

Thriving – A Textual Deep Dive

Session One – Authentically Bringing Ones Self to the Text

Textual Principle #1 – For my students to thrive, I must bring my authentic self to my role, and to the material I am teaching.

I. What is Thriving?

Thriving: is the product of the pursuit and engagement of an authentic life that brings inner joy and happiness through meeting goals, being connected with life passions and people, and relishing in accomplishments through the peaks and valleys of life.”

Jewish Education That Leads to Thriving: Jewish education that leads to thriving draws from mainstream scientific research and Jewish wisdom to allow learners to live a more meaningful, develop relationship-driven, and responsible life. Jewish Education that leads to thriving gives Jews the capacity to be the best possible versions of themselves and ensures that the learner is at the center of their own growth and learning. Thriving provides Jews with the tools to help bring about a more equitable and just world, and the tools to grapple with what does God ask from me? (The Jewish Education Project)

1) Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, Judaism as a Civilization, page 486.

No whit less important than reckoning with the perpetuation of Jewish life and culture is it to reckon with the well-being and growth of the individual child. The Jewish educative process must start with the actual experiences of the child as he lives them in the present, and lead him constantly so to reorganize and reinterpret his experience that he comes to identify his own good with the good of society. To achieve this end the child must be given increasing control over his own experience so that he will himself be able to shape and direct it toward aims freely and intelligently chosen.

Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan was a Lithuanian-born American rabbi, writer, Jewish educator, professor, theologian, philosopher, activist, and religious leader who founded the Reconstructionist movement.

II. Finding your “I”

2) Parker Palmer, The Courage to Teach, Chapter One

After three decades of trying to learn my craft, every class comes down to this: my students and I, face to face, engaged in an ancient and exacting exchange called education. The techniques I have mastered do not disappear, but neither do they suffice. **Face to face with my students, only one resource is at my immediate command: my identity, my selfhood, my sense of this “I” who teaches—without which I have no sense of the “Thou” who learns.** Here is a secret hidden in plain sight: *good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher.* In every class I teach, my ability to connect with my students, and to connect them with the subject, **depends less on the methods I use than on the degree to which I know and trust my selfhood—and am willing to make it available and vulnerable in the service of learning...**

Good teachers join self, subject, and students in the fabric of life because they teach from an integral and undivided self; they manifest in their own lives, and evoke in their students, a “capacity for connectedness.” They are able to weave a complex web of connections between themselves, their subjects, and their students, so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves. The methods used by these weavers vary widely: lectures, Socratic dialogues, laboratory experiments, collaborative problem-solving, creative chaos. The connections made by good teachers are held not in their methods but in their hearts meaning heart in its ancient sense, the place where intellect and emotion and spirit and will converge in the human self.

Parker Palmer is an American author, educator, and activist who focuses on issues in education, community, leadership, spirituality and social change.

III. Tocho K'Varo – Outsides matching Insides - The Value of Authenticity

<p>3) Babylonian Talmud Tractate Brachot 28a It was taught: On that day they dismissed the guard at the door and permission was granted to the students to enter. As Rabban Gamliel would proclaim and say: Any student whose inside, are not like his outside, will not enter the study hall.</p>	<p>תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות כח. תנא אותו היום, סלקוהו לשומר הפתח ונתנה להם רשות לתלמידים ליכנס. שהיה רבן גמליאל מקריז ואומר: כל תלמיד שאין תוכו כפרו, לא יכנס לבית המדרש.</p>
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Background to the Text:
 This text is from the Babylonian Talmud (c. 550 C.E.) and is the Rabbinic understanding of the context of source #3 above. It describes a Rabbinic conflict over the question of the establishment of the Evening prayer, which was established after the destruction of the second Temple in 70 C.E.

<p>4) Babylonian Talmud Tractate Brachot 27b – 28a Our Rabbi's taught: It once happened that a student asked R. Yehoshua: Is the evening prayer obligatory or voluntary? He replied: It is voluntary. He then went to Rabban Gamliel and asked him: Is the evening prayer obligatory or voluntary? He replied: It is obligatory. The student then said: But did not R. Yehoshua tell me that it is voluntary? He replied: Wait until the <i>Baalei Trisin</i> (Men of Armor) enter the <i>Beit Midrash</i>. When the <i>Baalei Trisin</i> came in, the questioner stood up and asked: Is the evening prayer voluntary or obligatory? Rabban Gamliel replied: It is obligatory. Rabban Gamliel then said to the Sages: Is there anyone who disputes this? R. Yehoshua replied: No. He said to him: Did they not report you to me as saying that it is voluntary? He then said: "Yehoshua, stand on your feet and let them testify against you!" R. Yehoshua stood up and said: Were I alive and he dead, the living could contradict the dead. But now that he is alive and I am alive, how can the living contradict the living? Rabban Gamliel remained sitting and expounding and R. Yehoshua remained standing, until the entire nation called out and said to Huzpith the Orator (the person who called out the teachings of Rabban Gamliel) Stop (literally stand)! And he stopped. It was taught: On that day they dismissed the guard at the door and permission was granted to the students to enter. As Rabban Gamliel would proclaim and say: Any student whose inside, are not like his outside, will not enter the study hall. On that day several benches were added. Rabbi Yohanan said: Abba Yosef ben Dostai and the Rabbis disputed this matter. One said: Four hundred benches were added to the study hall. And one said: Seven hundred benches were added to the study hall. When he saw the tremendous growth in the number of students, Rabban Gamliel was disheartened. He said: Perhaps, Heaven forbid, I prevented Israel from engaging in Torah study. They showed him in his dream white jugs filled with ashes alluding to the fact that the additional students were worthless idlers. The Gemara comments: That is not the case, but that dream was shown to him to ease his mind so that he would not feel bad.</p>	<p>תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות כז - כח. תנו רבנן מעשה בתלמיד אחד שבא לפני רבי יהושע אמר לו תפלת ערבית רשות או חובה אמר ליה רשות בא לפני רבן גמליאל אמר לו תפלת ערבית רשות או חובה אמר לו חובה אמר לו והלא רבי יהושע אמר לי רשות אמר לו המתן עד שיכנסו בעלי תריסין לבית המדרש כשנכנסו בעלי תריסין עמד השואל ושאל תפלת ערבית רשות או חובה אמר לו רבן גמליאל חובה אמר להם רבן גמליאל לחכמים כלום יש אדם שחולק בדבר זה אמר ליה רבי יהושע לאו אמר לו והלא משמך אמרו לי רשות אמר ליה יהושע עמוד על רגליך ויעידו בך עמד רבי יהושע על רגליו ואמר אלמלא אני חי והוא מת יכול החי להכחיש את המת ועכשיו שאני חי והוא חי היאך יכול החי להכחיש את החי היה רבן גמליאל יושב ודורש ורבי יהושע עומד על רגליו עד שרננו כל העם ואמרו לחוצפית התורגמן עמוד ועמד תנא אותו היום, סלקוהו לשומר הפתח ונתנה להם רשות לתלמידים ליכנס. שהיה רבן גמליאל מקריז ואומר: כל תלמיד שאין תוכו כפרו, לא יכנס לבית המדרש. ההוא יומא אתוספו כפיה ספסלי. אמר רבי יוחנן: פליגי בה אבא יוסף בן דוסתאי ורבנן. חד אמר: אתוספו ארבע מאה ספסלי. וחד אמר: שבע מאה ספסלי. הנה קא חלשה דעתיה דרבן גמליאל, אמר: דלמא חס ושלום מנעתי תורה מישראל. אחזו ליה בתלמיה סצבי חינוי דמליין קטמא. ולא היא, הוה ליתובי דעמיה, הוא דאחזו ליה.</p>
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IV. Practice: How Would You Bring Your Authentic “I” to This Text?

5) Dr. Erica Brown, Sincerity And Authenticity In Teaching, Torah U’Madda Journal, Vol. 11 (2002-2003)

The more an educator shows the stamp of his own unique humanity, the more the student will be able to look for that uniqueness in his own character.

Background to the Text:

This text is from the book of Genesis – the first book of the Bible. This text teaches us about the moment when God calls on Abraham to follow God, and to embark on a journey to the promised land. It is seen to be the moment that Abraham is chosen, and the moment when Abraham became the founder of Judaism.

6) Genesis 12:1-5

1) God said to Abram, “Go forth from your native land and from your father’s house to the land that I will show you.
2) I will make of you a great nation, And I will bless you; I will make your name great, And you shall be a blessing.
3) I will bless those who bless you And curse him that curses you; And all the families of the earth Shall bless themselves by you.”
4) Abram went forth as God had commanded him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran.
5) Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother’s son Lot, and all the wealth that they had amassed, and all the people that they had with them in Haran; and they set out for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in the land of Canaan,

בראשית יב:א-ה

א) וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם לְדַלֵּךְ מֵאֶרֶץ צָרָר וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֹרְאָנִי:
ב) וְאַעֲשֶׂה לְךָ לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל וְאֹבְדֵיךָ וְאֶגְדֹּלְךָ שְׂמֹךְ וְהָיִיתָ בְרָכָה:
ג) וְאֹבְדֵיכֶם מִבְּרָכֶיךָ וּמִקְלָלֶיךָ אָרָר וְנִבְרָכוּ בְךָ כָּל-מִשְׁפַּחַת הָאָדָמָה:
ד) וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה וַיֵּלֶךְ אִתּוֹ לוֹט וְאַבְרָם בְּוַחֲמֵשׁ שָׁנָיִם וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה בְּצֵאתוֹ מִחָרָן:
ה) וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם אֶת-שָׂרִי אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת-לוֹט בְּרֵ-אָחִיו וְאֶת-כָּל-רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכְשׁוּ וְאֶת-הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר-עִשׂוּ בְּחָרָן וַיֵּצְאוּ לְלֶכֶת אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן:

As you read the text – ask yourself the following questions:

- *What about this text do I connect to?*
- *What about this text do I find challenging?*
- *What connections can I make between this text and the world that we live in today?*
- *What perspectives/voices are missing from this text that would make it more meaningful for me? How can I bring them into conversation with this text?*

Now - Read the text again – this time as a teacher of the text:

- *Given who, and where they are - how do I anticipate that my students will react to this text?*
- *What do I want my students to get from this text?*
- *How do I want to use my own “I” experience of this text to help my learners to connect to this text?*

7) Brene Brown, Braving the Wilderness, p. 40

True belonging is the spiritual practice of believing in and belonging to yourself so deeply that you can share your most authentic self with the world and find sacredness in both being a part of something and standing alone in the wilderness. True belonging doesn’t require you to *change* who you are; it requires you to *be* who you are.

Brené Brown is an American professor, author, and podcast host, known for her work on shame, vulnerability, and leadership.