our own personal talents that take on more meaning when we do them to maximize our own personal spiritual potential.*

***You may now ask the group if they would now rank something like playing an instrument or another hobby (something that maximizes their own character traits, like kindness, sensitivity, sense of humor, etc.) higher on the list than some of the other things (like eating, sleeping).***