

Lesson 2: Receiving and Accompanying the Traveler

Time needed: 60 minutes

Recommended age range: 7th-12th grade

Objectives:

- Students affirm the value of welcoming the stranger in Jewish text
- Students explore the ways that welcome (opening up one's home) leads to an ethic of solidarity (the act of publicly standing up for someone else)

Materials: Copies of the text, one per each pair of students

Teacher's note: If you've already done the lesson plan "Welcoming the Traveler," the first two texts are intended as review.



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Lesson 2, Text Study 1

1. בראשית פרק יח

(א) וירא אליו יקוק באלני ממרא והוא ישב פתח האהל כחם היום: (ב) וישא עיניו וירא והנה שלשה אנשים נצבים עליו וירא וירץ לקראתם מפתח האהל וישתחו ארצה (ג) ויאמר אדני אם נא מצאתי חן בעיניך אל נא תעבר מעל עבדך: (ד) יקח נא מעט מים ורחצו רגליכם והשענו תחת העץ: (ה) ואקחה פת לחם וסעדו לבכם אחר תעברו כי על כן עברתם על עבדכם ויאמרו כן תעשה כאשר דברת: (ו) וימהר אברהם האהלה אל שרה ויאמר מהרי שלש סאים קמח סלת לושי ועשי עגות: (ז) ואל הבקר רץ אברהם ויקח בן בקר רך וטוב ויתן אל הנער וימהר לעשות אתו: (ח) ויקח חמאה וחלב ובן הבקר אשר עשה ויתן לפניהם והוא עמד עליהם תחת העץ ויאכלו:

1. Genesis Chapter 18

And the Lord appeared to him in the plains of Mamre; and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; 2. And he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him; and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself to the ground, 3. And said, My lord, if now I have found favor in your sight, pass not away, I beseech you, from your servant; 4. Let a little water, I beseech you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree; 5. And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and you comfort your hearts; after that you shall pass on; seeing that you are come to your servant. And they said, So do, as you have said. 6. And Abraham hurried to the tent to Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes. 7. And Abraham ran to the herd, and fetched a calf tender and good, and gave it to a young man; and he hurried to prepare it. 8. And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they ate.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What do you imagine is the travelers' experience as they pass by the tent? What do you imagine is on their minds?
- 2 Do we know if the travelers are wealthy or poor? Does that impact their situation? What might it mean to be in need due to circumstance rather than due to lack of wealth?
- 3 What does this text tell us about what it means to construct a welcoming tent?
- 4 What details stand out to you in this text? What implications do these details have about the text's overall meaning?

Lesson 2, Text Study 2

2. תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף קכז עמוד א

אמר רב יהודה אמר רב: גדולה הכנסת אורחין מהקבלת פני שכינה, דכתיב (בראשית יח) ויאמר (ה') [אדני] אם נא מצאתי חן בעיניך אל נא תעבר וגו'.

2. BT Shabbat 127a

Rab Judah said in Rab's name: Hospitality to wayfarers is greater than welcoming the presence of the Shechinah, for it is written, And he said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away,

Discussion Questions for high school students and older:

- 1 In your life, what are the challenges that make caring for others difficult?
- 2 What is the preoccupation that threatens to distract Abraham from caring for others?
- 3 Until this point in the text, Abraham has *heard* G-d, but has not *seen* G-d. What does it mean for Abraham to finally have a vision of G-d, and then walk away from it to serve the travelers?
- 4 What does Abraham discover about himself in this moment?
- 5 What does he discover about G-d?

Lesson 2, Text Study 3

3. רמב"ם הלכות אבל פרק יד

הלכה א מצות עשה של דבריהם לבקר חולים, ולנחם אבלים, ולהוציא המת, ולהכניס הכלה, וללוות האורחים, ולהתעסק בכל צרכי הקבורה, לשאת על הכתף, ולילך לפניו ולספוד ולחפור ולקבור, וכן לשמח הכלה והחתן, ולסעדם בכל צרכיהם, ואלו הן גמילות חסדים שבגופו שאין להם שיעור, אע"פ שכל מצות אלו מדבריהם הרי הן בכלל ואהבת לרעך כמוך, כל הדברים שאתה רוצה שיעשו אותם לך אחרים, עשה אתה אותן לאחריך בתורה ובמצות. הלכה ב שכר הלוייה מרובה מן הכל, והוא החק שחקקו אברהם אבינו ודרך החסד שנהג בה, מאכיל עוברי דרכים ומשקה אותן ומלוה אותן, וגדולה הכנסת אורחים מהקבלת פני שכינה, שנאמר וירא והנה שלשה אנשים, ולוויים יותר מהכנסתן, אמרו חכמים כל שאינו מלוה כאילו שופך דמים.

3. Rambam Yad, Laws of Mourning, Chapter 14

Law 14:1 It is a positive commandment of the sages to visit the sick, comfort the mourners, carry out the dead, accompany guests on their way, organize the burial of the dead, carry the bier on one's shoulder, to walk before the casket, to eulogize, dig the plot and bury the dead and likewise, to gladden the bride and groom, and to help them put together their new home. All these, are *gemilut hasadim* accomplished by one's body and there is no limit to this. Even though all of these specifics are defined by the sages, they are all under the rubric of "love thy neighbor as thyself." All of the things that you would want others to do for you, do them for others who are your brothers in Torah and mitzvot. **Law 14:2** The reward of accompanying (the guest on his journey) is greater than the rest. It is the law that Abraham, our father, established and it is the way of kindness that he practiced—to feed travelers and give them drink and accompany them on their journey. Greater is receiving guests than receiving the Presence of the Shechina, as it says, "And he looked up, and behold, there were three men." And accompanying them is greater than receiving them. Our sages said: All who does not accompany (the stranger who is your guest) it is as if you spilled blood."

Discussion Questions for high school students and older:

- 1 This text implies that our obligation to others is shaped by our own experience of need. Do you agree? What might be other reasons that we are obligated to other people?
- 2 Why does Maimonides make a distinction between receiving and accompanying travelers? What does it mean to welcome a stranger in your home, and what does it mean to travel with them? In what context might accompanying a stranger prevent the spilling of blood?
- 3 One way to see the distinction between receiving and accompanying is between welcoming someone privately and welcoming them publically, out in street. What implications does this text have for Jewish institutions like synagogues and camps? What implications does it have for us as individuals?

- 4 Is there a difference between welcoming friends and welcoming visitors to town whom you have never met? Between welcoming visitors to town and welcoming those seeking refuge?
- 5 How does this text inform our relationship to LGBTQ individuals and community? What might be ways for us and our community to be more welcoming of LGBTQ Jews?

This text study was created by Rabbi Steve Greenberg for Keshet. We encourage you to download this resource and share it with others, as long as you credit Rabbi Steve Greenberg and Keshet.



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