



A Shavuot Night Learning Activity

Potluck learning is a fun, interactive way for everyone to have a voice in group learning. Each participant is able to contribute by bringing and teaching sources that they have chosen.

There are two ways for this activity to take place:

1. Decide on a theme and share it with all the group members prior to the group's gathering to learn together. Each person then prepares one piece of learning; a section of Torah, a passage of Gemara, a story, a quote, or any other idea, and teaches it to the rest of the group. The group then discusses the theme in the context of the sources that were brought.

2. Decide on a theme and prepare a collection of different sources relating to the theme. Each person in the group chooses a source (or they can be assigned at random) to read privately and then teaches it to the group.

For this program, we chose option 2, and have also included questions to help facilitate the conversation. The theme of the learning is Matan Torah. For this broad theme, we purposely chose different types of sources. This enables participants to interpret the topic however they wish, and then bring in sources that they feel relate. These sources do not need to be presented in any particular order.

This activity is a great way to actively participate in learning on Shavuot night or for a family to have a meaningful conversation at the yom tov table.

Enjoy your learning!



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1) Beit HaLevi, Parashat Yitro

והנה המלאכים ביקשו שיתנו להם התורה ... ומשה רבינו נצחם ועיקר הנצחון היה במה שהמלאכים אינם יכולים לקיים מצות שבגוף ומש"ה בעצרת צריך לקיים המצוה דלכם מה שאין המלאכים יכולים לקיימה ... וזהו הענין שנוהגין בעצרת לאכול מאכל חלב, ועיקר הכוונה בזה דביו"ט מצוה לאכול בשר ... ובעצרת אוכלין גם חלב מקודם כדי לקיים ההבדל והזריזות שיש בין אוכל חלב לבשר והוא הקינוח והדחת הפה כדי לקיים מצוה שבאכילה, ועיין במדרש תהלים (מזמור ח) על פסוק מפי עוללים ויונקים יסדת עוז וע"ש שמסדר הויכוח של המלאכים על נתינת התורה ולבסוף אמר וז"ל אמר הקב"ה והלא אתם כשירדתם אצל אברהם אכלתם בשר בחלב ... ותינוק שלהם כשבא מבית הסופר ואמו נותנת לו פת ובשר וחלב ואומר היום לימדני רבי לא תבשל גדי בחלב אמו ... ומכאן יצא המנהג לאכול חלב כדי להראות הזריזות וההרחקה שבין אכילה זו לאכילת הבשר ולא כמו שעשו המלאכים שאכלו תיכף זה אחר זה.

The angels requested to receive the Torah ... and Moshe Rabbeinu defeated them (i.e. their claims), and his defeat was based on the fact that angels cannot fulfill commandments that require physical activity. For this reason, on Shavuot, the emphasis is on the physical, the aspects of Judaism that

the angels cannot fulfill ... This is the idea behind eating dairy products on Shavuot. On the holidays, there is a mitzvah to eat meat ... but on Shavuot, we eat dairy products beforehand in order to fulfill the requirements between eating dairy and meat — wiping one's hands and rinsing one's mouth. The midrash states, regarding the dispute between the angels and God about God giving the Torah to humans, that God said to them: "When you went down to visit Avraham, you ate meat and milk ... but even a young child of theirs knows that when he comes home from school and his mother gives him meat and milk, that he won't eat it." ... From here developed the practice to eat dairy to show the care and caution between eating milk and meat, not like the angels who ate one right after the other.

ובודאי שניהם יש להם שכר בשוה ... מי שישן הרבה כדי שיחזק מוחו בתורה נותן לו הקב"ה חלקו בתורה כמו אותו שממעט בשינה ומצטער עצמו כי הכל הולך אחר המחשבה

There are Torah scholars who deprive themselves of sleep and spend a lot of time learning Torah, and there are other Torah scholars who get sufficient sleep so that they have enough energy and alacrity to properly learn Torah. [This second group] can study in one hour what it takes [the first group] two hours to study, and they both receive equal reward ... one who sleeps so that he can concentrate on his learning, God gives him the same portion as the one who deprives himself of sleep because everything follows one's intent.

Questions for Discussion:

- When the angels came down as humans, they failed to keep the physical aspects of the Torah. Why should we commemorate such an event?
- Can you think of examples of mitzvot that show the importance of the physical aspects of Judaism?

Questions for Discussion:

- Can we learn more between 1am and 5am on no sleep or between 3pm and 4pm on a full night's sleep? If the latter, why do we spend the whole night of Shavuot studying?
- Sir James Mackintosh once commented, "The powers of a man's mind are directly proportioned to the quantity of coffee he drinks." How do you think R. Segal might respond to this comment?

2) Ruth 1:16-17

וַתֹּאמֶר רוּת אֶל-תִּפְגַּעֵיבִי לְעֻזָּבֹד לְשׁוּב מֵאֲחֵרֶיךָ כִּי אֶל-אִשְׁרַת תִּלְכִּי אֶלֶף וּבְאִשְׁרַת תִּלְיִנִי אֶלֶיךָ עִמָּךְ עַמִּי וְאֶל-קִינֹה אֶלְקִי: בְּאִשְׁרַת תָּמוּתִי אָמוּת וְשֵׁם אֲקַבֵּר כֹּה יַעֲשֶׂה ה' לִי וְכֹה יִסִּיף כִּי הִמָּוֶת יִפְרִיד בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ:

Ruth said: Don't urge me to abandon you, to turn away from you. Where you go, I will go and where you sleep, I will sleep. Your nation is my nation and your God is my God. Where you die, I will die and there I will be buried. This is what God will do for me and may He do more because only death will separate me from you.

Questions for Discussion:

- This statement of Ruth's is her acceptance of Judaism. What allusions can you find to some of the foundations of Judaism?
- How does Ruth's commitment to Naomi and to Judaism impact how we celebrate Shavuot?

4) Story about R. Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin (the Netziv)

When the Netziv completed his work *Ha'amek She'eilah*, he gathered his students together and held a party. One of his students asked: why are you making a party for the completion of a book? The Netziv responded:

This isn't an ordinary party. Before my bar mitzvah, I wasn't such a good student. One night, I overheard my parents discussing taking me out of school and sending me to become an apprentice to learn a trade. I immediately ran into the kitchen and pleaded with them to give me another chance at becoming a Torah scholar. If not for that moment, I would have become a tailor or learned some other profession, and I would have been a good Jew. Yet after my death, I would have gone up to the Heavenly Court and they would have asked me, "Where is the Ha'amek She'eilah?" I wouldn't have known what they were talking about. However, that moment changed everything and this party is a celebration of that moment.

3) R. David HaLevi Segal, Taz, Even HaEzer 25:1

שיש ת"ח מנדדין שינה מעיניהם ועוסקים בתורה הרבה ויש ת"ח שישינים הרבה כדי שיהיה להם כח החזק וזריות לב לעסוק בתורה ובאמת יכול ללמוד בשעה אחת מה שזו מצטער ועוסק בשני שעות

Questions for Discussion:

- What does this story teach us about achieving our potential?
- For those of us who are not as brilliant as the Netziv, how do we know if we are achieving our potential?

5) Pesachim 68b

רב יוסף ביומא דעצרתא אמר עבדי לי עגלא תלתא אמר אי לא
האי יומא דקא גרים כמה יוסף איכא בשוקא.

On Shavuot, Rav Yosef would say, "Prepare for me a fattened calf ... if not for this day, I would just be another Yosef in the marketplace."

Questions for Discussion:

- Even if Rav Yosef were just an "ordinary Joe," wouldn't it still be worthwhile to celebrate the giving of the Torah? What do you think Rav Yosef meant by highlighting his personal connection to the giving of the Torah?
- Rav Yosef was known for his humility (*Sotah* 49b). Does Rav Yosef's statement about Shavuot reflect humility?

6) Mishna Berurah 47:28

ואם היה ניעור כל הלילה י"א דא"צ לברך בבוקר וי"א דצריך לברך
כי קבעו חכמים ברכה זו בכל יום דומיא דשאר ברכות השחר וספק
ברכות להקל אך אם אפשר לו יראה לשמוע בה"ת מאחר ... ואם
היה ישן ביום שינת קבע על מטתו ובלילה שלאחריו היה ניעור כל
הלילה פסק הגאון רע"א דבזה לכו"ע צריך לברך בבוקר בה"ת.

If one was awake the whole night, there are those who are of the opinion that one does not have to recite the blessing [on learning Torah] and there are those who are of the opinion that one should recite the blessing because the rabbis instituted this blessing on a daily basis, similar to the other blessings of the morning. [In general,] when it comes to blessings, when there is a doubt, one does not recite a blessing. However, if possible, one should try to listen to the blessing on learning Torah from someone else ... If one slept during the day in a significant way in one's bed and then stayed up the whole night, R. Akiva Eger ruled that everyone agrees that one recites the blessing on learning Torah in the morning.



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Meet Shlomo Anapolle of Edison, New Jersey. When it comes to a love of Israel, few college students can match the Sabra passion of this Yeshiva University junior. A pre-med, biology major with plans to attend an Israeli medical school, Shlomo balances his time between neo-natal diagnostic research, intensive shiurim and a commitment to Israel advocacy.

Whether it's planning lobbying missions to Washington, D.C. with YUPAC or teaching English to teens in the Negev through Counterpoint Israel, Shlomo brings to bear his leadership skills for the sake of the Jewish people and homeland. He is proud to invite Israeli diplomats to YU to help his peers contextualize current events. Shlomo chose YU because, to him, Torah Umadda isn't merely the convergence of science and our mesorah—at Yeshiva University, it is the formula for a values-driven preparation for life. This is the essence of Torah Umadda and what sets YU apart.

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Questions for Discussion:

- a) Explain the logic of both opinions regarding one who stays up the whole night. Why does sleeping during the previous day solve the problem?
- b) If someone was learning on Shavuot night and fell asleep in a class for a significant amount of time, does that warrant reciting the blessing in the morning?

7) R. David Tzvi Hoffman, Commentary to Vayikra (Vol. II pp. 164-165)

לחג הפסח ולחג הסוכות נודעת מלבד החשיבות מבחינת הטבע גם חשיבות היסטורית, הראשון מזכיר את יציאת מצרים והאחרון את השגחת ה' על העם בלכתו במדבר (ויקרא כג, מג); וודאי שגם לחג השבועות נודע ערך היסטורי: ואין זה אלא זכרון קבלת התורה בסיני. לא הותקן לחג השבועות כל טקס סמלי, להזכיר את חזיונות סיני. ויש טעם לדבר; חזיון סיני אינו עשוי להתגשם בסמל גשמי, ... אלא יזכרו את המראות הגדולות, ויחוגו ביום מתן תורה את סיום הקציר, למען יודו לה' על ברכת האדמה בהביאם את הביכורים אל המקדש, וכיירו כי ה' הוא האדון השליט על הכול, אשר לו יעבדו ואל מצוותיו ישמעו, ובוזה יחזרו שנית על הבטחתם שניתנה בסיני: "נעשה ונשמע."

Passover and Sukkot are known for their significance both from an agricultural perspective and from a historical perspective; the first commemorates the exodus from Egypt, and the second commemorates God's providence over the nation while it traversed through the desert. Shavuot certainly has historical significance: it commemorates the receiving of the Torah at Sinai. [Nevertheless,] Shavuot wasn't given [by the Torah] any rituals to commemorate the events at Sinai. The reason is that the vision of Sinai cannot be embodied by a physical symbol ... Rather, we simply remember the great visions and we celebrate the harvest on the day of the giving of the Torah, so that we could show gratitude to God for the blessings of the land when we bring the first fruit to the Temple. We recognize that God is the master of everything, whom we serve and whose mitzvot we observe and by doing so, we repeat the message of Sinai: We will do and we will listen.



The future is in your hands.

Meet Rachel Mirsky from White Plains, New York. A biology major on a pre-med track, and captain of the YU softball and basketball teams, Rachel chose YU to allow her to explore and develop her unique talents and interests.

Rachel loves YU because it enables her to engage in her extracurricular passions and prepare for her career while remaining true to her religious commitments. An exceptional athlete, Rachel was recently named to the Capital One Academic All-District team. Whether in an Israeli laboratory conducting research on the properties of red blood cells, or authoring a medical ethics paper on eating disorders and the Biblical matriarchs, Rachel can find the perfect balance at YU. This is the essence of Torah Umadda and what sets YU apart.

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Questions for Discussion:

- How does R. Hoffman explain why the Torah does not emphasize Shavuot as the day of Matan Torah?
- Why is it so difficult to symbolize Matan Torah?

8) Moed Katan 25a and Ramban

רבי שמעון בן אלעזר אומר העומד על המת בשעת יציאת נשמה חייב לקרוע למה זה דומה לספר תורה שנשרף שחייב לקרוע.

R. Shimon ben Elazar states: If someone is present when a person dies, he is obligated to tear (his garments). What is this similar to? It is similar to a Sefer Torah that tore, where there is (also) an obligation to tear (one's garments).

רמב"ן: ולי נראה שהנפש בגוף כאזכרות בגילין, ומשל בעלמא הוא לומר שהוא הפסד גדול וחרדה רבה וחייב אדם לקרוע עליה כאילו נשרף ס"ת לפניו.

Ramban: It seems to me that the soul in the body is like the names of G-d (written) on the parchment. It is merely a parable to convey the message that it is a great loss and cause for alarm, and a person must tear his garments as if a sefer Torah was burned before him.

Questions for Discussion:

- Why do you think a person is comparable to a sefer Torah?
- What lessons can we learn about how we should act from the comparison of a person to a sefer Torah?



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