

JEWISH MANTRAS: HOW TO CHANGE YOUR BRAIN

How can we change our mood when we're in a funk? This resource will describe brief [exercises to improve your mood now](#) as well as retrain your brain to help you be more positive overall.

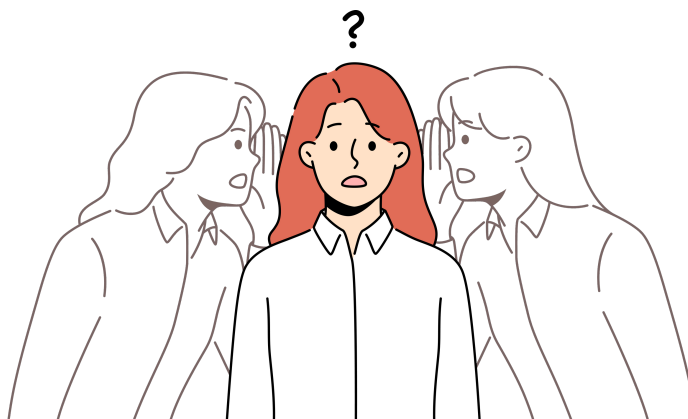
It is important to verbalize and analyze our emotions. Feelings help us gather information about ourselves—how we are experiencing the world and what we need in order to feel better. But if unwanted thoughts and unsettling feelings start to consume us, how do we focus on joyful concepts instead of those that circulate anxiety and depression? We must [retrain our brain](#) to cultivate our own happiness and strength, recognizing we are not defined by our emotions; in fact, we are the boss of them.



Psychology understands people with anxiety have adopted a pattern of thinking that engages worried thoughts. But worriers do not have to be ruled by anxiety and painful thoughts; we can change the pattern of beliefs and ideas we entertain and find tranquility and hope.

One way to retrain our brains is by changing our speech. The things we say and hear have a profound effect on our mind and soul, especially when repeated. Habitually reciting phrases with messages we want to focus on is one way to break our old patterns of thinking and [start thinking how we want to](#).

[Words literally build reality](#). In Genesis 1:5, God spoke and created the world: “God called the light Day and called the darkness Night. And there was evening and there was morning.” [Words create](#).



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Mantras: The Power of Habitual Phrases

Mantras are repeated phrases. Historically, eastern religions have used mantras to aid in meditation and concentration. We can consider any repeated slogan or statement to be a mantra if we say it with intention and to encourage a particular mindset.

Psychology supports the positive impact of mantras on our mood. In a study by Dr. David C. Mohr, et. al., anxiety and depression symptoms lessened after participants wrote and were encouraged to repeat their own mantras (2017). Furthermore, in a randomized controlled trial, inpatients diagnosed with major depression demonstrated a clinical reduction in depressive symptom severity after an intervention of mantra meditation (Bringmann, et. al., 2021). These results suggest mantras can disrupt usual thought patterns that, especially in people suffering from depression, are dysfunctional.

In addition to improving one's temporary mood, the long-term practice of meditation also retrains the brain to dissociate from, or unlearn, harmful thought patterns.

Try out these mantra examples and/or create your own:



Gam zu le'tovah: This, too, is for the good.

This phrase comes from the Talmudic story of Nachum Ish Gam'Zu (Tractate Ta'anit 21a). He is stricken with a series of illnesses and misfortunes but maintains a positive attitude through it all. *Even if we can't see the full picture — and we never can — we must trust that everything is part of a plan and for our best. Whenever we face a challenging circumstance, we have the chance to ask ourselves: What can I learn or gain from this?*



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Gam zeh ya'avor: This, too, shall pass.

This phrase comes from a traditional tale involving King Solomon, the wisest man to live. One day, a man sought advice from the king. After hearing his many complaints, King Solomon gave him a ring with the following advice: Gam Zeh Ya'avor. In difficult and uncomfortable periods of life, it is important to remember life moves beyond the current moment; our pain is temporary. We can consider how pain is part of our living experience yet does not define it. We are a compilation of body sensations, intellect and beliefs, feelings, and voluntary and involuntary actions. Take a moment to recognize other aspects of your current moment — the coziness of your sweater or the amazing functionality of your arms as you pick up a laundry basket. Even when we are in pain, we can pause to notice the other components of our life.



I strive for meaningful goals.*

Intention drives our actions to reflect our values and goals. In order to live proactively, we must remind ourselves to stay intentional. What goal am I prioritizing today? Where should I focus my attention to keep on track?



I am made b'Tzelem Elokim (in God's image), and I have infinite value!*

When we are not feeling our infinite worth, we must try to remember bishvili nivra ha'olam — the whole world was made for me. I have a purpose and reason for being here. We don't know the extent of our strengths and inner resources, but we can gain and build on them starting now.



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I control my effort and my actions.

I need to focus on what I can control; focusing on what I cannot control serves no purpose. I can do my part — and understand the rest is not up to me.



I see myself as I wish to be.*

How do I want to be? Our character is malleable, and we can develop ourselves with the choices we make.



My best is what I can do and what I am obligated to strive toward.

We can do no more than our best. That is all we are required to do.



* Rabbi Zelig Pliskin is the author of more than 25 books including Gateway to Happiness, The Power of Words, Building Your Self Image and Life is Now. He speaks about nine principles of achieving happiness, three of which are mentioned or adapted above.

Exercise: Create Your Own Mantras

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____



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Tips for designing your own mantras:

Affirmations are most effective when they are personal. Consider what you care about, what you want to be the focus of your mind and what you need to hear in order to reach your target. Brainstorm some phrases that empower you, and craft them into lines you can remember and repeat throughout the day.

Tips for saying mantras:

1. Create a schedule to repeat your affirmation multiple times in a day. → Repetition helps the mantra's meaning penetrate your mind and helps you remember the words, so you can recite your mantra whenever you need a boost.
2. Express affirmations with resounding enthusiasm! → How we speak determines the effect of what we say. Even if you have trouble believing the content of your mantra, articulating the words clearly and with passion will convince yourself more than mumbling will.

