

Lesson 3: Engaging with the Other

Time needed: 60 minutes

Recommended age range: 9-12th grade, adults

Objectives:

- Students will explore the Jewish value of inclusivity, as well as the challenges of engaging with those who are very different from oneself
- Students will consider the ways that difference can be seen as disgusting or wondrous, depending on perspective

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



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Lesson 3, 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 לוישי 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:

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 does this text say about the relative importance of the Jewish value of welcoming the stranger?
- 2 In the texts prior to this, Abraham has just circumcised himself, and is therefore in considerable discomfort during the episode recounted in the text. How does this make you see this text differently?

Lesson 3, Text Study 2

Plimo, Kiddushin 81a - 81b

Plimo used to say every day, “An arrow in Satan's eyes!” One day, it was the eve of the Day of Atonement, and the Satan disguised himself as a poor man and went and called out at his door, and so bread was taken out to him. The poor man pleaded with Plimo, “On such a day when everyone is inside, shall I be outside?” Thereupon he was taken into the house and bread was offered him. “On a day like this,” he urged, “when everyone sits at the table, shall I sit alone!” He was led to the table and sat down. As he sat, it was evident that his body was covered with oozing sores. As well, he was behaving repulsively at the dinner table and Plimo rebuked him saying, “Sit properly!”

Said the poor man, “Give me a glass [of liquor],” and one was given him. He coughed and spat his phlegm into it. They scolded him, [whereupon] he fainted and died. Later, Plimo’s household heard people crying out, “Plimo has killed a man, Plimo has killed a man!” Fleeing, Plimo hid in an outhouse. The Satan followed him there and Plimo fell before him. Seeing how Plimo was suffering, the Satan disclosed his identity and said to him, “Why have you always spoken this way [saying, ‘an arrow in Satan’s eyes!?’]?” Then how am I to speak? “You should say, ‘Let the Merciful One rebuke Satan.’”

Discussion Questions:

In Jewish tradition, Satan serves as a reminder to G-d of G-d’s disappointment in humankind. When Plimo says, “An arrow in Satan’s eyes!” he is bragging about his ability to triumph over the evil inclination with which all humans contend.

- 1 What is the real challenge with welcoming in all guests? Why can it be so genuinely difficult?
- 2 What can be the consequences of welcoming a difficult guest? What are the consequences of not welcoming that guest?
- 3 How would you respond to Plimo?
- 4 Who do you side with in this text? Who is being taught a lesson here?



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Lesson 3, Text Study 3

The Miracle Gender Bender

תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף נג עמוד ב

תנו רבנן: מעשה באחד שמתה אשתו והניחה בן לינק, ולא היה לו שכר מניקה ליתן, ונעשה לו נס ונפתחו לו דדין כשני דדי אשה והניק את בנו. אמר רב יוסף: בא וראה כמה גדול אדם זה, שנעשה לו נס כזה! אמר לו אביי: אדרבה, כמה גרוע אדם זה שנשתנו לו סדרי בראשית.

BT Shabbat 53b

There once was a man whose wife died and left him with an infant to suckle and he could not afford to pay a wet nurse. A miracle occurred and he grew breasts like a woman's two breasts and he nursed his child. R. Yosef said: Come and see just how great this man is that such a miracle was performed for him! Abaye said: On the contrary. How bad is this man that the orders of nature were changed for him.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 R. Yosef and Abaye have very different responses to the story of the man who grew breasts. Fundamentally, what do you think is their disagreement?
- 2 Where does difference feel monstrous in our lives, and where does it feel wondrous?
- 3 Why does difference feel so difficult or even scary sometimes?
- 4 People who are different from us can remind us that things can always change in our lives -- and something like this could happen to us. We think, "it could have been me." Share a time where you have felt that "it could have been you." What was that like?
- 5 What do you do to get over your difficulties in relating to people who are different? How do you turn a monster into a wonder? How do you truly welcome those who are different?
- 6 How does your community or congregation become a place that can turn monsters into wonders, a place that all kinds of people can see as their home?

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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