



**KEEP
CALM**

AND

HAVE A

**SHANA
TOVA!!**

**CHAGIM YOUTH ACTIVITIES
RESOURCE PACK**



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Keep calm...it's almost 5781!

This resource pack includes **Tribe's Top 10** activities and discussions for the period of Chagim from **Rosh Hashana to Simchat Torah**. Whether you are at home or shul, there are plenty of themes and ideas for youth, which you can use and adapt.

The material is based on existing resources collated by Tribe over the years. Thank you to the original authors and to the Tribe Team who joined me in working on tweaking the articles for the purpose of this booklet.

There is a statement which we recite in our prayers at this time of year. **“Hope in the Lord. Be strong and of good courage, and hope in the Lord!”** Is the double expression of hope in God just to strengthen our belief, or is there something else to it?

I like to think that the first mention of hope is encouraging us to trust in G-d. However, the second time hope is stated, it's about people having faith that **God has faith in us!** Believing in the spirit and unique talents that God has invested in each human being, unlocks a deeper appreciation of our lives and our world.

I hope these resources help to create a valuable space for discussion with young people in your homes and communities. We want to hear their voices and for them to realise how much they are appreciated. Each young person is a flourishing universe. Woven into the tapestry of the topics in this booklet, is the sentiment that we will forever enthusiastically celebrate our children, to give every individual the confidence that they can be the best version of themselves.

Shana Tova!

Rabbi Eli Levin
Tribe Rabbi

KEEP CALM AND MAKE THE RIGHT CALL

Rosh Hashana

Summary

We all judge other people. We know it is wrong and yet this doesn't stop us from doing it. Our minds are always interpreting the events that unfold around us and we spend a lot of time trying to fit people's behaviour into a category in our mind. Sometimes our judgements are well-placed but often we allow ourselves to be too negative. We can show a terrible lack of empathy and allow ourselves to see things in only one way.

On Rosh Hashana, we should try to think about possible positive explanations for scenarios that perhaps need a second glance. Try not to make a quick negative judgement about our fellow humans, instead perhaps think of a reasonable explanation for their behaviour. Hopefully G-d will mirror our approach in the way that He judges on the Day of Judgement.

Questions to consider

- What makes me judge other people?
- Do I always have to give the benefit of the doubt? What if someone has really done something wrong?
- How much do I care what others may judge me to be?

The Story 1: Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 31a

This section of the Talmud brings three examples of converts of which two are mentioned here. The first one involves a person seemingly interested in converting but on the condition that he does not have to recognise the authority of the *Torah SheBaal Peh* (The oral Torah such as the Mishna). Shammai angrily rejects the convert but Hillel welcomes him. The second convert wants a speedy conversion process and so asks Shammai to teach him “the entire Torah whilst standing on one foot”, i.e instantly. Again Shammai rejects the convert and Hillel accepts him. Hillel then says, “That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. This is the entirety of the whole Torah and the rest is commentary. Go and study!”

Although not brought here, the series of three stories ends with all three converts gathering together. They agree that “the sternness of Shammai sought to banish us from the world but the humble manner of Hillel brought us under the wings of the Shechina”

The Explanation

Shammai rebuked him. Shammai’s response to the first convert is the most harsh, as he poses the biggest problem. Rashi explains that Shammai’s rejection stems from a known teaching that a convert who rejects part of the Torah is to be rejected themselves. Hillel however thought the convert did not reject the Oral law entirely but just its Divine origin.

Hillel converted him. Hillel judged the converts favorably, and allowed them the chance to fulfil their potential. Just as Rav Kook explains in *Ein Aya*, if we ignore the obstacle that a lot of people have in front of them, and recognise what a person is capable of, we can help to transform a person with love and patience.

The rest is commentary. According to the book *Talelei Midrash*, Hillel empowers the convert to further his studies whilst at the same time offering him the support and framework of his principle of ‘that which is hateful...’ For Rav Kook the instruction to “go and learn” was to teach the convert the importance of balancing action and learning.

Further points for discussion

Here are a few additional themes you can explore with your group:

1) Are we so superior?

In Tamud Bava Metsia 59b we read, “Do not taunt your neighbour with the blemish you yourself have.” How many times do we see faults in others that we have ourselves? Perhaps one of the essential problems with judging others is that it makes us feel superior to them. Are we really that much better? Why do we have such a need to feel better than others?

2) Judging ourselves

When we come to judge other people we rarely give them the benefit of the doubt. Does this hold true when it comes to judging ourselves? Are we harsher about other people than we are about ourselves? Or is it the opposite? Perhaps we rationalise our own behaviour and explain away all bad behaviours.

3) They're always judging

Hanging out with friends and other people can leave us with the feeling that we are always being judged. Ask the group about their social circles. What things do people get judged for? For example, their fashion, how clever they are, sporting ability etc. Do they ever find themselves changing things about themselves because of worry about judgement? If they were never to be judged by their friends would they act any differently?

Activities

- **Excuses**

Make a list of 'bad' things that people do.

Give the list to the group and go around the circle trying to come up with the most fanciful excuses to get the person off the hook.

Give out prizes for the best justification.

Here are a few examples:

- I saw Jenny buying a cheeseburger in McDonalds
- Victor got caught at school with a bag full of stolen iPhones
- Michelle saw her best friend Suzy talking to some other friends without her being present and as she arrived they all went quiet
- Jordan came in to Shul really late and then ate loads of food at the Kiddush

- **Judge Judy**

Go to the website of this long-running TV show and find a couple of true to life cases that you think may be interesting for your group. Prepare some information cards for the characters involved and then hold a trial and see what the judge thinks. Take it in turns to appoint different judges from the group for each case. If it's not Yom Tov when you run this activity, you can even watch the original court case and see how they compare!

- **Cheat**

Play this classic card game in small groups of at least three players. Each group will need one standard pack of playing cards. Divide up the cards equally. Player one starts by placing his Aces face down in the centre.

The next player places his Twos, then the next player his Threes. The catch is that each player may or may not have the right cards.

The game calls for bluffing. However, if the other players think he/she may be bluffing they can call out "Cheat." Once someone calls cheat that player has to reveal the cards he just played. If he was not cheating the accuser has to take all the cards from the middle. If it turns out the player was cheating, then that player has to take all the cards.

The game is a good way to talk about reading others' behaviour.



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Keep Calm and Stay Cool!

Rosh Hashana

Summary

A new year, a new me?

What is it that makes us get so angry? We sometimes lose our cool when we get frustrated, provoked or when we feel wronged. Getting angry may make us scream and shout or act aggressively to others.

We all know excessive anger is no good thing but this activity brings us the story of an occasion when a lady called Yalta really flew off the handle. What provoked her anger? This provides an opportunity at the beginning of a new year, to look at the role anger plays in our lives and to explore the consequences of our rage.

Questions for discussion

- What makes us angry?
- Why should we control our emotions?
- Can anger ever be considered positive?

The Story: Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 51b

Ulla once visited Rav Nachman's house. They had a meal and Ulla said grace after meals before handing the cup of blessing to Rav Nachman. Rav Nachman asked Ulla to pass the cup of blessing on to Yalta, Rav Nachman's wife.

Ulla said: But Rabbi Yochanan taught that the fruit of a woman`s belly is blessed through the fruit of her husband`s belly...

Meanwhile, Yalta heard and got angry. She went into the wine cellar and smashed four hundred barrels of wine.

Rav Nachman asked Ulla to give her a different cup of wine.

Ulla sent Yalta a message – All the wine in the barrels should be a blessing for you.

Yalta replied, “Useless chatter comes from peddlers and lice comes from old rags.”

The Explanation

Ulla is a sage from Israel who comes to visit his friend Rav Nachman in Babylon. Rav Nachman is married to Yalta an intelligent and learned woman whose father is the head of the Babylonian Jewish community. After eating together Rav Nachman invites his friend to say Birkat HaMazon. Some of the Sages of the Talmud had a custom to bless wine at the end of bentching, as was the case with Rav Nachman, who requested his friend to pass the cup over to his wife Yalta so that she could partake in the ritual. Ulla did not approve of the practice, and despite being a guest, he proceeds to cite biblical verses in the name of his teacher Rabbi Yochanan to support his view against Rav Nachman. Yalta is offended and flies off in a rage to destroy all the wine in their cellar. Ulla is encouraged by Rav Nachman to try and appease her, but Yalta remains insulted.



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Four hundred barrels. Israeli scholar Rebbetzen Pnina Neuwirth points out how incredible it seems for a person to smash so many barrels out of anger. Imagine the time and energy needed! Yalta`s act stands in complete opposition to Talmud Shabbat 105b where someone who smashes utensils out of anger is compared to an idolater. So how is it, she asks, that the Sages do not criticise her violent anger in the story? Moreover, Yalta is even given the final say in the story! Perhaps the breaking was to teach Ulla, and us the readers, that 400 barrels of wine mean nothing compared to a single drop of blessed wine. Ulla saw Yalta`s religious life as a product of her husband. Yalta claimed her own independent right as a woman to her own spirituality

Yalta`s reply. The Iyun Yaakov (17th century Galicia) writes that Yalta meant two things. Unlike a pedlar, Ulla ought to be careful not to let his words come between husband and wife. Unlike a miser wearing rags, Ulla should be more generous in sharing out blessings in order to avoid strife.

Further points for discussion

Here are a few additional themes you can explore with your group:

1) **Out of Control**

The UK Mental Health Foundation`s booklet on anger management warns that anger can lead to actions that we will regret and hence it is important to keep our tempers under control. We all like to feel in control of things around us, despite the fact that the only thing we can really control is ourselves. This is a good opportunity to talk with the group about how much control they have over their lives. Do they think they have enough? Is there too much control from their parents and schools? What about their friends?

2) **The Costs of Anger**

Around the 15th century an anonymous book called Orchot Tzadikim – The Ways of the Righteous – appeared in Germany. It deals with perfecting one`s character traits, amongst them that of anger. Amongst the many consequences of anger the author listed the following:

Being a burden to your family / Hoping for revenge / Bearing grudges / Arguing with friends / Having no mercy or pity / Not being able to concentrate on prayer (or any other religious behaviour) / Acting illogically and unintelligently / People being scared of you / Not listening to feedback or criticism / Destroying things and causing damage / Being arrogant and self-centred

Would they add anything to the list? Which of these things do they consider to be the worst consequence?

3) Hulk Therapy

The Hulk is a superhero comic book character with well-known anger issues. Print out a Hulk mask and ask for two volunteers to come to the front. One person will play at being the Hulk, the other will try to be the Hulk's psychologist. The aim is for the psychologist to try and persuade the Hulk to calm down! The Hulk should be taken to the side and told that no-matter what is said, he should continue to be angry. Let the group watch the hilarious conversation! After a minute, allow other people to play the roles. This activity is a great way to begin talking about whether we can learn to control our anger



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Keep Calm and Forgive

Yom Kippur

Summary

We all make mistakes, but what do we do once we have hurt or upset somebody? Can we acknowledge our errors? How do we make amends?

Yom Kippur is a time to atone for our sins and ask for forgiveness. Let's have a look at a story from our sages to see what went wrong and how the mistake was fixed.

Questions for Discussion

What mistakes do we make?

Do we own up to things we have done wrong and try to fix them?

Why should we forgive others?

The Story: Babylonian Talmud, Taanit 21a

They said of Nachum Ish Gamzu that he was blind, had no hands or legs and was covered with boils...



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His students said to him, “Our teacher, you are completely righteous. So, how did this happen to you?” He said to them, “I brought it all upon myself.”

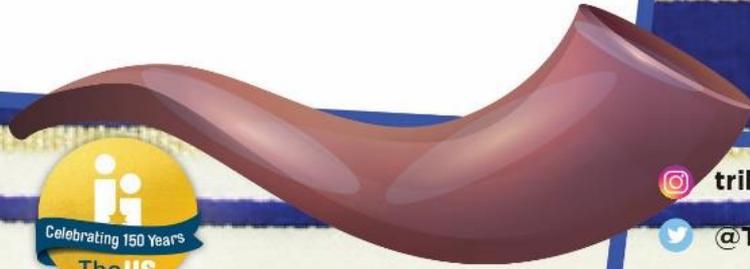
“Once I was travelling on the road to my father-in-law`s house and I had three donkey-loads with me. One was of food, one of drink and one of delicacies. A poor man came and stood in front of me on the road. He said to me, “My teacher, feed me!” I said to him, “Wait until I unload some from the donkey.” I had not yet managed to unload the food, before the man died. I went and fell on his face and I said, “Let my eyes become blind for not taking pity on your eyes. Let my hands be cut off for not taking pity on your hands. Let my legs be cut off for not taking pity on your legs.”

My mind was still not at peace, until I said, “Let my entire body be covered in boils.” His students said to him, “Woe to us that we have seen you like this!” Nachum said, “Woe to me had you not seen me like this!””

The Explanation

Nachum Ish Gamzu is a character much loved for his optimism. His name Gamzu comes from the Hebrew phrase גם זו לטובה - *this is also for the best*. But here, Nachum is in a terrible physical state and his students are keen to learn why this awful fate had befallen him. Nachum tells them about an encounter he had with a poor man who died in strange circumstances. The poor man bumps into Nachum who is on his way to his father-in-law`s house. He requests some food and Nachum asks the man to wait whilst he unloads some from his donkeys. By the time he unloaded the food the man was dead.

Nachum saw his actions as being the cause of death. As he could not ask forgiveness from the dead man he prayed for terrible afflictions as some form of punishment.



I brought it all upon myself. One of the clear messages of this story is how Nachum looks at his own actions first. He takes responsibility for the harm caused to the man and does not look for excuses or circumstances to explain the man's death.

Wait until I unload. At first it is difficult to see what Nachum did wrong. There is an alternative version of this story in Talmud Yerushalmi Peah where Nachum tells the man to wait until he returns from his trip. Our version only makes him wait for Nachum to unload and hence the puzzle of what he did wrong. Dr Rafi Vaacknin, an Israeli academic explains that Nachum was careless with his words, not his actions - telling the man to wait was harsh and insensitive.

He could have used warmer language even if he could not act any quicker. Rav Yitzchak Zilbershtein of Bnei Brak writes that the problem was that Nachum was so concerned with his own life that he didn't even think in advance that he might meet someone who would need food or Tzedaka on the way.

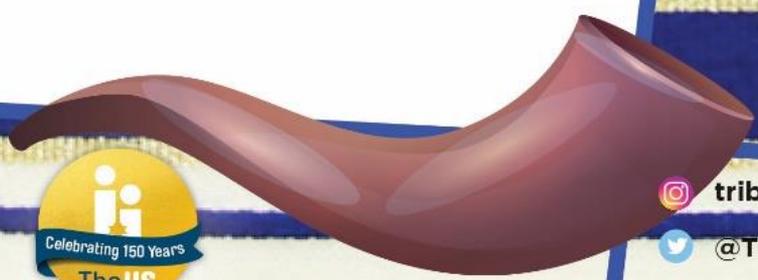
The punishment. It is hard to not feel that Nachum Ish Gamzu is a little extreme in his request for punishment. Blindness, losing his limbs, and boils - would not one of these things have sufficed? A very partial response is offered by the Ben Ish Chai (19th century Iraq). He asked whether Nachum should have acted more quickly. Had he only used his eyes to see the urgent predicament of the poor man he would have ripped open the bags and not unloaded them. That is why Nachum requested to be made blind.

Yom Kippur. The Mishna at the end of Masechet Yoma tells us that if someone does something wrong in the eyes of G-d, Yom Kippur and repentance will bring atonement. However, if someone wrongs another person, atonement will only be granted once the offended party has forgiven.

French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas in an essay entitled Toward the Other highlights how weighty, important and even dangerous the game of forgiveness and offence can be between humans. Forgiveness needs us to really engage with another person.



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Further points for Discussion

Here are a few additional themes you can explore with your group:

3) Owing up

Is it easy to admit to doing something wrong? Why not? Mostly we are concerned about the consequences of our actions. Perhaps we will be punished. Maybe we feel ashamed or guilty. Sometimes we worry about people finding out about what we have done and worry how this will affect the way friends or family see us. Occasionally we just don't know how to put things right. All these reasons lead us to hide away from what we have done. We hope people won't notice or worse, that someone else take the blame. Psychologists say becoming mature and growing up involves taking responsibility for things.

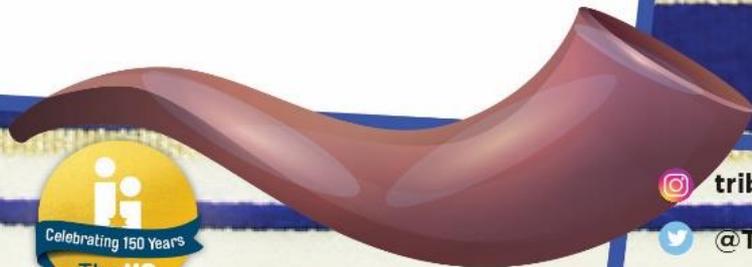
Is this true? What about Nachum Ish Gamzu's story – did he perhaps take too much responsibility?

4) Making an Effort to Make Amends

How far does one have to go to put right what they did wrong? One of the main focuses of Yom Kippur is Teshuva. If Teshuva can really bring balance to the whole world (see for example the 1st chapter of the Laws of Teshuva in the Mishna Torah) then should we not invest our maximum energies in fixing the things we have done wrong? But why don't we? Are we lazy? Embarrassed?

5) Power of Forgiveness

Forgiving others takes great strength. Share examples of when other people forgave them for doing something. Ask the group to try to remember how it felt to be forgiven. One of the reasons forgiveness takes so much strength is that it forces us to leave our ego behind and overcome our desire for revenge and justice.



Keep Calm and Know Yourself

Sukkot

Summary

There is much to say about the identity of the four species we use on Sukkot. These 'Arba minim' each have their own look, taste and feel.

When it comes to identity, we all know our names and addresses, basic facts about ourselves and our likes and dislikes. But do we really know who we are? What makes us who we are? How much of who we are is to do with where we come from? How much from what we hope to do?

In this activity we learn an incredible story of time travel. In the story we see Moshe Rabeinu travel into the future which causes him to question his place in the world.

Questions for discussion

Do we know what really makes us who we are?

How can we discover our self – worth?

Is our identity something we can define or something that others define for us?

The Story: Babylonian Talmud, Menachot 29b

Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav, When Moshe ascended on high he found the Holy One, blessed be He, engaged in fixing little crowns to the letters.

Said Moshe, 'Lord of the Universe, Why the delay?'

Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav, When Moshe ascended on high he found the Holy One, blessed be He, engaged in fixing little crowns to the letters.



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Said Moshe, 'Lord of the Universe, Why the delay?'
He answered, 'There will arise a man, at the end of many generations,
Akiva ben Yosef, who will teach lots and lots of laws on the basis of every
little tag and crown.'

'Lord of the Universe', said Moshe; 'Show him to me.'
God replied, 'Turn around.'

Moshe went and sat down at the back of Rabbi Akiva's classroom in the
eighth row but was not able to follow their arguments. He became weak.

They came to a certain subject and the students said to Rabbi Akiva, 'From
where do you know the law?'
Rabbi Akiva replied 'It is a law given to Moshe at Sinai.'
Moshe was comforted.

He returned to the Holy One, blessed be He, and said, 'Lord of the
Universe, You have such a man and yet You still give the Torah through
me?'
God replied, 'Be silent, for such is My decree.'
Then said Moshe, 'Lord of the Universe, You have shown me his Torah,
now show me his reward.'
'Turn around,' said God.

Moshe turned round and saw people weighing out Rabbi Akiva's flesh at
the market.

'Lord of the Universe', cried Moshe. 'Such Torah, and such a reward!'
He replied, 'Be silent, for such is My decree.'

The Explanation

The story takes us back to the giving of the Torah on Sinai. Moshe goes up
to receive the Torah and sees God busy adding detailed spikes and crowns
to the letters. He learns that Rabbi Akiva, one of the greatest Sages of the
entire Talmud, will interpret these details and learn various laws from
them. Moshe wants to meet this outstanding scholar but when he is sent



into the future to one of Rabbi Akiva's lectures, Moshe cannot understand the lesson but is happy that Rabbi Akiva references him.

Back on Sinai, Moshe asks God why if Rabbi Akiva is so great the Torah was not given through him instead. God tells Moshe to mind his own business. When Moshe asks to see Rabbi Akiva's reward he learns of his gruesome death.

Tag and crown. The Gemara in Menachot teaches us the convention of adding tags and crowns over letters in Torah scrolls, Mezuzot and Tefillin. There are seven letters with crowns, made up of three tags and six letters with a single tag. These tags are very important. Beyond their mystical importance, on a practical level their absence can invalidate a Torah's usage.

The eighth row. The Bet Midrash (Study hall) of the Talmudic period was hierarchical. The more experienced and knowledgeable students sat at the front so that each row back was considered less authoritative.

He became weak. Despite Moshe's authority in the Written Torah, he was unable to understand Rabbi Akiva's mastery in Oral Torah. Moshe and Rabbi Akiva are two giants of two traditions and this story forces us to ask what the relationship between the Oral and the Written law is? Did God empower Rabbi Akiva and the Sages to learn new laws (What we call a Chidush)? Or is nothing new because God already taught everything to Moshe on Sinai?

Weighing flesh. Rabbi Akiva was one of the ten martyrs killed by Rome. We read about them on Yom Kippur and Tisha B'Av in the Piyut titled '*Eleh Ezkerah*.' Rabbi Akiva was arrested for studying Torah as well as for his part during the Bar Kochba rebellion. The Romans killed him by tearing off his skin with a sharp comb. He died as a *Kiddush Hashem* saying the Shema.

Moshe was comforted. Moshe also seems to have lost his sense of identity and purpose. He thought his role was to teach Torah to the Jewish people and yet here he is, for a brief moment, facing the existentialist fear that he has been forgotten.



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Be silent. God's ways are not for us to comprehend. This echoes God's response to Iyov from out of the whirlwind, 'Where were you when I laid the earth's foundations?'

Further points for discussion:

Here are a few additional themes you can explore with your group:

1) Past, Present and Future

Akivia ben Mehallel in Pirkei Avot tells us to know three things in order to stay away from harm – From where do we come? Where are we going to? To who must we give an account of ourselves? These three questions can be applied to our past, future and present as well.

2) Self-Worth

Moshe's revelation is that he understands his place in the world. It is not for him to become an authority in the Oral law. That role is for Rabbi Akiva. Moshe gets to receive and transmit the Written law. It might be said that Moshe by the end of the story appreciates his own value to the world.

How about the participants in your group? Do they understand their value? Do they have a sense of self-worth? Is it possible to know one's value without travelling through time? Self-esteem is an important thing. For some people their identity is stable. They know who they are and what they do. For others their very identity is in flux. It depends on one's mood or one's surroundings.

Sukkot gives us a chance to think about who we are and what unique gifts we bring to the world. Just like the individual parts of the 'Arba Minim' ever human being is created to achieve something important and we should all feel empowered to do so.



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Keep calm and look on the bright side.

Shemini Atzeret & Simchat Torah

Summary

On Simchat Torah we conclude, and begin anew, the annual Torah reading cycle, an accomplishment that produces unparalleled joy and dancing.

Sometimes people find themselves losing hope. Negative things may happen and they despair. Yet there are other people who simply take things in their stride and remain positive. What decides whether someone is hopeful or not?

Meet the great optimist Rabbi Akiva, whose outlook helped him through difficult circumstances and serves as a model of faith and inspiration.

Questions for discussion

Do we happily accept what happens to us?

Are we open to the bad as well as the good?

Is optimism a religious way of being?

Can we teach ourselves to be more optimistic?



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The Story: Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 60b

Rav Huna said in the name of Rav citing Rabbi Meir, and so it was taught in the name of Rabbi Akiva: A man should always accustom himself to say, 'Whatever the All-Merciful does is for the good.' As exemplified in the following incident:

Rabbi Akiva was once going along the road. He came to a certain town and looked for lodgings but was refused everywhere. He said 'whatever the All-Merciful does is for the good', and he went and spent the night in an open field. He had with him a rooster, a donkey and a lamp. Suddenly a gust of wind came and blew out the lamp. A cat came and ate the rooster. A lion came and ate the donkey. He said: *'Whatever the All-Merciful does is for the good'*.

That same night some soldiers came and carried off the inhabitants of the town. He said to them: "Did I not say to you, whatever the All-Merciful does is for the good?"

The Explanation

Rabbi Akiva needed a place to sleep for the night. He asked around but he was turned away. It seemed odd that nobody in the whole town had a spare mattress or empty floor space. Rabbi Akiva however, was not put off by this display of poor hospitality and remained positive. He found himself somewhere to sleep outdoors in the fields beyond the town. He settled down for the night with his animals and equipment. His lamp was to see with, his donkey to ride and carry his equipment and his rooster was his alarm clock. All of his equipment was ruined; leaving Rabbi Akiva quite stranded. Yet he was still positive.

That night some enemy soldiers kidnapped the entire town – except for Rabbi Akiva who was asleep in the fields. It turned out, he was right. Despite the difficulties he had encountered finding a bed, it had all worked out for the good in the end.



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The wind, cat and lion: The story is written to highlight the misfortunes of Rabbi Akiva. Each element increases the obvious potential for despair but also the hidden potential for a good outcome. Rashi explains that if the light had shone or the animals made noises he would have been discovered by the soldiers and kidnapped, and the same is true if the townspeople had been more generous.

Whatever the All-Merciful does it is for the good: The Mishna that comes before this story teaches us that we must bless G-d for both the good and the bad things that happen to us. Rava, one of the Sages, explains that although the words of the Berachot are different for good and bad, we are to have the same sentiment of joyful acceptance for the two. The Hassidic author of the Toldot Yaakov Yosef (18th century Poland) urges us to be like Rabbi Akiva. The fact that there are different Berachot for good and bad things shows that evil does exist on some level but we still have to believe that good will eventually come even from the bad things in life.

Further points for discussion

Here are a few additional themes you can explore with your group:

6) Half full or half empty?

Most of us are familiar with this question about how we see the glass. Ask the group how they see it? In popular conversation, we see this way of looking at the glass as indicating whether we are optimists or pessimists. What do these words even mean? Do we know which we are? Is there a way of being both? Can they bring some examples of their positive or negative thinking? Do they have an idea about which it is better to be?

7) Bitachon

This word can be loosely translated as the feelings of confidence and trust in Hashem that our world as well our lives are in safe hands. This is a deeply religious attitude. The book Mesilat Yesharim (by the Ramchal – 18th century Italy) teaches that Bitachon involves us totally pinning all



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our hopes on Hashem's protection and recognising that there is nothing that we actually lack that was not destined for us. This is a world away from optimism – a positive belief or hope about the future with no necessary relationship to G-d. This is a wonderful chance to talk through these ideas with the group and explore their relationship with G-d and how much they feel G-d or are aware of G-d in their daily lives.

8) Changing Reality

Nowadays, many psychologists, self-help gurus and life coaches encourage us to change our outlook in order to change our reality. American Psychotherapist Susan C. Vaughan wrote a book about optimism where she says that "Optimism is a verb, not a noun." We can all become better optimists according to this approach depending on how we think and more importantly, what we tell ourselves. Maybe this is the power of Rabbi Akiva. He did not just think positively, he also said it aloud. Does the group think that words can change thoughts? Is it really that easy?

Activities

- **Be Optimistic**

Child star Shirley Temple sung a wonderful song in the 1938 film Little Miss Broadway called Be Optimistic. It can be watched on YouTube. Teach your group the song and sing it. Do they know any other songs about being upbeat and positive thinking? What about the song Zip-a-Dee-Doo-Dah? Happy Talk? Or, Always Look on the Bright Side of Life? As well as reading the lyrics or listening to the music, maybe invite the group to compose a song on behalf of Rabbi Akiva. Ask them to choose a well-known song and change the lyrics to reflect the philosophies of this optimistic Sage.



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- **Unfortunately, fortunately**

This is a communication game to be played sitting in a circle. The leader begins by stating a situation to the group, like “Your friend won’t help you with your maths homework.” The idea is to go around the group alternating between positive and negative perspectives about the situation with a sentence beginning either “Unfortunately...” or “Fortunately...” Choose somebody to go first and let them choose which they wish to be: “Unfortunately maths is my worst subject.” The next person in the circle needs to respond with the opposite perspective, “Fortunately this way I’ll really learn how to do long multiplication.”

Continue around the circle alternating perspectives until no-one can think of any more. The game helps to show how easy it is for us to change our outlook on the things that happen to us. You can ask the group whether it was easier to answer “Unfortunately” or “Fortunately.” *Other example situations: your white top came out of the washing machine a bit pink; you dropped some of your pocket money on the way to school; you opened the newspaper to read about a person winning the lottery, it wasn’t you!; your sister doesn’t want you to invite your friends to her Bat Mitzvah; your dad has cooked your least favourite food for dinner; your neighbour won’t let you play loud music at your party.*

- **Psychology Lecture**

Israeli Neuroscientist Tali Sharot, now based in London has written and spoken extensively about optimism and psychology. She delivered a lecture at a TED conference that is available on their website. There is also a transcript available of the talk. You could tell the participants about this and have a discussion about the implications of her talk. Does it really benefit us to be more optimistic?



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The Yom Kippur Debate



**ARE WE ALWAYS STRONGER
TOGETHER?**



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Motion:

This House believes that
we are stronger united even if it threatens
our individuality.



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Yom Kippur Debate. It is designed for use in youth groups or with family and friends, perhaps at a meal during the Yamim Noraim.

The motion is: This House believes that we are stronger united even if it threatens our individuality.

What did lock-down teach us about the structure of communal life that we had always been used to in our synagogues, schools, sport teams, social circles and elsewhere?

Are we always better as a group or does our individuality come to the surface when given a chance to do so, away from the limitations imposed by what we knew as our daily routine? Central to the discussion is a thought provoking presentation of the Biblical story of **Jonah** and whether he was a prophet who promoted unity or individuality.

To facilitate an informed debate, we have compiled some useful resources from general and Jewish sources. Please use these notes as a guide and a gateway to sharing your own opinions. Our thanks to Rabbi Johnny Solomon who has assisted the Tribe team with preparing these notes.

I hope you have a stimulating debate and a meaningful Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur with all of your prayers answered for the good!

Shana Tova!

Rabbi Eli Levin, Tribe Rabbi



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Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur is a time when we reflect on the past in order to live better lives in the future. A topic of recurring importance is **the relationship between the individual and the collective**.

Over the following pages, we have provided material associated with this theme to stimulate a debate on the motion that **'This House believes that we are stronger united even if it threatens our individuality'**.

The primary text for our study is Sefer Yona, the book of Jonah, which is read on Yom Kippur. Sefer Yona contains some highly significant information for our debate, including materials about the spiritual responsibilities of the Jewish people facing outwards from the Jewish community.

If you have the opportunity, do read Sefer Yona in a Yom Kippur machzor or a Tanach (Hebrew Bible) before participating in the debate. It should not take longer than about twenty minutes.

We suggest you appoint a moderator and then divide into two teams. The final page of these notes is for the moderator.

Let the debate begin!



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INTRODUCING JONAH

Jonah is one of the shortest yet most profound books of Tanach. It begins with God instructing Jonah to go to Nineveh – an enormous city, the capital of Assyria (modern-day Iraq), with a non-Jewish population – in order to encourage the people to repent and avoid destruction.



The explicit theme of *Teshuvah* (repentance) in the book of Jonah is an important reason why this story is read as the Haftarah during the Mincha service on Yom Kippur. However, if you look a little deeper into the text, you will also discover another very important message about the relationship between the Jewish people and the wider world.

Remarkably, despite Jonah receiving explicit instructions from God to go to Nineveh and tell the people to repent, he chose to flee instead. Even more remarkably, as the early rabbinic sages explain, this was not because Jonah thought that the people of Nineveh would refuse to repent. On the contrary, he fully expected them to heed God's call but still did not go!

Given this expected outcome, Jonah believed that by fulfilling God's instruction, it would implicitly reflect negatively on the Jewish people who themselves had not heeded previous calls from God to repent. So **while repentance by the people of Nineveh was good for humanity, Jonah felt that it was bad for the Jews.**



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The question that Jonah asked himself was, which choice is better? Should he do what was good for the Jews even if it showed less regard for the rest of humanity, or should he do what was best for humanity, even if it would be bad for the Jews?

It is clear that Jonah chose the former, but it is also clear that one of the major lessons taught in this book is that Jonah made the wrong choice. If you have read the book, you will know why! If not, then just look at the end of the book which shows that God disagreed with Jonah's position. The issues raised by this story continue to challenge us today in a variety of situations (for example, is it right if a Jew votes for a politician whose policies are good for the Jews but who may not provide effective leadership for the wider population?).

Following are a list of pointers and arguments both FOR and AGAINST Jonah's decision, and more specifically, FOR and AGAINST the motion that **'This House believes that we are stronger united even if it threatens our individuality'**.



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ARGUMENTS FROM JONAH OPPOSING THE MOTION

Jonah fled from God and ignored His instruction to encourage the people of Nineveh to repent. As early rabbinic teachings in the Midrash Mechilta put it, *“Jonah believed that he was protecting the honour of the son (i.e. of the Jewish people) by ignoring the honour of the Father (i.e. by failing to fulfil the instruction that God had given him)”*.

Clearly this was a very risky strategy by Jonah given the fact that disobeying God is a grave sin, especially since Jonah was prophet, a spokesperson for God who must have been a great person in spiritual terms to become a prophet. So why did Jonah risk so much?

An answer suggested by Rabbi Meir Leibush Weisser (known by the acronym ‘Malbim’, 1809-79) is that Jonah ignored God’s instruction for the good of the Jewish people because he believed that **any action that weakened or threatened the individual – the Jewish people in this case - could not be justified for a greater good**. Put differently, **if a greater good comes at a high personal cost, Jonah believed that it cannot be considered a greater good**.

Malbim adds a further perspective on this point. Not only would Nineveh’s expected repentance be bad for the Jews who themselves had not repented, but it would also lead to greater problems in the future. The Assyrians were destined to grow into a powerful empire that would later exile the Ten Tribes of Israel before the destruction of the First Temple. Consequently, Jonah, perhaps with Divinely-provided foreknowledge, thought that a way to forestall this outcome was to allow the people of Nineveh to perish.

According to this reasoning, there are times when decisions that may temporarily challenge us as an individual people (i.e. the Jewish people) may have even greater, far-reaching negative consequences.



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Therefore, we learn from Jonah's actions that **sometimes decisions need to be made to protect one's individuality even if it comes at the costs of what appears to be a greater good.** These decisions can be justified especially when further negative consequences may emerge were different choices to be made.

ARGUMENTS FROM JONAH FOR THE MOTION

While the first few verses of the book of Jonah describe how he ignored God's instruction and tried to flee from God, the rest of the book teaches us how Jonah made the wrong choice.

God miraculously kept Jonah alive in the belly of a fish, and instructed him a second time to go to Nineveh. God conveyed to Jonah that notwithstanding the personal cost to the Jewish people, Jonah was duty-bound to fulfil his responsibility for the greater good of the wider world.

Though this perspective displeased Jonah the final chapter, especially the closing lines in which God rebukes Jonah, convey a clear message. **No attempt to protect one's individual welfare should come at the cost of a greater good.**

An additional reason to support the motion is suggested by Rabbi Moshe Alshich (1508-93) who observed that perhaps Jonah had misread the situation.

According to Rabbi Alshich, Jonah may have believed that the expected repentance of the people of Nineveh would have spiritually condemned the Jewish people as the later had not repented. However, considered differently, perhaps the repentance of Nineveh might have inspired the Jewish people to repent as well. Instead of the actions of Nineveh



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diminishing the honour of the Jewish people, those actions may have encouraged the Jewish people to do what was correct.

We see from here that **what might seem to be a decision for the benefit of a nation other than your own, might actually have much broader benefits including for your own nation.**

ARGUMENTS FROM LOCKDOWN AGAINST THE MOTION

During lockdown, as we were forced to isolate, many people had time to reflect on their own identity, realising how much they are normally influenced by their surroundings, colleagues and friends. Perhaps counter-intuitively, lockdown allowed some individuals to flourish in a new way without being overshadowed by others, whether in online classes or lifecycle celebrations.

With the pandemic ravaging, everyone was focused on helping to keep the spread of COVID-19 at bay. Many medical, care and emergency services staff were moved out of their regular routines to support COVID-19 patients. Many people had to put their ambitions on hold to follow government guidelines and stay afloat as best as possible. Closing schools and colleges deeply affected the academic progress of individuals. As a result, individual progression was halted due to the need to come together against COVID-19. Uniting against COVID has come at the cost of individual achievement.

Some people's compliance with government guidelines has been based on what a group of friends do. They have felt awkward being stricter or more relaxed than others. Such a pressure to stand united and do the same as others not only stifles individual expression but also ultimately threatens the common good.



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ARGUMENTS FROM LOCKDOWN FOR THE MOTION

Many people struggled with wellbeing and mental health problems during lockdown even if they were not afflicted with physical illness. Feelings of isolation, anxiety and negativity increased through not being connected to others in the usual ways. Some people really felt and became more acutely aware of what it means to 'be there' for others. As God said to Adam in the second chapter of Bereishit (Genesis) before creating Eve, "It is not good for man to be alone". Within the Jewish community, we know that social responsibility and developing creative ways to connect as synagogue communities and friends have reached new heights.

When everyone united in the fight against COVID, there was an atmosphere of camaraderie and appreciation on the streets. From NHS staff, teachers, and rubbish collectors to people just staying at home to help, there was a keen sense of purpose for each role. Clapping for the NHS created a feeling of 'society' that perhaps has not been so palpable for some time in the UK.

For some people, wearing masks is uncomfortable, social distancing is annoying, and inhibiting social gatherings is frustrating. So many of our individual plans have been cancelled or thwarted. Yet, to beat the virus, individual needs must be put aside as we unite to comply for the greater good.



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NOTES FOR THE MODERATOR

Over the previous pages we have explored different approaches to the complex relationship between the individual and the community.

From Jonah we learnt about the relationship between the individual Jewish people and the other nations.

Through lockdown we reflect on the relationship between the individual and the community.

In each instance we have explored arguments either in support or against the motion that **'This House believes that we are stronger united even if it threatens our individuality'**.

However, while different conclusions can be drawn from this debate, it is essential that a distinction is made between individuality and individualism. As Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks explains in his *Covenant & Conversation for Bamidbar* (2014, www.rabbisacks.org):



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“Individuality means that I am a unique and valued member of a team. Individualism means that I am not a team player at all. I am interested in myself alone, not the group... Judaism values individuality, not individualism. As the Talmudic sage Hillel said, “If I am only for myself, what am I?””

What we learn from here is that **while there may be instances where individuality takes priority over belonging to a collective, there are no instances when individualism does, because no country, nation or person can live a good life if they are only interested in themselves.**



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Be Part of it - who will the next leaders be?

This activity is aimed at sparking discussion regarding what makes an effective Jewish leader. Through the debate we hope that participants start to think about how they will be active in the Jewish community as they start to contemplate their futures and career paths. There are many ways to be a leader within the Jewish people and to contribute in a meaningful way to wider society.

You can either split participants into small groups and give each group a profile (see next page), or let them choose which profile resonates with them. They then need to advocate why the young person they are representing has the greatest potential to be a leader.

Summary:

In Ethics of the Fathers chapter 1, Mishna 14, we discover this statement from Hillel the Sage:

אִם אֵין אָנִי לִי, מִי לִי, וּכְשֶׁאֲנִי לְעַצְמִי, מָה אָנִי, וְאִם לֹא עַכְשָׁו, אֵימָתִי

“If I am not for myself, who is for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?”

As Jews we use our strengths and talents to develop ourselves and to cultivate our communities. Every single individual has a unique part to play. It is easy to delay and wait for times when we may be older, wiser, more settled or feel more motivated. Yet Hillel reminds us that we all have a responsibility to look beyond ourselves, our friends and our schools, and share our passions with the .community at large and the wider world



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Name: Ariella Cohen
Age: 26
Job: Works for organisation where they find **Israel** bias and myths and correct them. Also trains people in **Israel** advocacy.
She says: "I love my job. I am **absolutely** passionate about **Israel** and think its achievements are incredible. Many people know this but many people have **only** read biased media reports. I want to change that.



Name: Ben
Age: 23
Job: Dr working for Jewish genetic organisation
He says: **I** chose to **specialise** in the field of genetic medicine so that **I** could help educate and research about preventing and aiding some of these most debilitating diseases. In this way **I** can use my **medical** expertise to give something back to my community.



Name: Johnny Levinson
Age: 23
Job: Works for charity that provides food and **clothes** for people below the poverty **line**, both within the Jewish community and wider community.
He says: "I love what **I** do. It is an honour to be able to help sustain people undergoing such hardship and know we are **literally** saving **lives**".



Name: Maya Dahan
Age: 25
Job: Jewish history teacher
She says: "**I** have been teaching students about Jewish history for 2 years now since **I** graduated. I chose this profession because **I** feel so strongly about understanding where we come from, to appreciate who we are and where we are going".



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Is Robin Hood ok?

Can a charity accept a donation from a thief?

Facilitators guide

Discussion

Encourage the youth to debate the paragraph below. This can either be done by splitting into 2 teams, arguing both sides, or by pairing students up and having them decide on a solution, or by asking for show of hands and then calling on people and encouraging others to counter-argue.

You are an eyewitness to a crime. A man has robbed the bank but instead of keeping the money for himself, he donates it to a poor orphanage that can now afford to feed, clothe and care for its children. You know who committed the crime. If you go to the authorities with the information, there's a good chance the money will be returned to the bank, leaving a lot of children in need. What do you do?



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Source 1

Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 248:1-2

Every person is required to give tzedakah (charity). Even the poor who are supported from tzedakah are required to give from what is given to them. One who gives less than they should is compelled by the authorities until they gave what was estimated as their means. The authorities could even seize their property and take from them what they should have given, even on Sabbath eve.

שולחן ערוך, יו"ד, רמ"ח

כל אדם חייב ליתן צדקה, אפילו עני המתפרנס מן הצדקה חייב ליתן ממה שיתנו לו. ומי שנותן פחות ממה שראוי ליתן, בית דין היו כופין אותו ומכין אותו מכת מרדות עד שיתן מה שאמדהו ליתן, ויורדים לנכסיו בפניו ולוקחין ממנו מה שראוי לו ליתן. ממשכנים על הצדקה, אפילו בערב שבת.

Discussion

Do you agree people should be forced to give charity?

Source 1 suggests that the charity receiving money may not need to investigate

how the money was obtained. However, if you know that the money was obtained illegally, does that change things?

Source 2:

Bava Kamma 119a:

With regards to a **robber**, from when is it **permitted to purchase** items from him? **Rav says:** It is prohibited **until the majority** of his possessions are **from his** own property, i.e., property that he obtained legally.

בבא קמא קי"ט א:

איתמר גזלן מאימת מותר לקנות הימנו רב אמר עד שתהא רוב משלו



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Discussion

Is this fair? Is this not judgemental?

Bava Kamma 112a

In a case of **one who robs** another of food **and feeds** it to **his children**, the children are **exempt from paying** the owner. If **he left** stolen goods **to them** as an inheritance, **whether they are adults or minors, they are obligated** to return the stolen goods. **(Rabbi Sumakhos says:** If the heirs are **adults** they are **obligated**, but if they are **minors** they are **exempt**.

בבא קמא קי"ב א:

הגוזל ומאכיל את בניו פטורין מלשלם הניח לפניהם בין גדולים בין קטנים חייבין משום סומכוס אמרו גדולים חייבין קטנים פטורין

Discussion

Is there a difference between an active purchase to receiving funds for charity?

This is the key source. It essentially says you cannot accept stolen goods. One could make the argument, that the charity is not allowed to have the goods or the money at all.

Discussion

There seems to be a difference between adults and children, do you think this is fair?

What about our Robin Hood case? Would the charity need to return the stolen money? Would you be obliged to inform the charity?



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Is Robin Hood ok?

Can a charity accept a donation from a thief?

Handout

You are an eyewitness to a crime. A man has robbed the bank but instead of keeping the money for himself, he donates it to a poor orphanage that can now afford to feed, clothe and care for its children. You know who committed the crime. If you go to the authorities with the information, there's a good chance the money will be returned to the bank, leaving a lot of children in need. What do you do?

Source 1

Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 248:1-2

Every person is required to give tzedakah (charity). Even the poor who are supported from tzedakah are required to give from what is given to them. One who gives less than they should is compelled by the authorities until they gave what was estimated as their means. The authorities could even seize their property and take from them what they should have given, even on Sabbath eve.

שולחן ערוך, יו"ד, רמ"ח

כל אדם חייב ליתן צדקה, אפילו עני המתפרנס מן הצדקה חייב ליתן ממה שיתנו לו. ומי שנותן פחות ממה שראוי ליתן, בית דין היו כופין אותו ומכין אותו מכת מרדות עד שיתן מה שאמדהו ליתן, ויורדים לנכסיו בפניו ולוקחין ממנו מה שראוי לו ליתן. ממשכנים על הצדקה, אפילו בערב שבת.



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Source 2:

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With regards to a **robber**, **from when is it permitted to purchase items from him?** **Rav says:** It is prohibited **until the majority** of his possessions are **from his** own property, i.e., property that he obtained legally.

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Bava Kamma 112a

In a case of **one who robs** another of food and feeds it to **his children**, the children are **exempt from paying** the owner. If **he left** stolen goods **to them** as an inheritance, **whether they are adults or minors, they are obligated** to return the stolen goods. **(Rabbi Sumakhos says:** If the heirs are **adults** they are **obligated**, but if they are **minors** they are **exempt**.

בבא קמא קי"ב א:

הגוזל ומאכיל את בניו פטורין מלשלם הניח לפניהם בין גדולים בין קטנים חייבין משום סומכוס אמרו גדולים חייבין קטנים פטורין

This is the key source. It essentially says you cannot accept stolen goods. One could make the argument that the charity is not allowed to have the goods or the money at all.



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The Power of Speech

Facilitators guide

Introduction

Below you will find a number of texts you can use for a special study session on Lashon Harah. It should take about an hour to complete. The texts have been framed with questions and points to help you teach the texts. Feel free to choose which order to best present the texts in.

Theme: The Power of Speech

Questions and Points to Introduce the Text

- ☞ We are going to be discussing the one thing that really and truly makes us human. What do you think defines us as human and makes us different from animals or objects?
- ☞ We are going to be learning about speech and language, one of the things that marks humans out from the rest of the created universe.
- ☞ Language is a miraculous thing. Just by thinking thoughts my brain can make my mouth move and my vocal chords stretch to say those thoughts out loud. Your ears receive those sounds and translate them into the brain where you can hear my words and understand their meaning almost instantaneously.

Source 1: Let's have a look at the creation of human beings and see if speech and language are mentioned.

בראשית ב: ז

וַיִּצְרֶה אֱלֹקִים אֶת-הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן-הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאָפִיו נְשֵׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה

Bereishit/Genesis 2:7

And the Lord God formed Adam of dust from the ground, and He breathed into his nostrils the soul of life, and Adam became a living soul.



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Questions about the text itself

- 👉 What do you understand by the idea of God breathing into the first human?
- 👉 Is there any mention of language here?
- 👉 Although the text does not directly mention language, some of the old commentators do:

Source 2

וּבְרָא ה' אֱלֹקִים יֵת אָדָם, עֶפְרָא מִן אֲרֶעָא, וּנְפַח בְּאַפּוֹהִי, נְשִׁמְתָא דְחַיִּי; וְהוֹת בְּאָדָם, לְרוּחַ
מְמַלְלָא

Onkelos' Translation of Bereishit/Genesis 2:7

And the Lord God created Adam, dust from the earth, and blew into his nostrils the soul of life which was for Adam the spirit of talking

- 👉 The text teaches us that speech came directly from God
- 👉 What do the commentators we read identify the breath of life with?
- 👉 What's so special about talking and communicating that God chose to give us this special gift?

Questions and points to introduce another text:

- 👉 Have you ever heard the phrase, 'Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me?' Do you think this is true?
- 👉 How much power do you think you have with your words? What can you do or say with words that would show us their power?
- 👉 Let's look at some Jewish sources that show us the power of speech:



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Source 3

משלי יח:כא
מִוֶּת וְחַיִּים בְּיַד-לְשׁוֹן

Mishlei/Proverbs 18:21

Death and life are in the power of the tongue

ירמיהו ט:ז

חָץ שׁוֹחֵט (נֶשְׁחוּט) לְשׁוֹנָם מְרַמֶּה דָבָר בְּפִיו שְׁלוֹם אֶת-רֵעֵהוּ יְדַבֵּר וּבִקְרָבוֹ יֵשִׁים אָרְבוֹ

Yirmiyahu/Jeremiah 9:7

Their tongue is like a drawn arrow, speaking deceit. With his mouth one speaks peace with his fellow, but inside him he lays his ambush

Questions about the text :

- 👉 **The book of Mishlei/Proverbs** tells us that our words have the power of life and death – that’s a lot of power!
- 👉 Do you think we are meant to understand the text literally? Can you think of any ways we can kill with our words? What about giving life?
- 👉 **The text from Yirmiyahu/Jeremiah** is talking about the Jews who were living just before the destruction of the First Temple. The prophet complains about the behaviour of the people and the way they spoke to each other and about each other.
- 👉 Why does the prophet use a bow and arrow as a metaphor for the power of speech?
- 👉 A bow and arrow need to be aimed – so do we think carefully about how and what we are going to say. An arrow can be fired from far away – so we can hurt people even when they are far by talking behind their backs or spreading a rumour. Once an arrow is fired it cannot be taken back!



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The Power of Speech

Handout

Source 1: Let's have a look at the creation of human beings and see if speech and language are mentioned.

בראשית ב: ז

וַיִּצְרֶה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן-הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נְשֵׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה

Bereishit/Genesis 2:7

And the Lord God formed Adam of dust from the ground, and He breathed into his nostrils the soul of life, and Adam became a living soul.

Source 2

וַיִּבְרָא ה' אֱלֹהִים יֵת אָדָם, עֶפְרָא מִן אֲרֶעָא, וַנִּפַּח בְּאַפּוֹהִי, נְשֵׁמַתָּא דְחַיִּי; וְהוֹת בְּאָדָם, לְרוּחַ מְמַלְלָא

Onkelos' Translation of Bereishit/Genesis 2:7

And the Lord God created Adam, dust from the earth, and blew into his nostrils the soul of life which was for Adam the spirit of talking

Source 3

משלי יח: כא

מוֹת וְחַיִּים בְּיַד-לְשׁוֹן וְאַהֲבִיָּה יֹאכֵל פְּרִיָּהּ

Mishlei/Proverbs 18:21

Death and life are in the power of the tongue; those who love it will eat its fruits

ירמיהו ט: ז

חָץ שׁוֹחֵט (שְׁחוּט) לְשׁוֹנָם מְרָמָה דְּבַר בְּפִיו שְׁלוֹם אֶת-רַעְהוּ יִדְבֵר וּבִקְרָבוֹ יִשִּׁים אָרְבוֹ

Yirmiyahu/Jeremiah 9:7

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Horim v' yeladim

Parents and children learning together

Families with younger children

Theme: Friendship in the Torah

Aims:

- To explore a very strong friendship described in the Torah.
- Discuss qualities such as altruism, giving, respect and compassion that made this relationship so remarkable.

Rachel & Leah, Genesis 29:16 - 25

וּלְלֶבֶן שְׁתֵּי בָנוֹת שֵׁם הַגְּדֹלָה לְאָה וְשֵׁם הַקְּטָנָה רָחֵל. וְעֵינֵי לְאָה רַבּוֹת וְרָחֵל הֵיטָה יִפְתֹּתָאָר וַיִּפְתֹּתָאָר וַיִּפְתֹּתָאָר מֵרָאָה. וַיֵּאָהֵב יַעֲקֹב אֶת־רָחֵל וַיֹּאמֶר אֶעֱבְדָךָ שִׁבְעַ שָׁנִים בְּרָחֵל בְּתִיךָ הַקְּטָנָה. וַיֹּאמֶר לָבֵן טוֹב תַּתִּי אֶתְּךָ לִי מִתַּתִּי אֶתְּךָ לְאִישׁ אֲחֵר שָׁבָה עִמָּדִי.

Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah's eyes were tender, but Rachel had beautiful features and a beautiful complexion. And Jacob loved Rachel, and he said, "I will work for you seven years for Rachel, your younger daughter." And Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than I should give her to another man. Stay with me."

So Jacob worked for Rachel seven years, but they appeared to him like a few days because of his love for her. And Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife, for my days are completed, that I may come to her." So Laban gathered all the people of the place, and he made a feast. And it came to pass in the evening that Laban took his daughter Leah, and he brought her to him, and he came to her. And Laban gave Zilpah his maidservant to his daughter Leah as a maidservant. And it came to pass in the morning, and behold she was Leah! So he said to Laban, "What is this that you have done to me?"

Did I not work with you for Rachel? Why have you deceived me?"



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Questions for discussion

- How do you think Rachel felt when her father made her sister the bride instead of her?
- Using just one word how would you describe Jacob's response?

Let's take a look at Rashi:

“For Rachel, your younger daughter: *Why were all these signs necessary? Since he Jacob knew that Laban was a deceiver, he said to him, “I will work for you for Rachel,” and just in case you say that I meant another Rachel from the street, he said: “Your daughter.” Now, in case you say, “I will change her name to Leah, and I will name her Rachel,” he also said: “your younger daughter.” Nevertheless, it did not work, for laban still tricked him”.*

“And it came to pass in the morning, and behold she was Leah: *But at night, she was not Leah, because Jacob had given signs to Rachel, but when she saw that they were bringing Leah, she (Rachel) said, “Now, my sister will be put to shame. So she readily transmitted those signs to her.”*

Questions for discussion

- How would Leah have felt if the swap would have been discovered at the wedding?
- Do you think Jacob had suspected that this would happen?
- What was special about Rachel and Leah's friendship?
- What does this story make you think about your own relationship with family and friends?

