


Text Study  Facilitator's Guide: Text Study **N** – Aleph
**Changing the Conversation:
Significant Issues**

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Usage

This text study is designed to engage Task Force members in a discussion of significant issues as they are addressed in Jewish texts. This study actually contains four separate sets of texts (one for each Significant Issue), each on its own Text Study handout.

Time Required

45 minutes

Goals and Outcomes

1. Learn how the significant issues are integral not only to children's Jewish education, but to Jewish life, in general.
2. Personally engage with the issues and understand them at a deeper level

Advanced Preparation

The Coordinator should gather all the reflections submitted online from the section which introduces the significant issues, and create a document by cutting and pasting the reflections organized by issue. S/he may decide to further refine each grouping if some comments are redundant or off topic. These lists should accurately represent the Task Force's collective thinking on the significant issues.

Facilitation

1. Divide the Task Force into four groups. Assign each group a significant issue text and give them the reflections (on the Coordinator's handout) that pertain to their issue. Allow 15 minutes for small group discussion. Remind people that the reflection question for the meeting allows Task Force members to summarize their own thoughts. The purpose of the text study is to review what our tradition has to say and the thoughts Task Force members had as they posted reflections on the Online Learning.
2. After 15 minutes, ask each group to share the highlights of their responses to the summary questions. Allow about 5 minutes for this activity for each group to share.
3. As a wrap up, spend a few minutes synthesizing the discussion.

Materials

Each individual will need:

- Text handout pertaining to their issue
- The Coordinator's handout containing the consolidated online reflections

Record Keeping

Assign someone to take notes during the debriefing. You will benefit from being able to refer back to these in the subsequent phases of the process. The Vision sub-team should be sure they are saved in the Vision Folder.



Text Study N – Aleph (Text 1 of 4)

Significant Issues: Jewish Living and Learning

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After saying the blessing before study, please read this text and discuss the questions below.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת קידושין דף מ עמוד ב

וכבר היה רבי טרפון וזקנים מסובין בעלית בית
נתזה בלוד, נשאלה שאילה זו בפניהם: תלמוד גדול
או מעשה גדול? נענה רבי טרפון ואמר: מעשה גדול,
נענה ר"ע ואמר: תלמוד גדול, נענו כולם ואמרו
תלמוד גדול, שהתלמוד מביא לידי מעשה.

Rabbi Tarfon and the Elders were once reclining in the upper story of Nitza's house in Lydda when this question was raised before them: Is study greater than practice? Rabbi Tarfon answered, saying "Practice is greater." Rabbi Akiva answered, saying, "Study is greater for it leads to practice." Then they all answered and said, "Study is greater because it leads to action."

Kiddushin 40b

1. Where do you weigh in on this debate? Rabbi Akiva offers one reason supporting his opinion. What reasons can you give in support of your opinion?
2. Rabbi Akiva suggests this is not an "either/or" debate but, rather, that there is an interplay between learning and doing. What was one experience in your life in which the integration of learning and living -- of learning and doing -- made a difference?

Now take turns reading the reflections posted in the Online Learning on this issue and discuss the following questions:

3. What about the issue Jewish Living and Learning seems appealing to the respondents?
4. What aspects of Jewish Living and Learning do the respondents think present the greatest challenges?

In summary, discuss the following questions:

5. To what extent do the text and the reflections address similar or different concerns?
6. In what ways has studying this text and reflections from the Online Learning expanded your understanding of Jewish Living and Learning?

Background

Rabbi Tarfon – One of the leading sages of the 2nd century and a colleague of Rabbi Akiva.

Nitza – A woman (?) mentioned periodically in the *Talmud*. Her claim to fame seems to be that the Rabbis gathered in her home in Lydda, often in the attic, to discuss and argue Jewish law.

Lydda – Currently the town of Lod in Israel, site of Ben-Gurion International Airport.

Rabbi Akiva – One of the greatest scholars of the *Mishnah*, he was the spiritual leader of the Bar Kochba revolt against the Romans. We are told that he did not begin serious Jewish study until he was 40 years old.

Kiddushin – One of the tractates of the *Talmud* that deals primarily with the laws of marriage and the legal acquisition of bondsmen, chattel and real estate

Text Study **א** – Aleph (Text 2 of 4)
Significant Issues: Community

After saying the blessing before study, please read these texts and discuss the questions below.

אל תִּפְרוֹשׁ מִן הַצְּבוּר

Hillel says: Do not separate yourself from the community.
(Pirke Avot 2:5)

(Commenting on Hillel’s statement) Rashi thinks that one should not separate from the community when it is experiencing difficulties so that one can be united with it when it experiences joy. Bartinoro adds that one who will not be with the community in time of sorrow will never be able to be with it at joyous times.

From *Pirke Avot: A Modern Commentary on Jewish Ethics* edited and translated by Leonard Kravitz and Kerry M. Olitsky, p. 21

1. In what ways might someone “separate from the community?” How does that feel to the individual? To the community?
2. As autonomous people living in a secular society, we opt in and out of groups all the time. What does the second text suggest is the price we pay for such mobility? Do you agree?
3. What was one moment, big or small, in your life when being part of a community mattered?

Now take turns reading the reflections posted in the Online Learning on this issue and discuss the following questions:

4. What about the issue Role of the Community seems appealing to the respondents?
5. What aspects of the issue Role of the Community do the respondents think present the greatest challenges?

In summary, discuss the following questions:

6. To what extent do the texts and the reflections address similar and different concerns?
7. In what ways has studying these texts and the reflections from the Online Learning expanded your understanding of the issue Role of the Community?

Background

Hillel – Babylonian-born authority on Jewish law who became the religious head of the Palestinian Jewish community from about 30 BCE to 10 CE. He is also the founder of a school of thought, *Beit Hillel*, through which his disciples represented his philosophy and teachings into the 5th century CE.

Rashi (1035-1105 CE) – Name is an acronym for Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchak. Highly regarded Biblical and Talmudic commentator who also was a grape grower in Troys, France. His commentary appears alongside the Talmudic text in every edition of the *Talmud*.

Bartinoro – Rabbi and commentator on the *Mishnah* during the second half of the 15th century. He traveled to Jerusalem and became spiritual head of the Jewish community there in 1488.

Pirke Avot (“Ethics of the Fathers”) – A tractate of the *Mishnah*, compiled in the early 3rd century CE, made up of story-like material and maxims from many of the famous rabbis of the time.



Text Study N – Aleph (Text 3 of 4)

Significant Issues: Parent Involvement

After saying the blessing before study, please read and discuss the questions below.

וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֶנְכִי מְצַוְּךָ הַיּוֹם עַל לְבָבְךָ:
וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם לְבְנֶיךָ

And these words, which I command you this day, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them to your children...

From V'ahavata prayer

Just as a [parent] is obligated to teach [a child], so, too, is [a parent] obligated to teach [a grandchild], as Deuteronomy 4:9 commands “and you shall teach them to your [children] and grand[children].”

Furthermore, this charge is not contained to one’s children and grandchildren alone. Rather, it is a mitzvah for each and every wise [person] to teach all students, even though they are not his [or her] children as Deuteronomy 6:7 states: “And you shall teach them to your children...” The oral tradition explains: “Your [children], “These are your students, for students are also called [children], as II Kings 2:3 states: “And the [children] of the prophets went forth.”

Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Talmud Torah 1:2

1. When in your life did you learn something significant from your parents or, as a parent, have you taught something to your children, by doing it together?
2. What do you see are the advantages and disadvantages of parents functioning as their own children’s primary teachers? In what situations have you seen this work best?
3. What has been your experience, if any, with sharing the role of primary teacher with your friends or fellow congregants? What do you know, or imagine, it is like to teach children whose families you know? How might that compare to teaching children whose families you don’t know?

Now take turns reading the reflections posted in the Online Learning on the issue Parental Involvement and discuss the following questions:


4. What about the issue Parental Involvement seems appealing to the respondents?
5. What aspects of the issue Parental Involvement do the respondents think present the greatest challenges?

In summary, discuss the following questions:

6. To what extent do the texts and the reflections address similar or different concerns?
7. In what ways has studying these texts and the reflections from the Online Learning expanded your understanding of the issue Parental Involvement?

Background

Maimonides – One of the great Jewish philosophers of all time who was a physician and lived in Moorish Spain, the Middle East and North Africa. He compiled the *Mishneh Torah*, a code of Jewish law, and wrote the *Thirteen Articles of Faith* and *Guide for the Perplexed*.

Text Study  Text Study **N** – Aleph (Text 4 of 4)
Significant Issues: Jewish Memories

After saying the blessing before study, please read this excerpt and discuss the questions below.

The medium is the message. Emotions are evoked and memories etched not with brilliantly argued points of theology but through the senses. This is why religious rituals are designed explicitly to appeal to our senses: the beauty of candle flames; the fragrance, color, texture, and taste of challah; the lovely sight and smell of the bessamim, sweet spices held in a delicate silver filigree box or tiny, carved wooden tower that you wave under your nose at the conclusion of Shabbat; the sound of ritual prayers and songs. Children's delight in the world of the senses is always waiting to bubble out, so religious rituals have a natural and easy appeal for them.

From *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee* by Wendy Mogel, Ph. D., p. 255

1. This passage suggests that memories are imprinted through the senses. Thinking about your strongest Jewish memories, to which senses are they most connected?
2. How might you respond to someone who believes that what matters most is not so much what children learn but rather that the experience is memorable?
3. What do you hope the children in your congregation will remember five, 10, 20 years from now?

Now take turns reading the reflections posted in the Online Learning on the issue Jewish Memories and discuss the following questions:

4. What about the issue Jewish Memories seems appealing to the respondents?
5. What aspects of the issue Jewish Memories present the greatest challenges?

In summary, discuss the following questions:

6. To what extent do the text and the reflections address similar or different concerns?
7. In what ways has studying this text and the reflections from the Online Learning expanded your understanding of the issue Jewish Memories?