

Text Study: Engaging In the Study of Torah

After saying the blessing before study, discuss the following questions in small groups.

Questions for Discussion

1. In the blessing you just said, we are commanded to “engage in the study of Torah.” The Hebrew word קוסעל *la’asok* means “to engage or to busy oneself.” What does it mean to you to be engaged, either to a person or a pursuit?
2. Typically, when talking about study, the Hebrew verb is דומלל *lilmod*. To you, what does the use of the word קוסעל *la’asok* suggest about what *should* be the nature of learning?

The heart of Torah learning is a kind of special dialogue. The text is read slowly, word by word. As we read, questions emerge. We struggle to solve these questions. Along the way, other voices, other Jews who have looked at these words before, join the discussion with their commentaries. They point out problems, they share their personal solutions. The conversation continues. Between students, between teachers and students, the perceptions differ, the inferred meanings conflict, and the quest continues. In the end, the learner is left staring at his/her own text; the voices and insights of many others are heard, but for each learner the passage has yielded a personal understanding. Jewish text study is a wondrous combination of learning from others and finding out about yourself.

From *Learning Torah* by Joel Grishaver

3. Read the text above. To what extent does this passage describe your experience with text study, either in RE-IMAGINE or in other settings?
4. The RE-IMAGINE Project focuses on what the **experience** of education will be like in the future. As you begin the process of re-imagining the future, identify the characteristics of text study, as described by Grishaver, that you would want to include. How would learners benefit from this experience of text study? What might be lost?



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5. According to the work of Peter Senge, change initiatives, just like text study, are most successful when they occur within the context of community.

*To succeed, it [an initiative] would need to involve repeated opportunities for small actions that individuals could design, initiate, and implement themselves. First on a small scale, and then with increasingly larger numbers of people and activities, participants would articulate the goals they would like to achieve, experiment with new projects and initiatives, learn from their successes and mistakes, and talk with each other, candidly and openly, about the results. This would build commitment through participation and action. It would also naturally draw in new people who share similar values and aspirations. (from *The Dance of Change*)*

While Grishaver is describing a learning experience that is ultimately personal and Senge is describing a learning experience that leads to organizational change on a wide-scale, both require the experience to take place in the context of community. What do you perceive to be the value of creating opportunities for personal growth in the context of the larger community?

Background

Joel Grishaver—is a founder and co-owner of Torah Aura Productions and the Alef Design Group. He has authored or co-authored more than 60 books, including Shema is for Real and Forty Things You Can Do to Save the Jewish People. More than 20 weekends a year Joel teaches Jewish learners of all ages as a scholar in residence in communities all over North America and Europe.

Peter Senge—a senior lecturer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the chairman of the Society for Organizational Learning, and the author of The Fifth Discipline in which he developed the notion of a learning organization. He is a recognized pioneer, theorist, and writer in the field of management innovation.



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