

MAKING G-D A VERB

BIG IDEA: How do miracles happen? And what do they have to do with nouns and verbs? In today's workshop we'll look at how to make miracles in your own life by turning nouns into verbs and taking action! Jewishly, we'll look at the big idea of G-d, and how and why to turn this very important noun into a verb too, inspired by Rabbi Harold Schulweis of Valley Beth Shalom in Los Angeles. In the kitchen, you'll learn the importance of taking matters into your own hands, rather than relying on someone or something else to bring you sustenance.

OVERVIEW - TASTE OF THE STORY

What is a noun? You may remember learning that a noun is a word used to describe a person, place, or thing-- like a cutting board, a table, Chef Danny, Chef Zoey, or California to name a few. But did you know that a noun also can be a word that describes an idea? These are called "abstract nouns," they are nouns you can't touch, like the word "miracle". A few other examples of abstract nouns are thought, dream, honesty, hope, love, truth, friendship, belief, talent, memory, and life.

What is a verb? A verb is an action word-- singing, dancing, drawing. Any word that describes an action is a verb. Cooking is all about verbs because we take action all the time in the kitchen-- like stirring, grilling, sauteing, chopping, and blending to name a few.

Ok so we are on the same page about what a noun is and what a verb is. But can a noun *become* a verb? And if so, what do we need to do to change that noun into a verb?

Let's look at the noun "miracle" as an example. What is a miracle, and how do miracles happen? A miracle is something amazing or unbelievable that happens that you never in a million years would have thought could, or even would, take place. An everyday miracle that you may have experienced as a little kid would be sitting down at the kitchen table when all of a sudden food appears on your plate as if by magic. You don't know how it got there, but it's ready for you to eat right at the perfect moment!

Well, the older you get, you probably realize that miracle was not what it seemed. Eventually, you recognize that someone was making that miracle and cooking for you all that time while you were growing up. The next logical step is to realize that *you* have to learn how to cook yourself. This is making the noun, miracle, a verb! To literally make a noun into a verb we simply add "-ing" to the end of the word.

So (ignoring that it may sound a bit silly) what happens when you are "miracle-ing" instead of just experiencing that miracle? Imagine this: you're hungry, it's almost dinner time, and what do you do? You take action, you make the miracle yourself! That food isn't just going to appear on the table. So, you go to the refrigerator, grab some ingredients, and get cooking. You have to cook, and before that, you have to learn how to do it, eventually entirely on your own and learn

the verbs of the kitchen. What changes about your experience of that word when it turns from a noun into a verb? In the case of making a meal, you aren't passively waiting for dinner to be served to you. You have to get "miracle-ing" and take that miracle into your own hands. This makes the experience more active, because you are making it happen right here and right now. *Learning* how to cook, actually *cooking*, and then after the meal, *cleaning* up--these are all the verbs that are needed to make that everyday miracle happen.

JEWISH CONNECTION

Can we do this same thing with the word G-d? Rabbi Harold Schulweis (z"l) of Valley Beth Shalom in Los Angeles said that we can change G-d from a noun to a verb. But how? And why? Well, before we can answer those questions, let's take a look at the noun: G-d.

First, let's touch base for a moment about how Judaism thinks about G-d. It's important to keep in mind that G-d is such a huge, vast idea that in Judaism not everyone agrees exactly how to define G-d for themselves or each other, and different communities will talk about G-d in different ways.

Even in our ancient Jewish texts, G-d does not have one single name. In different circumstances, G-d has different names based on how G-d is teaching us, giving us something, helping us, or protecting us. We use these different names, faces, and metaphors to feel a deeper connection to a greater presence that's really hard to define or name.

While this can certainly be confusing, it also is a wonderful example of how inclusive Judaism can be. There is even a story about an atheist who came up to his town's rabbi and said, "I don't believe in G-d." The rabbi responded, "You know what, I don't believe in that G-d either." The rabbi is telling the atheist in this story that G-d doesn't have to look or be the way that the atheist is imagining. Instead, the rabbi is encouraging the atheist to think about other ways they may be connected to a greater power in their everyday life. So, what are some of the many ways that ancient Jewish texts talk about G-d?

All the way back in the Talmud, G-d is named *Rachamana*, meaning the "Merciful or Compassionate One" (Berakhot 40b:6). And in the Torah, G-d is also described using forces of nature, such as *ruach*, a Hebrew word that means both wind and spirit. G-d even seems to look or act differently to the Israelites based on their situation. At the burning bush, when Moses first meets G-d, Moses asks, "What is Your name?" G-d replies, "*Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*," which literally translates to "I will be that I will be" (Exodus 3:14).

So how do all these different metaphors make us feel more connected?

Some of these metaphors use human relationships that we are more familiar with, such as "Ruler" or "Parent," to make the relationship between humans and G-d feel more familiar to us. When we use *Melech*, meaning King, we can understand that G-d sets out commandments that

we must do. When we talk about G-d as a parent, we focus more on how G-d may be older and wiser than us and can help give us advice and help us on our path.

A midrashic text dated to the Talmudic era points out how G-d “appeared to Israel at the Red Sea as a mighty man waging war” and later, at Mount Sinai as a teacher, and “appears to them in the days of Daniel as an elder teaching Torah, and in the days of Solomon appeared to them as a young man.” This text concludes: “The fact is, Rabbi Chiyah bar Abba said, that G-d appeared to them in a guise appropriate to each and every place and time.” (Pesikta de Rav Kahana (12:24)

“A guise appropriate to each and every place and time.” This midrash, or story, suggests that when we need someone to cheer us on, G-d will be that for us. When we need someone to tell us that we did something wrong and need to fix our mistake, G-d will be that for us. All of the support we need, in all its different forms, can be examples of G-d--a presence greater than ourselves.

So let’s go back to our question of how and why we would turn the noun G-d into a verb. Rabbi Harold Schulweis says that rather than wait for G-d to make miracles, we need to take on that responsibility– in this way we can turn G-d into an action, a verb. He calls the act of turning G-d from a noun to a verb “Predicate Theology,” the practice which helps us become more “G-d like.”

When you turn something into a verb you add in that “-ing.” So, that means here that we are “G-ding.” What does that mean?! Rather than sitting around waiting for physical signs of G-d, Rabbi Schulweis prefers people take matters into their own hands. Miracles can and do occur every day and everywhere because G-d is *within* each one of us.

This means that all of these names and faces of G-d don’t just allow us to have a deeper understanding of G-d, they can also help us have a deeper understanding of ourselves and each other. No one human can represent all the aspects of the divine. Instead, different people can act like different aspects of the divine, and by giving G-d so many names, it allows us to recognize the different but equally divine sparks in each of us. For example, can you think of a time when a friend showed you mercy or compassion? Maybe they offered you comfort when you were having a hard day, or forgave you for doing something wrong. In those moments, they were being G-d-like, by representing *Rachamana*, the Merciful One.

Whenever you step up and become part of the process of making the world a better place and inciting change, that’s when you are “G-d ing.”

THINKING QUESTIONS

- 1) How can you actively make G-d a verb in your everyday life?
- 2) (*for a deeper dive*) What other important nouns can you make into a verb in your life?

CONNECTION TO RECIPE

We already know that cooking is all about taking action! Today's recipe is the very first recipe that Chef Danny taught Chef Zoey that she could make on her own. Rather than waiting for dinner to magically happen, Chef Zoey, and now you, can make it happen by other means. This recipe is also really action-packed! Sometimes the way we show love and care is in the actions that we do, and this mac and cheese is full of loving actions--Rather than simply boiling water and stirring in a cheese powder, you'll chop and caramelize sweet potatoes, mince garlic, whisk your cheese sauce together, and maybe even shred if you're using fresh cheese!

CJA's SWEET POTATO MAC AND CHEESE

Ingredients:

- 1 large sweet potato, cut into small cubes (yam can sub)
- 3 Tbsp Extra-Virgin Olive Oil
- 4 cups elbow macaroni
- 2 cloves garlic, finely minced
- 4 Tbsp unsalted butter
- 4 Tbsp flour
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1/8 tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 3 cups half-and-half (for lower fat, use regular/skim milk)
- 1 3/4 cups shredded cheddar cheese (sharp or mild)
- 1/2 cup Asiago cheese, shredded (can use Parmesan)

Optional topping ingredients:

- 1 Tbsp Olive Oil
- 1/4 cup Panko breadcrumbs
- 1/4 cup shredded cheddar cheese

Recipe

1. Add one Tbsp of salt to a large pot of water and bring it to a boil. Add macaroni (or whatever pasta you are using). Cook until al dente, drain and set aside.
2. Heat 1 Tbsp olive oil in a large pot over medium-high heat; add sweet potatoes and cook, flipping occasionally, until they develop a caramelized crust (about 5 minutes).
3. In the same pot as the sweet potatoes, over low heat, combine butter and the rest of the olive oil and then add the minced garlic.
4. Add flour and stir to combine.

Nutrition Facts	
Servings 8.0	
Amount Per Serving	
calories 476	
% Daily Value *	
Total Fat 36 g	55 %
Saturated Fat 17 g	86 %
Monounsaturated Fat 8 g	
Polyunsaturated Fat 1 g	
Trans Fat 0 g	
Cholesterol 89 mg	30 %
Sodium 419 mg	17 %
Potassium 233 mg	7 %
Total Carbohydrate 29 g	10 %
Dietary Fiber 2 g	6 %
Sugars 4 g	
Protein 14 g	28 %
Vitamin A	215 %
Vitamin C	1 %
Calcium	218 %
Iron	2 %

* The Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet, so your values may change depending on your calorie needs. The values here may not be 100% accurate because the recipes have not been professionally evaluated nor have they been evaluated by the U.S. FDA.

5. Cook, stirring constantly for 2-3 minutes.
6. Increase the heat to medium, add in salt and pepper, and, with a wooden spoon or wire whisk, gradually add the half & half or milk.
7. Bring to a boil while continuously stirring.
8. Reduce heat, and then simmer for 1 minute.
9. Stir 1 3/4 cup Shredded Cheddar Cheese and 1/2 cup Asiago cheese until melted and smooth.
10. Add in cooked pasta and stir, adding more liquid if needed. Once completely combined, serve hot with a parmesan garnish!

Crunchy Topping Instructions:

To go the extra mile (and it's worth it, believe us), pour the mac and cheese mixture into a buttered (or sprayed) casserole dish, sprinkle a bread crumb topping on top and bake until golden brown, crunchy and bubbly!

1. Preheat the oven to 250 degrees.
2. Combine 1 Tbsp olive oil, 1/4 cup panko bread crumbs, 1/4 cup shredded Cheddar Cheese, and 1/4 cup Asiago cheese in a small mixing bowl. Stir until well combined.
3. Sprinkle on top of mac and cheese.
4. Bake for 25 min, or until the cheese is bubbly and the topping is golden brown. Serves 8.

Eat and discuss!

SUMMARY AND SYNTHESIS

Ok, so we've made G-d into a verb, but what are some ways we can "G-d"? What does "G-d-ing" look like in our daily lives?

Here's a story that demonstrates the power of "G-d-ing":

A family wakes up on Friday morning. They open the fridge, but they already know what they will find there... not much of anything. The caregivers in this family recently lost their jobs and are struggling to put food on the table. However, later in the afternoon, they are able to stop by a local Jewish food pantry called SOVA, that provides nutritious groceries and warm meals to those in need. On Friday night, they are able to celebrate their Shabbat as a family with challah, and soup, and a warm dinner.

What do you think they say? "It's a _____!"

"It's a miracle." But did G-d look down from heaven and point a finger at their table and make that meal happen? No, just like the example of food on your table growing up being provided by your family, this food had to come from someone's work. In this case, the people who donated money and food to SOVA and the SOVA staff supported this family and provided this meal when they otherwise would not have had food to eat. That's making G-d a verb, that's *making* the miracle.

So, miracles and “G-ding” can be big or small. Not just red seas splitting or even feeding a family. Just like you sometimes need support-- a teacher, a cheerleader, or a friend-- other people in your life do, too. We can make G-d into a verb in our everyday actions. If you see your friend is having a bad day, you choose to give them a hug, and that brings a smile to their face-- that’s a miracle! What if you see someone being bullied? You stand up to the bully and more importantly you make friends with the person being bullied. Because when they go home that night they’re going to say, “I have a friend tonight that I didn’t have this morning,” and you’re going to change someone’s life. That’s “G-ding,” that’s a miracle!

Jewishly, we have the opportunity to make G-d a verb both in our everyday lives and when celebrating holidays. Some of the most well-known Jewish values are tikkun olam and tzedakah (and we even dedicate entire workshops to each of these values to explore them more deeply!). Literally translated as “repair the world,” tikkun olam means looking around us and seeing what needs to be fixed--and then fixing it. Maybe that means the plants in your backyard that need watering. Maybe that means your friend that needs a hug. Tzedakah can include monetary donations, time volunteering, or other ways you bring justice into the world. In both cases, by integrating these Jewish values into your everyday life, you are turning G-d into a verb.

Even though many of our Jewish holidays celebrate something to do with our relationship with G-d, there is also room in our holiday celebrations to make G-d a verb! Let’s look at two examples where we learn about people who noticed something that wasn’t right and worked to make it right, making a miracle themselves in the process. In the story of Hanukkah, the Maccabees turned G-d into a verb and made their miracle of winning the war and rededicating the Temple to the Jewish people. And in the story of Purim, Esther turned G-d into a verb by making the miracle of saving the Jewish people of Shushan from destruction. And actually, Purim is one of the only stories, if not *the* only story, in the Tanakh that doesn’t ever explicitly refer to G-d, but G-d is still present through the actions of Esther as she saves her people.

So, If you’re ever given Tzedakah, donated food or clothing, or just helped to make someone else’s life better, you’ve helped make the miracle! You’ve turned G-d into a verb in your everyday life. And next time you celebrate Hanukkah or Purim, you can also celebrate how the brave Maccabees and Esther made their own miracles, and then channel their energy into your life!

(for a deeper dive)

There’s a reason that “adulting” has become so commonly used in modern conversation that dictionaries like Merriam-Webster have accepted it as a new word! For those who haven’t heard the term before, “adulting” is the gerund form of the noun “adult”, literally meaning “to adult”. It describes the action of doing those pesky tasks that adults have to do on a regular basis. For anyone who has made the leap post-high school or college out into the “real world,” the first couple of years as a bonafide adult can be difficult. So many new skills need to be honed--all the things you may have taken for granted growing up now need to be done all by yourself.

So how does changing the word “adult” from a noun into a verb help people who are just transitioning into adulthood? Well, setting long-term financial goals, doing a deep clean of kitchen appliances, remembering check-up visits to all the various doctors--these are all things that adults “should” be able to effortlessly do, but if you are doing them independently for the first time, all of these are potentially stressful and overwhelming. Just thinking, “Hey, I’m an adult, so I *should* be able to take these tasks on” can be shame- and guilt-inducing when what you are really feeling is that these tasks feel almost impossible. For this reason, many people in their twenties don’t feel like “real” adults at all. However, changing the noun “adult” to the verb “adulting” allows young adults to channel the role of an adult without feeling like mastery of these kinds of tasks should just automatically come naturally. Framing it as “pew, adulting is hard work!” emphasizes the active nature of adulthood and may make these new and intimidating tasks feel more approachable.

Where else can turning a noun into a verb help you approach a relationship or situation in a new way? If you have a younger sibling or have ever babysat you know that babies and toddlers can be really challenging to take care of. Sometimes they just have bad days, or just a bad moment, and they cry and cry and cry. Rather than thinking “I am their older sister” what happens when you think of your relationship as “sister-ing?” Suddenly it’s not something you are, but it’s something you have to *do*. You have the opportunity to help your younger sibling have a better day-- you can play with them, feed them, love them, and spend quality time with them, all in an act of “sister-ing.”

And when it comes to transforming other Jewish nouns to verbs, the first thing that comes to mind is Shabbat. Shabbat as a word itself is a noun, it is the word that means the day “Saturday.” However, when Friday night at sundown rolls around, we don’t just have Shabbat, we *make* Shabbat. That means we are “Shabbat-ing.” That means if you do the blessings over the candles, wine, and challah you are actively participating in Shabbat, or if you spend all day Saturday resting and rejuvenating you are embodying the meaning of Shabbat.

Go ahead and think about any other nouns in your life that hold meaning and see what happens when you turn them into a verb. All of these examples and more are ways we can become more present, active, and participatory in everything we do each and every day!

RECIPE “NUGGETS”

Sweet Potato

- Keeping the skin on the sweet potato will add more fiber to your meal, which is great for your digestion!
- Sweet potatoes are high in beta carotene, vitamins E and C, iron, potassium and vitamin B6.

- North Carolina's official vegetable is the sweet potato. They are known as the leading sweet potato producer in the United States. The largest producer in the world is China.
- Sweet potatoes can come in many different colors like orange, white, yellow, red and purple. They all have a different taste, texture, flavor, and nutritional content but the orange sweet potatoes are the sweetest. Pale, yellow or white skin potatoes are more dry than red, purple and orange.
- According to the Guinness World Records, the heaviest sweet potato weighed 81 pounds and 9 ounces. This record was set on March 8th, 2004 by Manuel Pérez Pérez in Spain.

Roux

- A mixture of fat (butter) and flour which is used to make sauces.
- Made with equal parts flour and fat
- Its name comes from the French word (*beurre*) *roux* 'browned (butter).'

Mac and Cheese

- On Sept. 23, 2010, American chef John Folse set a Guinness World Record for the world's largest macaroni and cheese dish, weighing around 2,469 pounds. It was made from 575 pounds of pasta, 286 pounds of mixed cheese, 56 pounds of butter, 26 pounds of flour, 1,100 pounds of milk, and 61 pounds of dried seasoning.