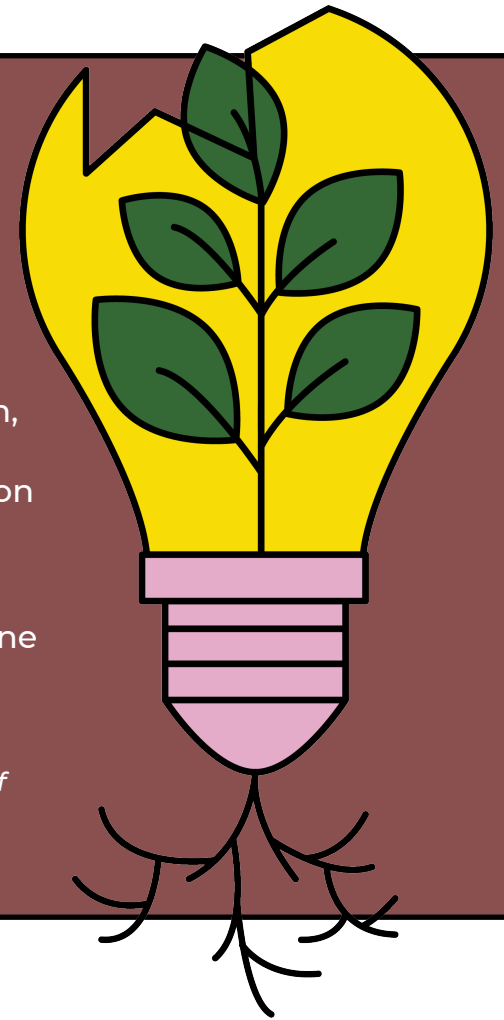


A Prisoner's Dilemma: Reflection & Connection

Not all bondage is visible to others. In fact, many of us find ourselves bound by challenges and struggles of which our loved ones are totally unaware: debt, addiction, illness (both chronic and temporary), and more. The invisible and private nature of bondage often reinforces its weight upon us, adding a sense of loneliness and isolation on top of the suffering.

This gratitude exercise comes courtesy of Rabbi Brandon Bernstein and Yitzhak Bronstein at Moishe House, beginning with an insight from the Talmud about how one can help release another from such bondage. It then offers a three-part activity to cultivate a sense of gratitude for being released from the chains of loneliness.

We are grateful to our partners at Moishe House, and especially Rabbi Brandon Bernstein, Director of Jewish Learning, and Yitzhak Bronstein, Regional Jewish Educator, for creating this activity.



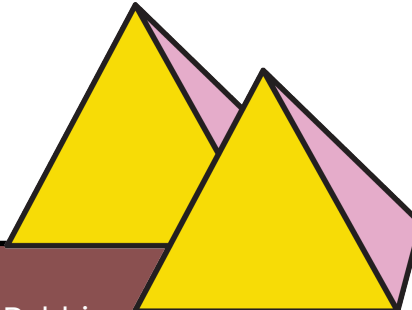
#gratitudedays

Days of
Gratitude



gratitudedays.com





There is a story in the Talmud about the sage Rabbi Yochanan visiting his student who had fallen ill. Rabbi Yochanan asks about how he is doing and takes his student's hand in his own. The student's health is immediately restored.

Later, Rabbi Yochanan himself falls sick, and a fellow sage follows the exact same steps. He visits, asks how he is doing, takes his hand, and beholds Rabbi Yochanan fully restored.

The Talmud asks: if Rabbi Yochanan was able to heal his student, then why couldn't he also heal himself? It answers: **"A prisoner cannot free himself from prison."**

אֵין חֲבוּשׁ מַתִּיר עַצְמוֹ מִבַּיִת הָאֲסוּרִים

Ein chavush matir atzmo mi'beit ha'assurim ([Berakhot 5b](#))

Rabbi Yochanan's secret was neither medicine nor magic, but the healing power of presence and connection with a dear friend. Just like Rabbi Yochanan, sometimes our friends and family need our company; sometimes, we need the company of our friends and family.

Today, you'll offer your presence to somebody and see how their presence may help release you.



#gratitudedays

Days of
Gratitude

m²

gratitudedays.com



Step One

Take some time to write out a reflection (or record as a voice memo if that's more comfortable) on something that's been troubling you lately. Try to focus on how it makes you feel. Include as many details as you want; this is for no one's eyes but your own.

Step Two



Think of a friend or relative you haven't spoken to in a while and for whom you feel affection. Maybe it's someone you've been meaning to connect with anyway. Call them up on the phone or by video call. With intention and presence, ask them how they are doing. Listen actively to what they have to say, and ask follow-up questions where you can. There's no need to force them to go deep; just allow them the conversational space to share if they'd like to. Listen, be present to their voice and their words, and allow yourself to connect. Before the end of your conversation, be sure to articulate your gratitude for their presence in your life.

Step Three

After your phone call, take some time to write out (or record) how you feel. How do you feel about the topic you wrote about at the start of this activity now that you've had some time to connect with someone else?

