



After saying the blessing before study, read the following text and discuss the questions that follow.

At the time when God was giving the Torah to Israel, God said to them: My children. If you accept the Torah and observe my mitzvot, I will give you for all eternity a thing most precious that I have in my possession.

And what, asked Israel, is that precious thing which Thou will give us if we obey the Torah?

The world to come.

Show us in this world an example of the world to come.

The Sabbath is an example of the world to come. (Mekhilta to Exodus 31:17) Unless one learns how to relish the taste of the Sabbath while still in this world, unless one is initiated in the appreciation of eternal life, one will be unable to enjoy the taste of eternity in the world to come. Sad is the lot of him who arrives inexperienced and when led to heaven has no power to perceive the beauty of the Sabbath...

(Abraham Joshua Heschel, The Sabbath)

Questions for Discussion

- The Sabbath, according to the above teaching, is a taste of the world to come, a future state that is still unknown yet desirable. The text suggests that people need a taste of a future state as a motivation for working to achieve that state. In what way does this ring true to your experience? What is the link between the experience of something still unknown and the motivation to work towards it?
- The text also suggests that in order to appreciate or even recognize the future state it is necessary to experience it. Do you agree/disagree? What implications does this have for making decisions about the future state of religious education in your synagogue?
- If a member of your task force were to say, “What gives me the authority to make a decision about future educational offerings?” What answers might be provided by this text?

Background

Mekhilta on Exodus– One of the earliest collections of midrash halacha, written as commentary on the book of Exodus.

Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972), one of the most significant theologians of the twentieth century. Rabbi Heschel was also active in the American Civil Rights movement.

