



Abraham's Journey

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Institute for Informal Jewish Education

Brandeis University

Community Hebrew High Schools Curriculum Development Initiative

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The IJE Community Hebrew High Schools Project
is made possible by the generous support of
Legacy Heritage Fund, Ltd.

Abraham's Journey

TOPIC/SUBJECT AREA: Bible studies

OF SESSIONS/ COURSE: 14

LENGTH OF EACH SESSION: 50 minutes

PURPOSES AND GOALS OF THIS COURSE:

INTENDED BEHAVIORAL OUTCOMES

- The students will be able to clearly articulate the difference between Torah and midrash.
- The students will be able to retell the biblical story of Abraham and Sarah.
- The students will be able to recognize the literary genre from which a commentary arises (i.e. midrash, mystical, chasidic, modern).
- The students will be able to use biblio-drama as a tool for elucidating a text.
- The students will be able to use journaling as a tool for self-discovery.
- The students will be able to draw connections between their own spiritual and religious journey (as they prepare for university and beyond) and those of our fore fathers/mothers.
- The students will be able to use *chevruta* style learning as a means to better understand the text.

UNDERSTANDINGS

- The students will understand the historical and cultural context of the ancient and modern midrash, mystical commentaries, and chasidic texts.
- The students will understand that we can learn about our own spiritual development through the Torah and its commentaries.
- The students will understand the concept of a “journey.”
- The students will understand the concept of a “rite of passage.”
- The students will understand the importance of introspection in a spiritually and emotionally mature existence.
- The students will understand the need to take a close look at simple and complex texts.

TEXTS

No prior Hebrew knowledge is necessary to take this course. However, in most lessons, both Hebrew and English texts should be provided for the students (JPS translation for the Biblical texts). Depending on the Hebrew skill level demonstrated in the first class, the texts can be read in Hebrew and English, or if the students are unable, only in the English with the Hebrew acting solely as a reference.

SYLLABUS

* These texts are included in the lesson plan, but they are not available in this packet due to copyright issues.

SESSIONS	TEXTS	QUESTIONS OF MEANING OR UNDERSTANDING	ASSIGNMENT DUE FOR THIS SESSION
SESSION 1	1. Chart 1 2. Lukatay Mo'Harar, 10:3 * 3. Map 1	Where does our tradition of biblical commentary come from? How can we learn about our spirituality through our ancient texts?	N/A
SESSION 2	1. Midrash Rabbah, 11:28 2. Gen. 11:10-31	How did our Rabbis add layers of meaning to the biblical text and why?	Bring a journal to class.
SESSION 3	1. Map 1 2. Gen. 12	On what kind of journey did Abraham and Sarah go? What are the journeys we take in life?	In your journal, write the story of your family's journey to the United States.
SESSION 4	1. Gen. 22:20-24 2. Gen. 24:1-19	What is a rite of passage? What was Abraham's connection with the land of his birth?	In your journal, write what you think about going off to college.
SESSION 5	1. Gen 23:1-3 2. Rashi, 23:1-3	Who is Sarah? What can she tell us about looking at the text deeply?	In your journal, write about your male and female role models.
SESSION 6	1. Sefer Ha Bahir, chapter 8 2. Gen. 17:1-16 3. Rashi, 17	What is in a name? Do our names change?	In your journal, write about the meaning and origin of your name.
SESSION 7	1. Gen. 15:1-21 2. Gen. 17:1-14	What is a covenant? What are the covenants we have?	Be sure to get a good night's sleep and bring your "thinking caps."
SESSION 8	1. Gen. 12:9-20 2. Gen. 20:1-18	Does Abraham lie? How do we feel about it?	In your journal, answer the following questions: Do you lie? What do you lie about?

SESSION 9	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gen. 15:1-21 2. Gen. 17:19 3. Lukatay Mo'Haran, 7:1 4. Gemmara Shabbat, p. 156b 	What is trust?	Prepare for a day of hard work.
SESSION 10	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gen. 14 2. Gen. 18 3. Gen. 21:9 	What is trust?	<p>In your journal, answer the following questions:</p> <p>What do you trust? Whom do you trust? Do you believe in faith?</p>
SESSION 11	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gen. 22:1-17 	<p>Studying the Akeidah:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the four levels of understanding a Jewish text? (See <i>PARDES</i>). 2. What does <i>Pshat</i> mean? <p>The Akeidah:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What was the <i>Akeidah</i>? 2. Who was involved? 3. Where was it? 	<p>In your journal, answer the following question:</p> <p>What was the scariest moment in your life?</p>
SESSION 12	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gen. 22:1-17 2. Rashi, 22:1-17 	<p>Studying the Akeidah:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is <i>Remez</i>? 2. What is <i>Drash</i>? <p>The Akeidah:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why did it happen? 2. Where is G-d in all this? 	Be sure to get a good night's sleep and bring your "thinking caps."
SESSION 13	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gen 22:1-17 2. "Isaac" by Amir Gilboa 3. "The story of Isaac" by Leonard Cohen 4. "Adam to G!D" by Benjamin Bregman 	<p>Are we interconnected?</p> <p>Who are we responsible for?</p>	<p>In your journal, answer the following question:</p> <p>What is your relationship with G-d like?</p>
SESSION 14	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lukatay Mo'Haran, 10:3 	<p>Did Abraham and Sarah change during their journeys?</p> <p>How did we change in this class?</p>	

Session 1, Abraham's Journey

I. Teacher's Preparation

LESSON QUESTIONS OF MEANING:

- Where does our tradition of biblical commentary come from?
- How can we learn about our spirituality through our ancient texts?

Teacher's Guide

I. Teacher's Preparation

LESSON QUESTIONS OF MEANING:

Because the biblical commentaries will play such an important role in our class, it is very important that the students have a basic understanding of their origin and purpose.

Though not all texts will stick to the standard scheme, it is necessary for the students to have a point of reference from which they can understand additional commentaries.

Thus, in each class, two questions will be asked of every text:

- Where does this text fit into our chart? (see appendix 1, page 80)
- Who wrote this text? (Even if the text is the Torah, this should spark conversation).

The second question is the central question of meaning of the course, and though it will probably not be answered adequately even by the end of the course, it is vital that it is asked at the beginning to encapsulate the purpose of our educational journey.

To make this question more central, you need to have the question: "What can we learn about our spirituality from this text?" in front of them for every class.

One way to do this would be to use a piece of laminated oak tag or poster board with magnets on the back and put the question on the black board.

Additional texts will be provided for you to help explain both the chart and the Lekutay Mo'Harar piece.

SELECTION OF TEXTS:

The students will receive a binder with all of the course material and relevant questions for each class. They will be asked to put their names on the binders and told to be respectful of the texts. Additionally, they will be told that the binders will be left with the teacher after each class.

1. I have decided to use this chart because it is a simple outline of major works of ancient Jewish biblical commentaries. I will also use this chart as the motivating question for other sessions in the curriculum.
2. I chose this text because it raises the issue of the human relationship to the divine. I want the students to try to discover and experience the diversity of perspective that can be encountered in the quest for personal spiritual meaning. Furthermore, it will serve as a foundational piece for understanding how we can derive personal spiritual lessons from Abraham and Sarah.
3. I have decided to use this map because it is a clear and concise depiction of the physical journey Abr(ah)am and Sara(i)h undertook.

SKILLS NEEDED BY STUDENTS:

If you are worried that your students may not be ready to handle the texts you may want to supplement their knowledge by giving them background material, i.e. a passage from each of the groups of text.

SELECTION OF TEXTS:

1. Chart # 1 (Appendix 1, page 80)
A generalized schema of biblical homiletical and legalistic commentaries, and their historical timeframe.
2. Lekutay Mo'Harar, 10:3
A short Rebbe Nachman piece on the different relationships Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had with G-d.
3. Map # 1 (Appendix 3, page 85)
A theorized version of Abraham's overland journey from Ur (in present day Iraq) to the land of Cana'an (present day Israel).

SKILLS NEEDED BY STUDENTS:

Only the English translation of the texts will be provided in this session

OBJECTIVES/ INTENDED OUTCOMES:

1. What will the students *do*?

- The students will **look** at Chart # 1 in *chevruta* (pairs) and **answer** three questions. *See appendix 1 (page 80) for questions.*
- The students will **read** Lekutay Mo'Haran section and **answer** four questions in *chevruta*.
- The students will **examine** Map # 1 and **recognize** its value as reference material.
- The students will **discuss** their answers to the questions as a class.

2. The students *will be able to*:

- **Articulate** the differences between Torah, *Midrash*, and *Halachah*.
- **Articulate** the differences of spirituality of our forefathers/mothers.
- **Use a map** as reference material to biblical times and events.

3. The students *will understand that*:

- *Chevruta* learning style is an ancient, and intrinsically Jewish, learning technique.
- There are several genres of Jewish texts that can be used to understand the Torah.

I am not placing the Hebrew text here primarily because it is too difficult to understand. Future texts will be included in both Hebrew and English, so as to experience the text from the original; however, this lesson's texts is both too far from the original text of the Torah and Midrash (Rabbi Nachman lived in the early 19th century) and too complicated.

OBJECTIVES/ INTENDED OUTCOMES:

By being clear about what I want them to *do* during and *understand* at the *end* of class, I can decide what exactly I need to assess and devise better ways of doing so.

This first session is primarily to get the students actively involved in learning Jewish texts while simultaneously bringing their knowledge about the history of Jewish texts (which is often under-taught) to a sufficient level to begin our intensive text study.

Furthermore, the text used in this section will hopefully challenge their preconceived notions of the monotony of spiritual practice.

Chevruta, working together with one other person, is a useful learning technique that if monitored and initiated correctly, can keep the students on task for moderately long periods of time.

ASSESSMENT/ MEASUREMENT OF INTENDED OUTCOMES:

As this is the first lesson of the class, I think that it's more important to see how things are going with the teacher-student and student-student dynamics than it is to solely evaluate learning.

The *chevruta* approach actually allows you to assess their maturity level, their desire/ability to engage with the text, their comfort saying things in front of the class (which, depending on your group, could take much longer to fully assess), and any possible behavioral problems that might exist. I have them choose their own *chevrutot* so they will either be on their best behavior, or their worst.

Additionally, the text provided is incredibly complex, so any answers they come up with could be correct.

Look for creativity and reward it, whether it is in concordance with the commentary or not.

ASSESSMENT/ MEASUREMENT OF INTENDED OUTCOMES:

1. Monitor their work in *chevruta* as they study the text and answer the seven questions assigned:
 - a. The students should be orderly and engaged with the text.
 - b. Thoughtful remarks and questions in *chevruta* should be expected.
2. Evaluate the quality of the answers they develop as a class.
3. Ask them if they enjoyed *chevruta* and whether or not any of them have experienced this type of learning before.

II. Lesson Plan

A. RECALL/ SPONGE ACTIVITY:

1. There is no recall activity for this lesson.

B. SET INDUCTION (10-15 min.):

1. Ask the question: "When have you had a spiritual experience?" Discuss openly.
2. Ask the question: "How can a text be a source of spiritual wisdom?" Discuss openly.
3. Introduce the concept of studying in pairs (*chevruta*) and how they are expected to work together in this course.

II. Lesson Plan

A. RECALL/ SPONGE ACTIVITY:

As this is the first lesson, there will be no recall activity.

B. SET INDUCTION:

These two questions should bring the central purpose of this course (spiritual development) right up to them.

Furthermore they get to talk about themselves, which is an incredibly useful technique for focusing a possibly rowdy class.

I chose *chevruta* because it functions as a means of focusing students of this age by putting them in an ideal environment (with a friend) working on a specific, focused task. Ideally, this should limit the amount of time wasted controlling the class.

Furthermore, the *chevruta* style of learning has a traditional place in Jewish culture, so introducing it (or reinforcing it if they had already done it) will prepare them for future *chevruta* style learning sessions.

I want to set as quiet a work environment as possible and limit the social chatter during this *chevruta* time, but I also want this to be fun for them. Thus, if they are mature enough, I would let them select their own partners, keeping in mind that the teacher still needs to monitor their work and keep them on task.

I want the students to make their best efforts in trying to understand difficult concepts. Nonetheless I want to provide them with a foundation of knowledge that they can use when

learning Jewish texts now and in the future. I want to demonstrate that the group can enrich the work of any one individual and *chevruta* social collaborative learning is valued highly in Jewish study for that reason.

Depending on their level of maturity, they can find their own "chevruta buddy" with the understanding that inappropriate behavior will cause re-assignment and that they may not have the same partner for the whole semester. Following that, I will move each pair to as private a corner of the class as I can to promote quiet work.

Because this is the first class, an overview of the course, its guidelines, and the expected level of maturity are necessary.

The importance of leaving the binders with the instructor should be mentioned early on so as to introduce this concept early. When you collect the binders, it lets the students know that formalities and structure are important to this course. Additionally, the value of these holy texts needs to be stressed with some frequency. Finally, this will prevent the students from forgetting their material.

C. TEXT STUDY:

The binder of course material will imbue this class with a sense of formality in Torah learning. Furthermore, it will be a central place for the students to write down their thoughts.

4. Introduce the course:
 - a. Discuss the attendance, behavioral expectations, and the use of the binder for the course.
 - b. Express that this course will provide the students with a foundation of knowledge about Abraham and Sarah.
 - c. Express that this course will help them along their spiritual journeys by giving the students insight into their own development.

C. TEXT STUDY (30 min.):

1. Ask the students to turn to the chart #1 in their binders and begin their *chevruta* study.
2. Roam the room to answer questions while monitoring progress and conversations.
3. Instruct the students to raise their hands if they need help.
4. They will have seven minutes to work in their pairs.

5. Ask the students to try to answer the questions listed in their binders, as well as ask any questions they don't understand.
6. Get back together for another seven minutes of discussion.
7. Give a short presentation on the history of the Jewish texts and try to give a concise definition of their origin, their purpose and their cultural context.
8. Ask the students to turn to the next page (Lekutay Mo'Haran, 10:3), get back together with their chevruta pair, and study together for 10 minutes.
9. Come together again for another 10 minutes of discussion of the following questions:
 - a. Ask the students to try to explain what they thought the text meant, and have another student write what was said on the board.
 - b. Explain the reference to the "mountain, field, and house" as references to the different places where our forefathers met Hashem (Moriah for Abraham, the field for Isaac, and Beth-El for Jacob).

Further explain that according to some traditions, all three places were the same place: the Temple mount.

Ask them: "What do these three places represent to Nachman or the text? How are they different?"
10. Each student will write individually on the words "house," "field" and "mountain" in terms of spirituality, thinking about these questions:
 - Have you had a spiritual experience in any or all of the three?
 - Where does the human life connect with the divine?
 - Is it in the lowest place in the world (Sodom and Gemorrah)?
 - In the tent of Sarah where she throws out her handmaiden? Is it where Isaac takes Rebecca into his mother's tent?
 - In Yaakov's tent?

As mentioned earlier, this text is extremely difficult to understand without key information (i.e. what Nachman is talking about). Nonetheless, struggling with difficult texts does have its benefits.

I ask them to explain what they think and write it on the board first to show them that creative answers, even if they are somewhat off, are highly valued. Just as modern *Midrashim* are written to try to explain something that might be difficult for us to understand, so to should they create their own creative explanations.

After the initial round of answer, I introduce what the commentary says Nachman actually meant, so as to either congratulate their successful efforts, or to show them the depth of a somewhat esoteric text.

Finally, I ask them to reflect on the meaning of the text and apply it to their own developing spiritual journeys because I hope to show them that our own spiritual paths can be different, yet still have the same ultimate value in our lives.

D. CLOSURE:

The map is to provide a visual starting point for the biblical story we are learning about

By complimenting their work, I want to have them realize that I admire their effort on the question of meaning we are investigating.

I want to invite them to think about their own spirituality because that is the central topic of this course. I believe the earlier the question is introduced, the better they will be able to answer it by the end.

11. Ask the students: What do you think about the three terms (house, field, mountain) and their importance for understanding personal spirituality?

D. CLOSURE (5 min.):

1. Ask the students to look at Map # 1 and let them know that it will be a good reference for the journeys taken by Abraham and Sarah.
2. Summarize what we have done today.
3. Compliment their work where appropriate.
4. Invite them to think about their own spirituality and how it may have changed as they have gotten older.
5. Collect their binders.