

**Emerging from an Immersion in Text:  
Practical Applications of  
Babylonian Talmud *Masechet Megillah***

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## Summary

There were three primary goals I set out for myself before I began this text immersion. The first, was to develop my technical skills in working with Talmud and Aramaic. The second, was to take what I learned from the text of *Masechet Megillah* and to find practical ways to use it in my Rabbinate. Lastly, was to enjoy every possible moment studying with my teacher and mentor, Dr. Michael Chernick. While I cannot definitively say I have achieved the former goals, I can certainly say I succeeded in the later.

The first of the three papers is a responsa. On a practical level, it focuses on the question of whether the Talmud permits women to read from the Torah. On a theoretical level, it (attempts) to argue that the Reform movement's acceptance of women reading Torah on the grounds of equality and egalitarianism is also justified in the *Halakha*. The second paper takes the form of an extended sermon or a short lecture. It focuses on lessons in education and pedagogy derived from pages 21a-22a of *Masechet Megillah*, that have application in modern, Reform, educational settings. The last "paper" is actually a set of three lesson plans built around some of the *sugyot* I studied in *Megillah*. All three were designed with a Reform Temple community in mind. The first lesson is designed for children (Grade 6) in a religious school setting; the second is designed for adults; and the last is for families (parents and young children) who first learn separately and then come together at the end, for a final discussion on the lesson's overall theme.

## Acknowledgements

Although I am eternally grateful to my family, friends, teachers and mentors on a daily basis for helping to reach this moment in my life, there is really only one person who belongs on this particular page: my advisor, Dr. Michael Chernick

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There truly are no words to properly express the gratitude I hold in my heart for the time and energy and care you have given me over the last few months, but I hope you will always know how deeply I have treasured our time learning together and how humbled I am to have been your last thesis advisee.

Thank you Dr. Chernick, for everything.

## Women and *Kriyat Ha-Torah*: A Rejection or Embrace of *Halakha*?

### **1. Introduction**

Although the Reform movement has officially welcomed the participation of women in all manner of synagogue worship since 1976<sup>1</sup>, it has done so based solely on the underlying values of universalism, equality and egalitarianism, which are often assumed to be in outright rejection of established *halakha*. Although there is certainly no need within the parameters of Reform Judaism to justify this perspective through the traditional mechanisms of Jewish law<sup>2</sup>, there has nevertheless been an assumption that in order for women to participate equally in worship one must either circumvent, or outright reject *halakha*, to do so.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate this assumption, focusing on one specific aspect of worship - *Kriyat Ha-Torah* (public Torah reading) - and to determine if, in fact, it is necessary to eschew *halakha* in order to allow for women's participation in this central ritual act.

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<sup>1</sup> Although many individual congregations had already embraced full participation of women in all manner of worship practices prior to 1976, full egalitarianism was not accepted as a matter of Reform doctrine until the drafting of the 1976 CCAR Platform - *Reform Judaism: A Centenary Perspective*. "Moreover, though some still disagree, substantial numbers have also accepted our teachings: that the ethics of universalism implicit in traditional Judaism must be an explicit part of our Jewish duty; that women have full rights to practice Judaism; and that Jewish obligation begins with the informed will of every individual."

<sup>2</sup> See the 1885 *Declaration of Principles* (The Pittsburgh Platform), Article 3: "We recognize in the Mosaic legislation a system of training the Jewish people for its mission during its national life in Palestine, and today we accept as binding only its moral laws, and maintain only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives, but reject all such as are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization."

## 2. Background

Before we can begin to explore the *halachic* perspective on women reading Torah, we must first address a few important issues relating to the history of *Kriat Ha-Torah*, as well as some general *halachic* principles that determine the obligation of hearing the Torah reading and the mechanisms by which this *mitzvah* is fulfilled.

### The Origin of Public Torah Reading: *Hakhel*

The first mention of a public Torah reading comes from Deuteronomy 31:10-12, which describes the *mitzvah* of *Hakhel*. *Hakhel* (which means “assemble”) was a gathering that took place every seven years in which key sections of the Torah were read by the King in the presence of “*Ha’am*” (the people). It is important to note, that this assemblage included everyone in the community: men, women, children and even strangers (i.e. non-Jews).

The practical explanation for this assemblage, according to the text in Deuteronomy, is so the people “may hear and so learn to revere your God יהוה and to observe faithfully every word of this teaching” (Deut 31:12). The Rabbis took this one step further and understood *Hakhel* as more than just an opportunity for education (i.e. *Talmud Torah*). Rather, they saw it as a recreation of the precise moment of revelation when God first gave the Israelites the Torah in the presence of “all Israel.” Understood in this way, it makes sense that men, women and children were all included in *Hakhel*, as they were all present at Sinai for the Revelation, as well.

### The Origin of Regular Public Torah Readings: Ezra

Although *Hakhel* establishes a precedent for obligatory public Torah reading, the setting of regular weekly readings at pre-determined times (i.e. Shabbat morning, afternoon, Mondays

and Thursdays) began with Ezra the Scribe (as detailed in the book of Nehemiah, chapter 8).<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that these regular readings did *not* replace *Hakhel*, but rather ensured that three days did not pass without the people hearing the Torah read aloud.

### Are Women Obligated to Hear the Torah Read?

There is a general rule that is expressed in Mishnah *Kidushin* (*Perek Alef, Halacha Zayin*) that women are exempted from observing positive commandments that are “time-bound.” Since hearing the Torah read in public is considered a time-bound commandment, one might then assume that women are not obligated to participate in this particular *mitzvah*. However, if regular public Torah readings are based on *Hakhel* - and if in fact men, women and children (and strangers) are obligated to take part in it - then by that logic women should be obligated to perform the time-bound mitzvah of hearing regular public Torah readings, as well. And this, as we will see later on in the writings of the *Poskim*, is in fact the case.

This is ultimately an important point of clarification to address at the outset, because it negates a concern that might have arisen from the combination of two general *halachic* principles. The first is laid out in *Mishnah Rosh Ha-Shanah* 3:8, which states: “*This is the general principle: one who is not himself under obligation to perform a religious duty cannot perform it on behalf of a congregation.*” The second is that *Kriyat Ha-Torah* is considered a communal - and not an individual obligation<sup>4</sup>. So, if a woman was not not obligated to hear *Kriyat Ha-Torah*, and if it is a communal *mitzvah* that is fulfilled by some (i.e.

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that there is a tradition, expressed by the Rabbis in *Bava Kamma* 82a, that Moses was actually the one to set regular times for public Torah readings, and that Ezra merely evolved the practice. See Rambam *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Tefillah* 12:1

<sup>4</sup> See Ramban, *Milchamot Adonai on the Rif, Amud Gimel*

the Torah readers) on behalf of many (i.e. the congregation) - they would technically be unable to fulfil that obligation on behalf of the congregation, if they were to have participated in the public Torah reading.

Since this is not, in the end, a concern, we can now proceed with our investigation, unhindered.

### 3. Our “Urtext”: *Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah 23a*

The question of whether a woman may perform *Kriyat Ha-Torah* is first addressed on the bottom of page 23a of Babylonian Talmud Tractate *Megillah*, wherein the Rabbis teach the following *baraita*:

תנו רבנן: הכל עולין למנין שבעה, ואפילו קטן ואפילו אשה.

*The Rabbis taught in a baraita:*

*All count towards the seven [readers]<sup>5</sup>, even children and even women.*

At first glance, this would seem to answer the question of whether a woman is permitted to read from the Torah clearly and definitively. However, the *baraita* continues with the following caveat:

אבל אמרו חכמים: אשה לא תקרא בתורה, מפני כבוד צבור.

However, the sages said: A woman does not read from the Torah out of consideration for the “*kavod*” of the congregation.<sup>6</sup>

Although the first statement appears to state the facts rather clearly (namely, that women *are*

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<sup>5</sup> Although today there is usually a *Ba'al Koreh* (a Torah reader) and an *Aliyah L'torah* (a person, or persons who offer the blessings before and after each reading), in the Talmudic era (and indeed, for many centuries prior and post) both processes were done by one person (i.e. performed the *berachot* and the Torah reading).

<sup>6</sup> There is a parallel version of this *baraita* which exists in the Tosefta (*Megillah* 3:11), which reads: “*All count towards the seven [readers], even children and even women. We do not bring a woman to read to the public.*” It is virtually identical, however it does not include the explanation included in the *Bavli* as to why (*mipnei kevod Ha-Tzibur*). This will be discussed further later in the paper.

permitted to perform *Kriyat Ha-Torah*), the condition appended by the *chachamim* introduces a dilemma, which can only be reconciled by addressing the following three questions:

- What does “*Kevod Ha-Tzibur*” actually mean?
- In what circumstances does a concern for *Kevod Ha-Tzibur* apply and why?
- Should the statement of the *Chachamim* be understood as a recommendation or *minhag*, or as binding law?

Since the baraita on 23a does not offer any clarification of its statement, in order to answer these questions we must look to other examples in the Talmud and elsewhere for clarification.

For the purposes of organization, we will first present and examine each of these sources on their own and only after, attempt to synthesize their ideas in order to address the questions above, and by extension, our larger question (whether a woman is permitted, according to *halakha* to participate in *Kriyat Ha-Torah*).

#### **4. *Kevod Ha-Tzibur* in the Talmud**

The phrase *Kevod Ha-Tzibur* appears four other times in the Talmud. They are as follows:

##### Babylonian Talmud, *Masechet Megillah* 24b

“Ullah bar Rav inquired of Abaye: May a minor, whose legs are exposed, read the Torah [for the congregation]? [Abaye] said to him:  
“[Truthfully] you should inquire [about a situation in which the child is] naked [and not just partially exposed]. What is the reason [for this]?  
Because we are concerned for the **honor of the congregation**.”

Whether the child is permitted to perform the reading itself, is not questioned here (which makes sense, given that the *beritha* in 23a is explicit that a child *may* read from the Torah). What *is* of concern to the Rabbis, is the question of how to maintain decorum and respect during the Torah service in the Synagogue. Without having to offer any further clarification, the Rabbis make it apparent that the sight of an immodestly, or inappropriately



dressed child on the *bimah*, is unacceptable. And although the *gemara* speaks only of a child in this instance, we can rightly infer that the same standards would be applied to an adult male (or female) as well.

What is interesting about this ruling however, is that the *kavod* appears to only be of concern for the congregation and *not* for the Torah, or, by extension, for God. Perhaps this is *peshita* (obvious and implicit), but perhaps not. Perhaps, it is an important distinction that would suggest that *Kevod Ha-Tzibur* is really only to be applied out of concern for the reaction of the congregation. In other words, an improperly dressed child reading Torah is not an affront implicitly, and is only so if the congregation sees it as such.

Babylonian Talmud, *Masechet Gittin* 60a

*“Rabbah and Rav Yosef both said: Chumashim may not be read from in the synagogue, out of **respect for the congregation**.”*

Rabbah and Rav Yosef’s ruling comes in response to a question posed earlier in the *gemara* regarding the acceptability of reading from a *chumash* rather than a Torah scroll, for the purposes of *Kriyat Ha-Torah*. According to Rashi, in the period in which the Rabbis are discussing this question, the *chumash* was a handwritten scroll similar in every way to a Torah, except in the fact that they were individual scrolls for each book of the Torah. Thus, the Rabbis initially reject the idea of using the *chumash* in place of a standard Torah scroll, because they are incomplete (in the sense that they are only one of five of the books) and therefore are unfit for *Kiryat Ha-Torah*.

The *gemara* counters this however, and suggests that this should not be a concern because even though a *chumash* is not the entire Torah, it is nevertheless a complete version of

the individual book (i.e. *all* of Genesis, or Exodus etc...) and should therefore be accepted.<sup>7</sup>

This challenge then prompts Rabbah and Rav Yosef's response, which demonstrates that the issue of prohibiting reading from a *chumash* is only out of concern for *Kevod Ha-Tzibur*.

The question now is, why is using a *chumash* so insulting to the community? The Rashba offers some clarification<sup>8</sup>. In his commentary on the *sugya*, he explains that the reason using a *chumash* is insulting to the congregation, is because it implies that they do not have the money to afford a proper *sefer Torah*. Thus, he argues, the concern for *kevod Ha-Tzibur* is not that it insults the congregants (that is, their individual sensibilities, as in the case above), but rather insults the *kavod* of the entire congregation, by implying that either the Temple leadership is cheap, or, perhaps even worse, that the individual congregants themselves are (i.e. they do not contribute enough to the synagogue to allow for the purchase of a Torah).

Babylonian Talmud, *Masechet Yoma* 70a

*“Why [does the Kohen Ha’Gadol have to recite the prescribed section from Numbers by heart]? Let him roll [the Torah to the proper place] and read [from the scroll]! Rav Huna son of Rav Yehoshua said in the name of Rav Sheishet: “Because we do not roll a Torah scroll in public, out of [consideration for] **the dignity of the congregation.**”*

The context of this inquiry relates to an earlier *mishnah* (beginning on 68b), which describes the process by which the *Kohen Ha’Gadol* performs his various public rituals and responsibilities associated with Yom Kippur. One of those responsibilities was to read certain prescribed sections of the Torah from the book of Numbers.

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<sup>7</sup> The underlying idea here is that just as a full Torah scroll is rendered unusable if even one letter is missing, so too would a *chumash* be unusable because even if it is a complete copy of Genesis or Exodus, it is missing the other four books of the Torah and is therefore considered as incomplete as a full Torah which is missing a letter.

<sup>8</sup> *Hidushei Ha’Rashba* to *BT Gittin* 60a, ד”ה - ספר

The *gemara* explains, that after reading the first section *Acharei Mot* (Lev 16:1-34) from the Torah scroll, the second reading (Lev 23:26-32) was to be done by heart. This was because otherwise there would need to be a pause for the scroll to be rolled from chapter 16, to chapter 23. This, the Rabbis argue, would unduly burden the congregation who would have to then wait, thereby causing an affront to the *kavod* of the assembled masses.

Thus, unlike the previous two examples, this application of *Kevod Ha-Tzibur* is not concerned with dignity or respect *per se*, but rather an obligation not to burden the members of the congregation with unnecessary waiting. Interestingly, this sensitivity for not “burdening” the congregation appears elsewhere in the Talmud, but with a slightly different phraseology. Rather than *kevod*, they use the word *Tircha* (see *BT Berachot* 12b), to indicate a situation in which doing something in the midst of a service which might be otherwise desirable (e.g. reading from a Torah scroll, rather than relying on the potential fallibility of human memory), would nonetheless show disregard for the dignity of the community in the process (i.e. by making them wait) and is therefore prohibited.

Babylonian Talmud, *Masechet Sota* 39b

“And R. Tanchum said in the name of R. Yehoshua ben Levi: The emissary of the congregation is not permitted to strip the enclosure [containing the Torah scroll] in [the presence of] the congregation. [Why ?] **Out of respect for the congregation.**”

Following along the same lines as the example from *Yoma*, this example again seems to view *Kevod Ha-Tzibur* as analogous to *Tircha D'Tzibura*. Historically, the Torah scroll was kept off-site somewhere safe, and was brought to the synagogue only when it was used for public readings. Before it was brought in however, the “*Shaliach Tzibur*” would lay down a nice piece of fabric (this is the “enclosure” referred to in the *Sugya*) on the table, upon which the

Torah would be read.

It was also the practice in that time, that the congregants would not leave the synagogue after services had completed until the Torah had been removed and taken to its off-site location. Thus, R. Yehoshua's teaching is to inform us that the emissary was not permitted to make the people wait while he removed the fabric from the table. Instead, he would have to take the Torah first to its safe place and only then return for the "enclosure." In this way, the people would be able to leave and not have to wait for him to complete his duties.

### **5. *Hidushei Ha'Poskim* (Innovations and Clarifications of the Rabbinic Decisors)**

Now that we have examined the Talmudic understanding of *Kevod Ha-Tzibur* - the primary justification given in the Talmud for why women do not participate in *Kriyat Ha-Torah* - let us now look at a few later Rabbinic sources that contribute further to the discussion.

R. Yossef Caro - *Beit Yosef, Orach Hayyim*, 282:3

*"R. David Abudirham writes (on page 130 in the section on weekday prayer in his book, Sefer Abudraham) that in regards to a city with only Cohanim ... if there are women or children [present who know how to perform Kriyat Ha-Torah], the Cohen reads twice (i.e. the first two readings) and the woman and/or children read the rest."*

R. Abudirham lived in Seville Spain in the 14th century and wrote extensively on liturgy and ritual practices. Caro quotes him in this instance to demonstrate that, in fact, there were circumstances (as likely, or unlikely as they have been in reality) in which women and children were known to perform *Kriyat Ha-Torah*. Although Abudirham's ruling is presented in the hypothetical, the very fact that such a hypothetical must even be considered, indicates that this question of *halakha* is not theoretical, but practical in nature.

R. Yossef Caro - *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Hayyim*, 282:3 (with R. Moses Isserlis' Glosses)

*“Women and children count towards the seven [readers], so long as they know to whom they are blessing.” (Isserlis' Gloss) “they only can join to the number of those who read, but the whole seven can not be women or children. (i.e. they can be part of the seven, but not all of them)”*

In his definitive code of *Halacha*, know as the *Shulchan Aruch*, R. Caro concludes, based on his tireless research, that indeed women and children may be counted among the seven Torah readers on Shabbat, however with the important caveat that “they know to whom they are blessing.” This caveat applies a general understanding in *halakha* that in order to properly recite a blessing, one must understand *why* one is blessing, and to whom the blessing (i.e. God) is directed. Since prior to the institution of a *Ba'al Koreh* the reader was responsible for reciting the blessings over the Torah, in addition to doing the reading itself, it was necessary for him to add this clarification.

R. Isserlis, in his *Ashkenazic* gloss to Caro's work adds another important caveat, which in effect picks up on the ruling of R. Abudirham in the *Beit Yosef* - namely that although women and children are permitted to perform *Kriyat Ha-Torah* according to the strict letter of the law, that they may not be the *only* readers (i.e. at least some of them must be adult men).

What is fascinating in both cases however, is the absence of the designation *Mipnei Kevod Ha-Tzibur*. However, one might argue that Isserlis' (and by extension, Abudirham's) rulings are based on an implicit application of the underlying concept of *Kevod Ha-Tzibur*, since another way to read his statement is to say in the affirmative “at least *some* of the readers *must* be men” as opposed to the negative “but the whole seven can not be women and children.” In other words, the reason why they can't all be women and children is that if that were the case, it would be insulting to the men of the congregation and would therefore violate

the “*Kavod*” of the male *Tzibur*.

R. Avraham Gombiner - *Magen Avraham*, *Siman 282 Seif Katan 6*  
(Commentary on *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Hayyim*, 282:3)

*“We learn from this [ruling, that if she can be counted as one of the seven] that a woman is obligated to hear Kriyat Ha-Torah. And even though the reason for [Torah reading] is for the purposes of Talmud Torah and [we know that] a woman is not obligated to do Talmud Torah, nevertheless it is a mitzvah for them to hear just like the mitzvah of hakhel - where women and children were obligated to be. You could say that even if they weren’t obliged, they still count towards [the seven readers] - and this is what the tosafot wrote at the end of of [Masechet] Rosh Hashanah. But in Masechet Sofrim, Perek Yud Tet, it says that women are obligated to hear Kriyat Ha-Torah just like men and it is commanded to translate for them so that they will understand. [But i will be honest,] here [where I live] it is customary for women to go outside [during the Torah reading].”*

R. Gombiner (known as the *Magen Avraham*) adds some important information to the discussion here, in his commentary on Caro’s *Shulchan Aruch*. First, he reiterates what we have already established earlier, that women are, in fact, obligated to hear *Kriyat Ha-Torah* (even if they are *not* obligated to do *Talmud Torah*). The second is that he gives an insight into the reality of his community’s (17th c. Poland) customs, in which the women generally would leave during the Torah reading. It should be cautioned however that we do not read too much into this statement. Firstly, we do not know if the Women were leaving to go home, or if they were leaving to head to their own service<sup>9</sup>. Regardless, The *Magen Avraham*’s accounting of the situation demonstrates that women are obligated to hear *Kriyat Ha-Torah* and can therefore be counted among the seven Torah readers - even if in reality they chose (or, presumably were pressured) not to do so.

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<sup>9</sup> Many communities in Ashkenaz were known to have so-called “Viber” Shuls, wherein women were able to lead their own prayer services.

R. David Pardo (*Hasdei David*) Commentary on *Tosefta Megillah* 3:11

*“It appears, even if a woman comes up by herself [to read from the Torah] (i.e. she is not actively brought up by anyone), there would be no good reason to force her to go back down. Since according to the strict letter of the law, she counts [towards the seven].”*

The last *Posek* we will examine - R. David Pardo (18th century, Italy) - offers an interesting take on the parallel text to *Babylonian Talmud Megillah* 23a, which is found in the *Tosefta Megillah* 3:11 (which was already mentioned earlier in this paper in footnote number six). He concludes that the conditional statement *“We do not bring a women to read to the public”* does not necessarily indicate a prohibition. Rather it is simply that a community does not (for any number of unspecified reasons) *actively* call up women (i.e. “bring them up”) for *Kriyat Ha-Torah*.

Furthermore, he writes that since it has been proven by the Magen Avraham (and others) that women have the same obligation as men to hear the Torah read, it therefore *“makes sense that since she has that obligation, that if she comes up, there is no reason to make her sit down.”*<sup>10</sup> In other words, women’s participation is entirely voluntary, and there is no reason to prohibit their involvement, so long as they (the women) are the ones to initiate it.

## **6. Synthesis**

Since the *Baraita* in *Megillah* 23a (and the parallel text in the *Tosefta*) are both rather clear that women (and children) are permitted to participate in *Kriyat Ha-Torah* and since the *Poskim* (Caro, Gombiner and Pardo) all support this assertion, what remains is to determine what (if any) limitations *Kevod Ha-Tzibur* can or should place on restricting women’s

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<sup>10</sup> R. David Pardo (*Hasdei David*) Commentary on *Tosefta Megillah* 3:11

participation. To that end, we will now attempt to address the three primary questions outlined in Section #3 by synthesizing what we have gleaned from studying our Talmudic and later-Rabbinic sources.

### What Does “*Kevod Ha-Tzibur*” Actually Mean?

Since the *Baraita* does not qualify or clearly define the phrase *Kevod Ha-Tzibur*, we examined four other Talmudic sources to see if we might determine its meaning. What we found was that even within the Talmud, there is no authoritative definition. In the examples from *BT Megillah 24b* and from *Gittin*, the consideration seems to be out of concern for decorum and/or potential embarrassment to the congregation's sense of self worth, respectively. In the examples from *Yoma* and *Sota*, we see *Kevod Ha-Tzibur* applied out of concern for not burdening the congregation by having to make them wait.

Both ways of understanding *Kevod Ha-Tzibur* have some application in our discussion. Firstly, the question of decorum and/or potential for embarrassment makes sense sociologically, given the status of women in the Talmudic era (and indeed, throughout much of Jewish history). Namely, that women did not experience equality with men in the public sphere. In this way, we can understand that if a woman were to perform *Kriyat Ha-Torah* in place of a man, it might be considered an offense to the “*kavod*” of the male congregants, because it would de-facto prove that they were not up to the task themselves.

*Kevod Ha-Tzibur* as a burden might also have some application here as well. Since the concern in both *Yoma* and *Sota* have to do with making people unduly wait, if one were to imagine the time it would take for a woman (who would be sitting in the women’s section, which might be upstairs or otherwise not easily accessible) to reach the *bima* for her reading, it would



probably take as long (if not longer) than what is being described in the Talmudic sources - and thus a violation of *Kevod Ha-Tzibur* in that way.

In What Circumstances Does a Concern for *Kevod Ha-Tzibur* Apply and Why?

There is no “general rule” for the application of *Kevod Ha-Tzibur* anywhere in the *halakha*. As we have seen, there are several examples of its application in the Talmud, but nevertheless the Rabbis offer no further clarification of its implied meaning; only its application in very specific instances. It can be inferred, however, that *Kevod Ha-Tzibur* is based on an assumption that the *tzibur* (i.e. the adult, male congregants) can be (and presumably, often *are*) easily agitated when their *davening* is interrupted, either by being made to wait, or by being insulted or offended by something they perceived to be unseemly or inappropriate, happening during a service.

Should the statement of the *Chachamim* be Understood as a Recommendation or *Minhag*, or as Binding Law?

Although one might legitimately infer from the *Baraita* that the statement of the *Chachamim* (that women do not read out of concern for the *kavod* of the male congregants) can be applied as law, the statements of the *Poskim* clearly demonstrate that *Kevod Ha-Tzibur* was, is and will always be intended as a conditional (and therefore non-binding) statement.

Both Caro and Isserlis state unequivocally that “women (and children) count towards the seven” and Pardo makes it clear that even if we do not *actively* call them up, there is no reason to forcefully sit a woman down if she comes up to read. Furthermore, The *Magen Avraham* demonstrates that women are equally obligated to hear *Kriyat Ha-Torah* and therefore should not be held back, unless they themselves choose to do so on their own.

Thus, it would seem that the application of *Kevod Ha-Tzibur* must not be seen as binding law - but rather as a guideline aimed at a sensitivity to the unique qualities and makeup of a given *tzibur* (congregation) and one that must be considered on a case-by-case basis. In other words, in a hypothetical situation in which the *Tzibur* would not be offended by the sight of a woman reading Torah (i.e. in a modern, Reform congregation), or one in which women would not take any longer to get up to the *Bima*, that there is no concern for *Kevod Ha-Tzibur* and thus no *halachic* rationale for prohibiting women from performing *Kriyat HaTorah*.

## 7. Summary and Conclusions

After exploring sources from both the Talmud (and *Tosefta*) and the *Poskim*, it is clear that women are, and have always been, permitted to perform *Kriyat Ha-Torah*. However, the limitation placed on this practice by the statement of the *Chachamim* has historically limited the participation of women in this important *mitzvah* out of a concern for the reaction of the adult, male population (i.e. the *Tzibur*). In other words, *Kevod Ha-Tzibur* is entirely based in, and contingent upon, the nature of the society in which one currently lives and prays.

Obviously, the *Tzibur* of the Rabbis discussed in this paper were very different than the *Tzibur* of a modern, Reform congregation. Furthermore, despite the fact that there is still a long way to go before we can truly say that we live in fully “equal” society, the larger society in which we live today does not possess the social constraints that were placed on women for most of human existence. Therefore, even if we were to accept the limitation placed upon the initial ruling of the *Baraita*, because the society in which we live is accepting of men and women as equal, that Women’s full participation in *Kriyat Ha-Torah* is entirely permissible according to

Jewish law.

Thus, it can be said that, at least in this instance, women's participation in *Kriyat Ha-Torah* in the Reform movement is not a rejection of *halakha*, but rather an accurate application of its legal rulings.

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Looking Back, to Move Forward:  
Lessons in Jewish Education and Pedagogy in Tractate Megillah 21a - 22a

The challenges facing contemporary Jewish education and Jewish educators, in general, are immense. The challenges facing Reform religious school education and educators specifically, *kal v'chomer*. Some issues are conceptual and some are operational. Some have been around for decades and others are arising only now; owing, at least in part, to the dawning of “The Digital Age.”

Should the focus of supplementary Jewish education be on Hebrew, Torah study or social justice? Should religious school education err towards formal or informal instruction? Should classes be held on weeknights, Sunday mornings or on Shabbat? At the Temple, in the home, or online? How many hours a week should students be in class, or doing homework? Questions abound but definitive answers are elusive, and finding consensus among the various stakeholders (e.g. students, parents, clergy, educators and lay leadership) often feels nearly impossible.

If there is any consensus at all, in fact, it seems to be in the assumption that positive change will come only through “innovation.” However, this emphasis on innovation pushes educators and stakeholders to focus their attention primarily in only one, of two directions. Some look sideways, toward contemporary models and methods of education and pedagogy found outside of the Jewish world; while others look only forward, toward the use of futuristic technologies that will provide new vehicles for the transmission and reception of data and information.

Although these lateral and frontal orientations are indeed helpful (if not entirely

necessary) for finding sources of inspiration and tools for innovation outside of the Jewish world, I would argue that there is an equal need to look backwards, and to give much needed attention to the experience and wisdom gleaned from thousands of years of Jewish teaching and learning that are present within our own tradition.

This paper is an attempt to do just that. To demonstrate that there is considerable wisdom to be gleaned from examining our own history of educational theory and practice. In particular, this paper will focus on three examples taken from Tractate Megillah (pages 21a - 22b), that provide insight and practical advice that I believe can be helpful in addressing some of the most pressing issues facing the field of Jewish education today.

Lesson #1: Getting on the “Same Level” as our Students  
Tractate Megillah, 21a

The mishnah that begins in the middle of page 21a of Tractate Megillah is primarily concerned with the “what,” “when” and “how” of reading from Megillat Esther. It begins with the assertion that the Megillah may be read “either standing or sitting.” The Gemara, however, is quick to provide a baraita asserting that this is not the case with regards to the Torah, which may only be read while standing.

The Rabbis justify their assertion by bringing a proof text from the very moment that the Torah was given by God to Moses. The text from Deuteronomy 5:28 states: ואתה פה עמד עמדי – “And you stand here with Me.” The implication, according to the Rabbis, is that when God was transmitting (i.e. teaching) the Torah to Moses, it was done while standing. Thus, the Rabbis argue, if at the very moment the Torah was transmitted Moshe was “standing” with God, then *every* time the Torah is transmitted (i.e. read) in a public setting, it *must* be done standing,

as well.

The gemara then provides a further exposition of the verse from Deuteronomy by Rabbi Abahu that I believe contains one of the most poignant and powerful pieces of wisdom on education to be found in our entire tradition. It states:

ואמר רבי אבהו: מנין לרב שלא ישב על גבי מטה וישנה לתלמידו על גבי קרקע?  
שנאמר: ואתה פה עמד עמדי (דברים ה:כח)

And R' Abbahu said: From where [is it known] that a teacher should not sit on a couch and teach to his student [who is sitting on the] ground?

For it is stated (in Deuteronomy 5:27): “*And you, stand here with Me.*”

Since God is the ultimate power in the world, it is fair to assume that the Rabbis also viewed God as the ultimate teacher, as well. Following the same logic, the Torah is also the ultimate teaching and, presumably, Moses is the ideal student. Following this logic, one can then argue that for the Rabbis, the precise moment at which God gives the Torah to Moses is *the* paradigmatic example of Jewish education and pedagogy in the history of the Jewish people.

Taking this logic a step further (and momentarily eschewing the initial focus of the gemara on the word עמד<sup>11</sup>) Rabbi Abbahu uses this seminal experience as a “teachable moment,” to suggest that just as God did not teach Moshe while being elevated above his student, so too should all teachers (i.e. transmitters of Torah, in its largest sense) not be elevated above their students, as well.

Now, one can understand and apply this teaching in a number of ways. The first, and

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<sup>11</sup> Technically speaking, in R' Abbahu's example, both the teacher and the students are sitting (the teacher on a couch and the student on the floor). This indicates that he has intuited that the real issue at hand (in terms of teaching in general, not reading Torah specifically) is not about standing and sitting per se, but rather about one party (the teacher) being in an elevated position vis-a-vis his/her student. Rashi, in his notes, supports and clarifies this understanding by suggesting that so long as both parties are on the same level (i.e. both on the couch, or both on the floor) that it is acceptable.

most practical, is that it is not effective for a teacher to be physically separated from their students. In its most obvious comparison, this can be applied to a common classroom configuration in which the teacher stands at the front of the room behind a desk, while the students sit in front, arrayed in rows of chairs. In this configuration, the students are generally considered to be “passive” learners, who receive knowledge only through instruction, rather than through lived experience. In the example from Deuteronomy, God makes a point to bring Moses up to stand next to him so that he is an *active* participant in the process of learning.

A second potential understanding of R’ Abbahu teaching focuses on the symbolic impact of having a teacher elevated above his/her students. Using the example of God and Moses, even though God has an unquestionably elevated status vis-a-vis Moses, God nonetheless chooses to bring Moses up to his level. Although it would have been God’s prerogative not to do so, God chooses to elevate and honor his student by teaching him on an equal plane, rather than (quite literally) talking down to him, which many teachers, to this day, are known to do.

The third potential reading of R’ Abbahu’s teaching (and consequently the one with the greatest potential impact, in my opinion) is more psychological in nature. It suggests that in order for one to teach effectively, it is necessary for the educator to figuratively “get on the same level” as their students. This means that at every level of education - from curriculum development, to lesson planning to classroom instruction and management - the teacher and curriculum developer(s) must endeavor to truly understand who their students are, where they are coming from and what, realistically, they are capable of.

This seems simple enough to achieve in principle but is, in fact, much harder to achieve

in practice. In an op-ed written as part of an online roundtable discussion entitled: “Growing Jewish Education in Challenging Times,” Jonathan Woocher (noted Jewish educator and Chief Ideas Officer of JESNA) writes that one of the realities and greatest shortfalls of contemporary Jewish education is that it is out-of-date and therefore out-of-touch with today's students, their lifestyles and, ultimately, their unique needs. He writes:

“The Jewish education that many of us have known, a Jewish education by and large created in and for another era characterized by different priorities and purposes, is not adequate to fulfill [its] potential and to seize the opportunities that we face today.”<sup>12</sup>

To frame it in the words of our tradition, we are still teaching our youth “couched” in the language and priorities of an era that has passed, and with a perspective and orientation that does not reflect an understanding or appreciation for the current generation of learners who sit, at a distance, on the proverbial “floor.”

Take, for example, the insistence on devoting the bulk of our resources (temporal, financial and human) toward the teaching of Hebrew in the majority of our Reform religious and Sunday schools. Students spend countless years and days and hours attempting to “master” a language, foreign in both alphabet and grammar, that realistically cannot be learned in 1-2 hours a week, and in a vacuum. This is not, by any means, to suggest that Hebrew is not important, or that it should not be taught in our religious schools, but is the emphasis placed on its teaching at the expense of other potential topics (e.g. social justice, Jewish ethics, Jewish history, Jewish culture) in the best interests of our students and, by extension, the Reform movement, writ

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<sup>12</sup> Woocher, Jonathan. "Growing Jewish Education in Challenging Times: Seizing the Opportunities. *EJewish Philanthropy*. EJewish Philanthropy, 7 June 2010. Web. <http://ejewishphilanthropy.com/growing-jewish-education-in-challenging-times-seizing-the-opportunities/>



large?

The (over) emphasis on Hebrew education at the expense of all other topics, seems to demonstrate the validity of Woocher's argument and the necessity for applying Rabbi Abbahu's teaching. Namely, that clergy, directors of religious schools, curriculum designers and other stakeholders are out-of-touch with the needs and realities of today's students and as a result continue to support educational modes and mechanisms that are of, and from, a different generation. The simple fact that Hebrew education still represents the *majority* of what is being taught in an average religious school only serves to demonstrate the gap of understanding that exists between educators and their students - which is *precisely* what R. Abbahu is cautioning against in the *gamara*.

Our Sages understood that just as The Creator of the universe was mindful of his student Moses, so too should we, as teachers of Torah in Israel, make every effort to reduce the physical, symbolic and psychological distances between us and our students. In so doing, we can elevate the level of significance Jewish education can and must play in their lives, and ensure that the chain of teaching that began on Mt. Sinai with God and Moses will continue on through this generation, and for generations to come.

Lesson #2: Do not Overburden the "Tzibbur"  
Tractate Megillah, 21a

One of the major concerns of the mishnah on 21a of Tractate Megillah, is the question of how many Torah readings should be done on different days of the week and on special occasions throughout the year. The mishnah is explicit that on Mondays and Thursdays and during Shabbat Mincha, there are to be three readings - and *only* three; no more, no less.

Although the gemara does not provide a specific rationale for why this is the case, Rashi offers an important clarification as to why there are no *additional* readings:

(ראשי ד"ה) אין מוסיפין עליהן - שלא יקשה לצבור, מפני שהן ימי מלאכה ...

“We do not add [additional Torah readings on Mondays and Thursdays, or read from the Prophets]: So as not to overburden the congregation, since those are work days ...”

Unlike on Shabbat or Yom Tov (when work is prohibited), on Mondays and Thursdays the public must go to work after hearing the Torah reading. Thus, adding additional readings would extend the service and put undue burden on the majority of the *tzibur* (community), who must get to work in order to make a living.

The Rabbis sensitivity to the lives and burdens of the “average” working person cannot, and should not, be taken for granted. The fact that they were willing to limit the amount of Torah that is read (and therefore *taught*) is not an insignificant accommodation. To limit the amount of Torah that is read solely out of concern for the burden it would place on those that have to work, demonstrates a willingness on the part of the rabbis to balance religious obligations with the secular obligations that the vast majority of the people faced being part of the workforce. I believe the time has come to apply this same understanding to our religious school students, as well.

Although there is considerable anecdotal data to serve as evidence of the overburdened lifestyle of many, if not most, of our young people, hard scientific data on the subject is virtually non-existent. However, even using anecdotal and observational methodologies alone, it seems fair to say that the lives of religious school students today are extremely hectic. With many activities (both primary and extra-curricular) vying for time and attention in a finite number of hours per week, the reality is that many of our students see religious school as a burdensome

obligation, rather than an opportunity for learning and growth. Thus, striking a balance between religious and secular obligations is an imperative now, more than ever.

As Jewish educators, we must believe in the inherent value, not just the *obligation* of Jewish learning. However, it is precisely our love of teaching Torah that can also blind us to the realities of life that many, if not most, of our students are struggling with. Again, Jonathan Woocher captures the essence of the problem when he writes:

“Most Jewish education today remains ‘provider,’ rather than ‘consumer’ centered, and the price we pay is that [a] growing numbers of Jews opt out of the system altogether or ‘settle’ for experiences that are less than fully satisfying.”<sup>13</sup>

To be clear, I do not believe that Woocher is suggesting the we, as “providers” of Jewish education, should compromise our principles, or subordinate ourselves to the needs of our student “consumers.” Nor do I think that Rashi or The Sages would either. However, I do think there is an essential teaching here that cannot be overlooked. Namely, that if we do not become more aware of, and more accepting of the realities of life for our *tzibur* - if we do not recognize that expecting students to come to the Temple to study on weekends, or weeknights after a full day of school (or sometimes even both!) - that we risk placing such an unreasonable burden upon our youth that they will indeed, as Woocher suggests, become so resentful of their Jewish education that they will leave altogether and never look back.

A few years ago, I was teaching a 7th grade class for a synagogue in Manhattan. One night, one of my more rambunctious students came in and was clearly not himself. He was

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<sup>13</sup> Woocher, Jonathan. "Growing Jewish Education in Challenging Times: Seizing the Opportunities. *EJewish Philanthropy*. EJewish Philanthropy, 7 June 2010. Web. [http://ejewishphilanthropy.com/growing-jewish-education-in-challenging-times-seizing-the-oppo](http://ejewishphilanthropy.com/growing-jewish-education-in-challenging-times-seizing-the-opportunities/)rtunities/

exhausted and lethargic and looked dead on his feet. I pulled him aside and asked what was up? He explained that because he had to come to religious school that night, he would not get to sleep until 2am, because he still had five hours of homework to do for his secular school when he got home. This, he went on to say, was not an abnormal occurrence. It was what happened to him *every* Wednesday night after religious school. He enjoyed religious school and wanted to be there, but he also could not ignore his other responsibilities. He confided in me that he was not sure he would be able to keep coming because he was just so exhausted.

Ultimately, he was left with no choice. There were no other options, no alternative opportunities, no asynchronous modes of learning. His choice was either to come to religious school on Wednesday nights, or get no Jewish education at all. My heart broke seeing the tears in his eyes, and I knew that as a result of this situation, he would likely grow up to resent not only the religious school, but the entire synagogue institution for putting him in this position.

Our sages understood that there were many demands placed on the *tzibur* of their time, and so they made necessary accommodations out of respect and understanding for their community. The pressures and responsibilities are even more demanding of our *tzibur* today, in our age, than they were in the age of the Rabbis - and yet, we do not seem to possess the same sensitivities as our forbears. We must educate our children - of this, there is no question. Talmud Torah is an unshakable imperative of our faith and our culture. But we must understand that asking too much of our students and placing too great a burden on them has the potential to achieve the opposite goal. It is therefore imperative that we learn from the wisdom of our sages and apply their teachings. And in-so-doing, look towards finding new and innovative ways to educate our students without overburdening them and without creating yet another generation

that resents their Jewish education.

### Lesson #3: Making Accommodations to Meet the Needs of All Learners

#### Tractate Megillah, 22a

In the mishnah found on page 21b, we learn that there must be four Torah readers on Rosh Hodesh. In the gemara that follows however, R. Ullah bar Rav raises a concern that if this is indeed the case, that there is a problem in terms of dividing up the four readings properly<sup>14</sup>. To find an answer, he sends an inquiry to Rava.

In response, Rava explains that he has not heard a definitive ruling regarding the Rosh Hodesh reading, but that he did hear a ruling elsewhere ( in Tractate Taanit 26a) that offers some insight into the dilemma. The mishnah speaks about a special occasion during which the Kohanim bless the people of Israel and Torah is read publically every day of the week.

The first reading of the week, done on Sunday, starts at the beginning of the Torah, with *parshat Bereishit*. The problem arises from the fact that the first paragraph of the reading has five verses, and therefore presents a challenge to divide up evenly between the first two readers. Since there is a requirement that there be a minimum of three verses read by each reader, it is impossible to split a paragraph of five verses between two.

Rav and Shmuel offers two solutions to the problem. Rav says that the second reader should “jump back” (דילג) and re-read the last verse read by the first reader (i.e. verse 3). Shmuel argues the same verse should be split (פוסק) in two, allowing the first reader to read the first half of verse 3 (thereby giving them the necessary three verses) and the second reader who

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<sup>14</sup> Due to considerations for other general halachic rules concerning Torah readings (e.g. minimum number of verses in a Torah reading; minimum verses read or left to be read in a paragraph)

follows to begin with the second half of that verse, which would allow them to read the necessary three verses, as well.

The gemara then raises an important question: “Why does Rav not agree with Shmuel [and simply split verse three in half]?” The gemara explains, “[Rav] holds that any verse which Moses did not divide, we may not divide [either].” In other words, it is not proper to assume that anyone (even a great and respected teacher such as Shmuel) should be allowed to split verses of Torah, even to address a difficulty.

Naturally, the next question the gemara asks is, if this is indeed the case, then how can Shmuel suggest that splitting a verse is indeed possible? The gemara then explains that it was the practice of Shmuel (with the permission of his teacher R. Chanina, who is identified as an expert in the laws concerning the Torah), to split Torah verses, but *only* for the purpose of teaching school children. According to Rashi<sup>15</sup> the reason for this special allowance was that for school children, especially young ones, it was too hard to remember an entire verse, and therefore special accommodations (i.e. splitting up long verses) were needed in order to help them learn.

Although one might pass-over this teaching without giving it much thought, I would argue it contains a very significant insight that is extremely relevant in contemporary Jewish educational settings. As Rav points out, the concept of splitting a verse of Torah in two is not something one can or should do lightly. It is only done in order to accommodate the needs of a specific group of learners, namely “תינוקות” (children). However, that very fact that the Rabbis were willing to do something, that in any other circumstance would be anathema, only out of

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<sup>15</sup> See Tractate Tannit 27b, ד"ה צער גדול

understanding and empathy for their students teaches us a very valuable lesson about meeting the needs of *all* learners.

This is especially important when we think about those children in our community with special learning needs. Although there are now a few excellent examples of a growing sensitivity for special needs programs in Jewish education, there are still many religious school programs that have not made the necessary adjustments and accommodations to effectively and compassionately meet the needs of learners who may otherwise find challenges to succeeding in standard learning environments.

In New York City, one new and innovative day school is providing an example of how we, in the synagogue world, might approach teaching our special-needs students. It is called the Shefa School and will be opening its doors for the first time, this coming fall. Although it is a specialized day school, there are still many lessons that can be learned from their approach to Jewish education that can be applied, even in a religious school setting. According to their mission statement, the goal of Shefa is to:

“Prioritize each child's learning needs by providing excellent, individualized, research-based instruction to foster academic, social, and emotional competence and confidence ... [and to] empower students to become active joyful lifelong learners, critical thinkers, kind and responsible individuals, and contributing members of the Jewish community and the broader world.”<sup>16</sup>

The key to this statement is that they prioritize the learning needs of *each* child. That means they do not use the one-size-fits-all approach that so often defines our religious schools.

Furthermore, they provide each of their students the individualized attention they need in order to help each child build a sense of self-confidence and self-worth.

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.shefaschool.org/Pages/About-Shefa>

This seems like a *peshita* (obvious) statement, but the reality is that most special-needs students in religious schools are still put in a position where they must learn the same material at the same pace as their classmates. This invariably has a negative effect on the child's confidence and often results in embarrassing them and distancing them from their fellow students.

Obviously, not every religious school has the resources (financial or human) to create a situation where every child receives the care and attention experienced by the students at the Shefa School. However, it can and must be our model; it must be the "golden ring" we reach for. We must be willing to go to great lengths, just as R. Shmuel did with his students, to make every accommodation necessary to ensure that our students are being fully supported in their learning.

Our Sages understood that there are times when we, as Jewish educators, need to be aware of the limitations of our students and to make adjustments to the way we teach in order to meet their special needs. The ultimate goal of teaching is to help students learn. If we are not willing or able to make every effort to help *all* - not just *some* - of our students, then we have ultimately failed in our sacred charge. The Sages of our tradition have given us a roadmap for success, it is now up to us to follow it.

### Conclusions

The challenges facing contemporary Jewish education and Jewish educators are indeed immense. And certainly, the state of everything from our curriculum development to our instruction, to our methods of delivering content are in desperate need of innovation. However, it is essential that we, as dedicated Jewish educators, understand that there is much in our own history and traditions that can and must play an important role in how we think about the future



of Jewish education.

Although there is much we can learn from educators outside of the Jewish world, and although there are many exciting possibilities available to us through the use of new technologies, it is also essential that we look back - back to the wisdom and experience of our ancestors - in order to help us move forward, and to train the next generation of Jewish leaders and teachers, as well.

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# The Blind Man & The Torch

*Babylonian Talmud, Masechet Megillah 24b*

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**Age:** 6th Grade (can be adapted to younger and older children as well)

**Class Time:** 45 minutes

## Enduring Understanding

- The Talmud exemplifies the Jewish imperative to question, debate and deduce what it means to be Jewish and how we might go about living a meaningful Jewish life.

## Essential Questions

- ☐ Does one need to *directly* benefit from something in order to say a berakha?
- ☐ Is it possible that there are berakhot in Judaism that can be said by some people and not others?
- ☐ What do we learn about the Rabbis of the Talmud and the role they play in shaping Judaism and Jewish practice from studying this *Sugya*?

## Goals

- To introduce learners to the (basics) of Talmud and the role it has played in shaping Judaism, Jewish culture and Jewish practice.
- To introduce learners to the concept of the *Machloket* in the Talmud
- To ask learners to confront a complicated and nuanced question about Jewish practice and to derive answers through an engagement with the Talmud

## Objectives

*By the end of the lesson, students should be able to ...*

- ★ **Define** the following: *Talmud, Sugya, Machloket, Berakha Levatala, Rashi, Tosafot*
- ★ **Recall** the story of the blind man and the torch (i.e. R. Yosse's story)
- ★ **Explain** the function of commentary (Rashi, Tosafot) in the Talmud
- ★ **Provide** an example of a *Berakha Levatala*
- ★ **Produce** commentary on a passage from the Talmud
- ★ **Summarize** and **Analyze** the arguments of R. Yehudah and the Sages
- ★ **Assess** which argument (R. Yehudah or the Sages) they agree with, and **Describe** why

## Timeline

- ❖ Set Induction (2min)
- ❖ Brief Intro to Talmud and Commentaries (10min)
- ❖ R. Yosse's Story (The Blind Man and the Torch) (5min)

- ❖ Students Create Commentaries on the Talmudic Material (15min)
- ❖ Sharing and Discussion (10min)
- ❖ Closure (3min)

## **Resources**

1. Source Sheet
2. A Talmud (or a copy of a page of talmud)
3. Pens and Paper
4. Black/Whiteboard and/or Large Poster Board with the R. Yosse Story attached

## **Activities**

### Set Induction

Ask the students to think about the following question, but not to respond out loud: *Should you have to directly benefit from something in order to say a blessing over it? For example, should you need to be able to smell in order to say the blessing over the spices during Havdalah?*

### Brief Intro to Talmud and Commentaries

Explain to the learners that in order to help answer the question you just posed during the set induction, we are going to take a look at something from the Talmud.

Assuming that some (if not most) of your learners will not know much (if anything) about the Talmud, take the first few minutes of the session to provide them with the basics of what it is, when it was compiled and by whom, and what function it has/ continues to play in Judaism and Jewish practice.

### R. Yosse's Story (The Blind Man and the Torch)

Read the class the section of the *sugya* from *Megillah 24b* (source sheet provided)

### Students Create Commentaries on the Talmudic Material

Show the students a page of Talmud (ideally bring in an actual Talmud and turn to the page that is being studied) and then (briefly) explain to them about the different commentaries (Rashi and Tosafot) that surround the *sugya*.

Now hand out pens and paper and explain that *they* (the learners) will now become the commentators and that each of them will have a chance to answer the question: *Should someone who is blind be able to say the Yotzer Or Blessing? (Why/Why not?)*

### Sharing and Discussion

*Take the large piece of posterboard with the R. Yosse story attached and place it on a wall, or blackboard, or some other location with enough space around it to place the student's commentaries. The goal is to place their comments around the core text, so as to create you own class's version of a page of Talmud with the commentaries surrounding the Sugya. It should look something like this:*

Student's Commentary	Student's Commentary	Student's Commentary
Student's Commentary	Core Text R. Yosse's Story	Student's Commentary
Student's Commentary	Student's Commentary	Student's Commentary

Ask each student to go around and share their answers to the question and to describe how they came to their answers. After they have presented their commentary, ask them to go up to the board and attach their commentary onto the perimeter of the text.

### Closure

Go around the room and ask every learner to share something that they thought before class, that they now thinking differently about after studying the Talmud text from *Megillah*.

## Source Sheets

*\*Note\* Since the original Talmud text may be too advanced to study with learners who are not familiar with its organization and rhetorical style, I have provided both an accurate translation and an edited, paraphrased translation.*

### ***Babylonian Talmud, Masechet Megillah 24b (Schottenstein Translation)***

Mishnah: ... A blind man may divide the shema and serve as a translator. But R' Yehudah said: Anyone who has not seen light in their lifetime may not divide the Shema (i.e. say the blessings before and after the Shema)

Gamara: It was taught in baraita: The sages said to R. Yehudah: Many have sought to expound on the Merkavah [although] they have never seen it. And R. Yehudah [responded]: There [in terms of the Merkavah] understanding is dependent on the mind, and [it is therefore possible] to understand it by focusing the mind. Here [in the case of a blind person who cannot say the berakha on the luminaries (i.e. Yotzer Or), it is a question of whether] one benefits (i.e. from seeing the light), [and a blind person] does not benefit [from it, because he cannot see].

But the Sages [held that a blind person could say the blessing of Yotzer Or and is therefore permitted to divide the shemah] because he [does in fact benefit], as Rabbi Yose [taught]: For it was taught in a baraita: Rabbi Yosi said: “All the days of my life, I have been troubled by the verse [from Deut 28:29] that says ‘*And you will grope at noonday as the blind man gropes in darkness.*’ I wondered, what is the difference [for a blind person] between darkness and light?”

That was until I witnessed the following happen: One time, I was walking in the darkness of nighttime, and I saw a blind person who was walking on the road with a torch in his hand. I said to him: “My son, what is a torch to you?” He said to me: Whenever the torch is in my hand, people see me and save me from ditches, thorns and briars.

### ***Babylonian Talmud, Masechet Megillah 24b (Paraphrased Version)***

There was a disagreement between some Rabbis that was recorded in the Mishnah: Some Rabbis said it was permissible for a person who is blind to say the *Yotzer Or* prayer (the prayer that thanks God for creating light), but Rabbi Yehudah said that anyone who has not seen light in their lifetime, should not be permitted to recite the *Yotzer Or* berakha.

Since the Mishnah did not resolve the disagreement, that Rabbis of the Gemara tried to move the conversation forward. They related a conversation (from a *baraita*) in which the Sages challenged Rabbi Yehuda's position. They said to him: “R. Yehudah, what about the *Merkavah* (God’s chariot) that is mentioned in the book of Ezekiel? Many have talked a great deal about it and described what it looks like, even though they have never seen it! So why can’t a blind person say the *Yotzer Or* blessing, even if they have not seen light in their lifetime?!”

Rabbi Yehudah responded: In the case of the *Merkavah*, understanding it and talking about it is entirely dependant on the mind, because no one that has ever lived (except for Ezekiel) has seen it with their own eyes. But in the case of the blind person, it is not a question of being able to describe what light is - it is a question of benefit. In other words, *berakhot* like *Yotzer Or* are about thanking God for things we benefit from. Since we can see (and therefore benefit) from light, we say the *berakha*. But since a blind person (who has never seen light in his/her life) has never directly benefited from light, they are not permitted to say the *berakha*.

But the Mishnah clearly says that at least some of the Rabbis said it was permissible. How is this so? Because a blind person does in fact benefit from light. How do we know this? Rabbi Yose offers us an answer, with the following story: Rabbi Yose once taught: “All the days of my life, I was confused by the verse from Deuteronomy 28:29, which states: ‘*And you will grope around at noonday, as the blind man gropes around in the darkness.*’ I wondered to myself - why would a blind person grope any more in the darkness than in the light!? That was until I was walking down the street in the middle of the night when and I saw in the distance a blind man who was walking with a Torch in his hand. I called out to him and said: ‘Sir! Why are you carrying a torch in your hand? You are blind yes? So why would the light from the torch help you to see? The man replied: ‘You are correct, the Torch does not help me to see. But, since I am carrying the torch, people are able to see me and then they come over to help me avoid all of the thorns, briars and ditches that I might otherwise have run into and hurt myself.’”

Thus, Rabbi Yose’s story shows that a person does not have to *directly* benefit from something in order to still derive some benefit from it. And therefore, Rabbi Yose and the sages held that a blind person should indeed say the *berakha* of *Yotzer Or*, since they too benefit from light.

# Censoring the Torah?! Hubris or Common Sense?

*Babylonian Talmud, Masechet Megillah 25a*

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**Age:** Adult

**Class Time:** 1hour 30min

## Enduring Understanding.

- The Talmud exemplifies the Jewish imperative to question, debate and deduce what it means to be Jewish and how we might go about living a meaningful Jewish life.

## Essential Questions

- ❑ What are the theological implications of the Rabbis censoring and/or editing material from the Tanakh?
- ❑ What do we learn about the Rabbis of the Talmud and the role they play in shaping Judaism and Jewish practice from studying this *Sugya*?

## Goals

- To introduce learners to the (basics) of Talmud and the role it has played in shaping Judaism, Jewish culture and Jewish practice.
- To familiarize learners with the basic organization of the Talmud (i.e. *Masechtot*, *Sugyot*, *Mishna and Gemara*)
- To provide an opportunity for learners to engage with a Talmudic *Sugya* (in English) and to analyze the material contained therein.

## Objectives

*By the end of the lesson, students should be able to ...*

- ★ **Define** the words Talmud, Mishna, Gemara, Masechet, Sugya, Meturgeman, Aramaic
- ★ **Explain** the relationship between Mishnah and Gemara
- ★ **Describe** the role of the Meturgeman
- ★ **Debate** why the Rabbis felt the need to read and translate some sections of the Torah and not others
- ★ **Evaluate** the Rabbis decisions about which material in the Tanakh is to be censored and/or edited
- ★ **Support** and/or **Refute** the Rabbi's decisions vis-a-vis which material is to be censored and/or edited
- ★ **Discuss** the theological implications of censoring and/or editing the Tanakh

## Timeline

- ❖ Set Induction (2min)
- ❖ Brief Intro to Talmud (15min)
- ❖ Hevruta and Group Discussion Part 1 (20min)
- ❖ Hevruta and Group Discussion Part 2 (20min)
- ❖ Part 3 and Group Discussion (20min)
- ❖ Closure (3min)

## Resources

1. Source Sheets (English translations of *Tractate Megillah* 25a)
2. Tanakhs
3. Pens and Paper

## Activity Instructions

### Set Induction

Ask the learners the following question: *Do you think there is censorship in Judaism?*

Ask them to respond with only: *Yes, No, Maybe, or I don't know*

### Brief Intro to Talmud

Assuming that some (if not most) of your learners will not know much (if anything) about the Talmud, take the first few minutes of the session to provide them with the basics of what it is, when it was compiled and by whom, and what function it has/ continues to play in Judaism and Jewish practice. It is also important for the purposes of this lesson to explain the role of the Meturgeman and the need for translation of Torah into Aramaic during the Talmudic era.

### Hevruta and Group Discussion Part 1

*The Sugya is divided into three distinct sections. The first section lists sections of the Torah (mostly unseemly ones) which are read and translated. The second lists sections of the Torah which are read and NOT translated. And the third lists a number of particularly vulgar words which are altered when read in public to be less vulgar. For the first two sections, time will be given for hevruta study and a group discussion based around the guiding questions provided. The final section will be introduced by the instructor, rather than done in Hevruta first. The reason for this is that the material is too advanced (based on an advanced knowledge of Hebrew) for the learners, but the core concept (namely, the editing of Torah text) is worth discussing. It is also important, for the sake of the conversation, to remind learners that most people living during the time*



*of the Talmud did not speak Hebrew - only Aramaic, and so the only way they would be able to understand a public Torah reading would be if it was translated for them.*

To begin with, divide the class into hevruta and hand each group copies of Source Sheet #1. Ask them to work through the *sugya*, and as they do, to look up the Biblical references in the Tanakhs that are provided. Once they have moved through the material they should then consider the guiding questions

### Hevruta and Group Discussion Part 2

Repeat steps mentioned above, this time with source sheet #2.

### Part 3 and Group Discussion

Because this last section of material is likely too challenging for learners to work through on their own, the instructor should introduce the material.

Use this material as an entre to opening up a wider conversation about censorship, based around the following guiding questions:

- Did anything surprise you about this Sugya? If so, why was it so surprising?
- Did there seem to be any rhyme or reason to the Rabbis decisions vis-a-vis what was censored and what was not?
- Were there any things left off the lists that you would have included/excluded? Why?
- Do you feel like the Rabbis made compelling arguments to support their assertions? If so, provide an example. If not, what might you suggest as a compelling rationale?
- Do you agree with the Rabbis that these (or other sections) of the Torah should be censored?
- How does the idea of censorship of the Torah make you feel? Does it feel like a Jewish thing to do? How so/how not?

### Closure

To close, do a “Think, Pair, Share” exercise, in which each person turns to the person sitting next to them and shares one new thing that they learned in the class. Then go around the room and provide an opportunity to (briefly) share insights, remaining questions and or reactions to the class.

Source Sheet #1  
***Babylonian Talmud, Masechet Megillah 25a***

Mishnah: [The episode of] Reuven is read but NOT translated [into Aramaic]. The story of Tamar is read and translated. The first story of the [Golden] Calf is read and translated, but the second one is read but NOT translated. The priestly blessing and the story of David and Amnon [these] are read but NOT translated. We do not read the merkavah as a haftorah - but R. Yehudah permits it. R. Eliezer said: we do not read [from Ezekiel ch 16] “make known to Jerusalem” for maftir. (b/c it talks about all the abominations that were being done in Jerusalem)

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Gemara: The rabbis taught in a berita: There are some [sections of the Torah] we read and translate, and there are some that we read but do not translate, and there are some that we do not read and do not translate. These [are the ones that are] read and translated:

The story of creation (beginning of Genesis) is read and translated. This is obvious! [No, it is not obvious, because if we do not translate the story] someone might ask: “‘what is above and what is below’” and ‘what was before and what will be after?’” [Thus the beritha] comes to teach us [that it should in fact be translated as well as read].

The story of Lot (Gen 19:31-36) and his two daughters is read and translated. This is obvious! [No, it is not obvious], because someone might say [we should not translate it out of] concern [that it might damage the] honor of Abraham”, [thus the berita] comes to teach us [that it should in fact be translated].

The story of Tamar and Judah (Gen ch. 38) is read and translated. This is obvious! [No, it is not obvious], because someone might say [we should not translate it out of] concern [that it might damage the] honor of Judah.” [Thus the berita] comes to teach us [that it should in fact be translated] for it is [actually a] praise [of Judah] since he confessed [his sin].

The first story of the calf (Exodus 32:22-24) is read and translated. This is obvious! [No, it is not obvious], because someone might say [we should not translate it out of] concern [that it might damage the] honor of Israel”, [thus the berita] comes to teach us [that it should in fact be translated] because it is certainly agreeable to them [if it is translated] because it will be an atonement for them. (i.e. hearing it read is a form of atonement)

The [chapters] on curses (Leviticus 26) and Blessings (Leviticus 27) are read and translated. This is obvious! [No, it is not obvious], because someone might say [we should not translate it out of] concern that perhaps the congregation will become disheartened, [thus the berita] comes to teach us [that it should in fact be translated].

[The various sections of the Torah regarding] warnings and punishments are read and translated. This is obvious! [No, it is not obvious], because someone might say [we should not translate them out of] concern that people will come to observe [the mitzvot] out of fear” [instead of love], and [thus the berita] comes to teach us [that it should in fact be translated]:

The story of Amnon and Tamar (II Sam 13) [story of Avshalom] is read and translated. This is obvious! [No, it is not obvious], because someone might say [we should not translate it out of] concern [that it might damage the] honor of David”, [thus the berita] comes to teach us [that it should in fact be translated].

The story of the concubine in Givah (Judges ch19) is read and translated. This is obvious! [No, it is not obvious], because someone might say [we should not translate it out of] concern [that it might damage the] honor of [the tribe] of Benjamin”, [thus the berita] comes to teach us [that it should in fact be translated].

[Ezekiel 16:2]: “Make known to Jerusalem her abominations” is read and translated. This is obvious! This excludes R. Eliezer’s [opinion that it is prohibited to read it]. For it was taught in a baraita: There was once a certain man who was reading before R. Eliezer [Ezekiel 16:2] “Make known to Jerusalem her abominations” [and] He [R. Eliezer] said to him: before you investigate the abominations of Jerusalem, Go and investigate the abominations of your mother! [Sure enough] they checked after him and found in him a blemish of descent.

### **Guiding Questions**

1. Why are the Rabbis so concerned with these Torah passages being translated into Aramaic?
2. Given that many (if not most) of these passages contain stories that reflect poorly on major Biblical characters, why do you think the Rabbis insisted that they be translated, as well as read?
3. Do you agree with the Rabbis decisions to translate these stories so that everyone would understand them?
4. Are there any sections of the Torah that are listed in the gemara that are not listed in the mishnah? Why do you think they were added?
5. What do we learn about the Rabbis and their perspective on Torah from this part of the *sugya*?

Source Sheet #2  
***Babylonian Talmud, Masechet Megillah 25a***

Mishnah: [The episode of] Reuven is read but NOT translated [into Aramaic]. The story of Tamar is read and translated. The first story of the [Golden] Calf is read and translated, but the second one is read but NOT translated. The priestly blessing and the story of David and Amnon [these] are read but NOT translated. We do not read the merkavah as a haftarah - but R. Yehudah permits it. R. Eliezer said: we do not read [from Ezekiel ch 16] “make known to Jerusalem” for maftir. (b/c it talks about all the abominations that were being done in Jerusalem)

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Gemara: These [are the Torah readings] that are read but NOT translated:

The story of Reuven (is read but not translated). An incident occurred when R. Haninah b. Gamliel went to Kabul and the Hazan (Cantor) of the synagogue was reading [the verse from the story of Reuven in Genesis 35] “And it came to pass when Israel dwelled” and he said to the translator to stop and only [read] the last [part of the verse]. And the sages praised him.

The second story of the Golden calf is read but not translated. Which is the second story of the calf? From [Exodus 32:21 that begins] “And mooses said” until [Exodus 32:25, which begins with] “and mooses saw.” It was taught in a baraita: R. Shimon ben eliezer said: “a person should always be careful with his answers” - [for we learn from] the reply with which aaron answered Moshe, the subverters acted brazenly, as it says (in Exodus 32:24): “And I threw it into the fire and out came this calf.”

The Priestly blessing (Num 6:24-27) is read but not translated. What is the reason? Because it is written (in Numbers 6:26) “*Yissah*” [and thus people would conclude that God shows favoritism to Israel]

The story of David and Amnon is read but not translated. But you said [earlier] that it is to be read AND translated! There is no difficulty. This ruling is for] where it is written “Amnon son of David” and that [ruling above is for] where it is written just Amnon (i.e. no mention of David, therefore no threat to his honor).

**Guiding Questions**

1. Why are the Rabbis so concerned with these Torah passages being translated into Aramaic?
2. Do the Rabbis offer an explanation for why these passages and not others are not

translated? If so, do you find their argument(s) compelling? How so/how not?

3. Is there anything that connects these passages together, or are each of them unique?
4. Are there any sections of the Torah that are listed in the gemara that are not listed in the mishnah? Why do you think they were added?
5. Are there any other Torah stories you think should be on this list?
6. What do we learn about the Rabbis and their perspective on Torah from this part of the *sugya*?

### Source Sheet #3

#### ***Babylonian Talmud, Masechet Megillah 25a***

The rabbis taught in a baraita: All verses that are written in the Torah as a disgrace, are read as a praise.

For Example:

- ❖ From Deut 28: *Yishgalena* (have sex with) is read *Yishcavenah* (lie with)
- ❖ From Deut 28: *Bapolim* is read *Batchorim*: Rashi explains that both mean anus, but one is less bad.
- ❖ From II Kings 6: *Chiryonim* is read *Divyoni*: A nicer way of saying Dove feces)
- ❖ From II Kings 18: “To eat *Chorayhem* and to drink *Meimei Shineiham*” is read “To Eat *Tzoasam* and to drink *Meimei Ragleiham*”: A less explicit way of saying people ate poop and drank diarrhea)
- ❖ From II Kings 10: *Lemocharaot* we read *Lemotzaot*: Another less explicit way of saying poop)

#### **Guiding Questions**

- Did anything surprise you about this Sugya overall? If so, why was it so surprising?
- Did there seem to be any rhyme or reason to the Rabbis decisions vis-a-vis what was censored and what was not?
- Were there any things left off the lists that you would have included/excluded? Why?
- Do you feel like the Rabbis made compelling arguments to support their assertions? If so, provide an example. If not, what might you suggest as a compelling rationale?
- Do you agree with the Rabbis that these (or other sections) of the Torah should be censored?
- How does the idea of censorship of the Torah make you feel? Does it feel like a Jewish thing to do? How so/how not?

# What Makes an Object *Kadosh*?

*Babylonian Talmud, Masechet Megillah 25b-26b*

**Age:** Family - Adults and Children K-2nd grade (Can be adapted for other age groups)

**Class Time:** ~1 hour

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## Enduring Understanding

- The Talmud exemplifies the Jewish imperative to question, debate and deduce what it means to be Jewish and how we might go about living a meaningful Jewish life.

## Essential Questions

- ☐ What makes an object sacred?
- ☐ What makes one object more sacred than another?
- ☐ What are the most sacred objects in my life and why are they sacred to me?
- ☐ What do we learn about the Rabbis of the Talmud and the role they play in shaping Judaism and Jewish practice from studying this *Sugya*?

## Goals

- To introduce learners to the (basics) of Talmud and the role it has played in shaping Judaism, Jewish culture and Jewish practice.
- To introduce learners to the concept of “*ma’alin ba’kodesh v’ein moridin*” (We go up in matters of holiness and not down)
- To help learners determine which objects are most “sacred” in their lives and explain why

## Objectives

*By the end of the lesson, students should be able to ...*

<u>Adults</u>	<u>Children</u>
<b>Define</b> the words: Talmud, Mishna, Gemara, Masechet, Sugya, Kadosh, Hevruta	<b>Define</b> the word Kadosh
<b>Explain</b> the relationship between Mishnah and Gemara	<b>Explain</b> (in very basic terms) what it means for something to be “Kadosh” (sacred)
<b>Explain</b> the concept of “ <i>ma’alin ba’kodesh v’ein moridin</i> ”	<b>Create</b> a work of art that depicts objects that they think are Kadosh (sacred)

<b>Describe</b> what the word “sacred” (Kadosh) means to them	<b>Discuss</b> why they selected the specific objects and why they think they are “sacred”
<b>Question</b> the logic of the Rabbis and their ordering of “sacred” objects in the Talmud	<b>Compare and Contrast</b> their list of “sacred” objects to others in the class
<b>Compose</b> a list of both Jewish and secular “sacred” objects	
<b>Compare and Contrast</b> their list of “sacred” objects to others in the class	

### Timeline

<u>Adults</u>	<u>Children</u>
Set induction (5min)	Set induction (5min)
(Brief) intro to Talmud (10min)	What is Kadosh? (10min)
Introducing the Mishnah and Hevruta Study of Gemara (20min)	Art Project (20min)
Group Discussion (10min)	Group Discussion (10min)
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Together</u></p> <p>Group Discussion (10min) Group Closure (5min)</p>	

### Resources

<u>Adults</u>	<u>Children</u>
“Sacred Object” slide-show	“Sacred Object” slide-show
Source Sheets	Art supplies (paper, markers, watercolors, pencils, etc...)



## Activities

<u>Adults</u>	<u>Children</u>
<p><u>Set Induction</u></p> <p>Explain the the learners that you are going to be showing them a slide-show with pictures of different objects. Ask them to raise their hands whenever they see an image of an object that they consider to be “sacred” (Kadosh).</p>	<p><u>Set Induction</u></p> <p>Begin by asking the learners: <i>What do you think the word “sacred” means?</i></p>
<p><u>(Brief) intro to Talmud</u></p> <p>Assuming that some (if not most) of your learners will not know much (if anything) about the Talmud, take the first few minutes of the session to provide them with the basics of what it is, when it was compiled and by whom, and what function it has/ continues to play in Judaism and Jewish practice.</p>	<p><u>What is Kadosh?</u></p> <p>Explain that the Hebrew word for “sacred” is <i>Kadosh</i> and explain where the idea of <i>Kadosh</i> in Judaism comes from. Follow this by asking if they think an object can be “sacred” and if so, what makes that object “sacred?”</p> <p>Show them the slide-show and ask them to raise their hands whenever they see an image of an object that they consider to be Kadosh. Afterwards, ask the learners what made some of the objects in the slide-show <i>Kadosh</i> and others not?</p>
<p><u>Introducing the Mishnah and Hevruta Study of Gemara</u></p> <p>Begin by reading aloud (but not handing out) the mishnah beginning on 25b (<b>Teacher Resource #1</b>). After you have read the Mishnah out loud, pose the following questions to the group: <i>What do you think is the underlying point of what the Rabbis are trying to teach here? What is the logic behind the way they have ordered these objects?</i> Give them a chance to respond and only after explain to them the concept of “<i>ma’alin ba’kodesh v’ein moridin</i>”</p> <p>Afterwards, break the learners up into Hevruta and hand out <b>Source Sheet #1</b> and ask them to read through the selections from the sugya and to consider the guiding questions that follow.</p>	<p><u>Art Project</u></p> <p>Provide learners with all manner of art supplies and ask them to draw/paint a picture that depicts objects that they think are Kadosh (sacred) to them (can be both Jewish objects and secular objects)</p>

<p><u>Group Discussion</u></p> <p>When the group comes back together, first give them an opportunity to share some reactions and or responses to the guiding questions. The intent of the lesson is to get them thinking about what makes an object “sacred” to the Jewish people and what makes an object “sacred” to them, as individuals.</p>	<p><u>Group Discussion</u></p> <p>Give each learner a chance to show the rest of the class their art projects and to explain why the objects they decided to paint are <i>Kadosh</i> to them.</p>
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<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Together (ask parents to sit with their children)</u></p> <p><u>Group Discussion</u></p> <p>Use the following guiding questions to help lead the group discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does the word “Kadosh” mean to you?</li> <li>• Does an object have to be a Jewish object (i.e. Torah) for it to be Kadosh? How so/how not?</li> <li>• Can an object ever lose its holiness? Can an object that was not originally sacred become sacred? How so?</li> <li>• What do we need to do to make sure we take care of the sacred objects in our lives?</li> </ul> <p><u>Group Closure</u></p> <p>Go around the room and ask person to share one new thing that they learned.</p>
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Teacher Resource #1

***Babylonian Talmud, Masechet Megillah 25b-26a***

**Mishnah:** If the townsfolk were to sell the town square, they may purchase [only] a synagogue with the proceeds. [If they sell] the synagogue, they may purchase [only] an ark. [If they sell] an ark, they may purchase [only] wrappings [for the Torah]. [If they sell] wrappings, they may purchase [only] books (i.e. the other books of the Tanakh - The Prophets and Writings). [If they sell] the (sacred) books, they may purchase [only] a Torah scroll.

BUT, if they sell a Torah - they may NOT purchase (sacred) books [with the proceeds]. [If they sell] the (sacred) books, they may NOT purchase wrappings. [If they sell] wrappings, they may NOT purchase an ark. [If they sell] the ark, they may NOT purchase a synagogue. [If they sell] the synagogue, they may NOT purchase the town square [with the proceeds]. And such [is the law] for [any] leftover [proceeds from the sale of something sacred].

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Source Sheet  
*Babylonian Talmud, Masechet Megillah 25b-26b*<sup>17</sup>

**Mishnah:** If the townsfolk were to sell the town square, they may purchase [only] a synagogue with the proceeds. [If they sell] the synagogue, they may purchase [only] an ark. [If they sell] an ark, they may purchase [only] wrappings [for the Torah]. [If they sell] wrappings, they may purchase [only] books (i.e. the other books of the Tanakh - The Prophets and Writings). [If they sell] the (sacred) books, they may purchase [only] a Torah scroll.

BUT, if they sell a Torah - they may NOT purchase (sacred) books [with the proceeds]. [If they sell] the (sacred) books, they may NOT purchase wrappings. [If they sell] wrappings, they may NOT purchase an ark. [If they sell] the ark, they may NOT purchase a synagogue. [If they sell] the synagogue, they may NOT purchase the town square [with the proceeds]. And such [is the law] for [any] leftover [proceeds from the sale of something sacred].

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**Gemara:** The Rabbis taught in a Baraitha: Objects used for [the performance of a] mitzvah may be discarded [after they have been used up]. [But] objects [which are] accessory to sacred [items] must be hidden [and not put to another use].

And these are the objects used for a Mitzvah [and which may be discarded after they can no longer be used]: A Succah, Lulav, Shofar, Tzitzit. And these are objects [which are] accessory to sacred (Kadosh) items [which may not be discarded after they are used]: Sacks [that hold] sacred books, Tefillin and Mezuzot; a case for a Torah school; a case for Tefillin; and a [tefillin] straps.

[Expounding on this] Rava said: At first I assumed the lectern [on which the Torah scroll is placed while read in public] is [merely] an accessory of an accessory [of a sacred item] (since the Torah is placed on a coverlet which is then placed on top of the lectern) - and [therefore] it is permissible [to use the lectern for non-sacred purposes]. [But] since I observed that [sometimes] they place the Torah school [directly on the lectern] I think that [the lectern itself] is an accessory of a sacred [item] - and [therefore] it is prohibited [to use it for non-sacred purposes].

And Rava [also] said: At first I assumed [that] the curtain [which lines the inside of the ark] is an accessory of an accessory (the Ark) of a sacred item. [But] since I observed that [sometimes]

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<sup>17</sup> Translation adapted from *Tractate Megillah: The Gemara: The Classic Vilna Edition, with an Annotated, Interpretive Elucidation*. Zlotowitz, Gedaliah, and Hersch Goldwurm. Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1991. Print.

they bend [the curtain] under and place the Torah scroll on it, I think that [it must be] an accessory of a sacred item - and [therefore it is] prohibited to use it for non-sacred purposes.

And Rava [also] said: “An ark [used to house a Torah] which fell apart, it is permissible to make [from it] a smaller Ark, [but to make] a lectern [from it] is not permitted [because a lectern has less sanctity than an ark].

And Rava [also] said: A curtain [which lines a Torah ark] that has become worn - to make a covering for Torah scrolls from it is permissible [because the covering possesses the same degree of sanctity as a curtain, per the statement above], but [to make from it a covering] for a *Chumash* (A single book of the Torah) is prohibited.

And Rava [also] said: Sacks [used] for single *Chumashim* (single books of the Torah) and cases for Torah schools are [considered] accessories of sacred [items] and must be hidden. This is obvious! [Why was it necessary for Rava to teach it]? [Were it not for his teaching] you could have argued [that] these [sacks and cases] were not made for the honor [of the scrolls they house], rather, they were made merely to safeguard [the scrolls].

### Guiding Questions

- Looking at the mishnah, is there anything on this list that seems out of place (i.e. not particularly “sacred”)? Does the way the Rabbis ordered the list make sense to you? How so/how not?
- Based on what you have learned from the mishnah and the gemara, what do the Rabbis consider to be the necessary characteristics of a sacred (Kadosh) object?
- Given what Rava says about the lectern, do you think it is possible for any object that comes into contact with something sacred (i.e. a Torah scroll), even for a few moments to attain a sacred status?
- Why do you think a *chumash* is considered less sacred than a full Torah scroll? What does this teach us about the nature of sacredness, according to the Rabbis?
- What lesson is Rava trying to teach in the last paragraph (which the Rabbis suggest might be obvious)? How does this lesson expand our understanding of what a sacred object is?

***Kadosh or Not Kadosh?***

***Which of These Objects  
or Places  
are Sacred to You?***

## Is A Torah a Sacred Object?



## What About A Yad?





**Or a Kippah?**



**Or a Talit?**



## Or a Torah Covering?



## Or a Torah Ark?





## What About a Whole Synagogue?



## Or The Kotel in Jerusalem?





## Or Maybe Katz's Deli In New York?



## Or Even Yankee Stadium?





**Or Maybe a Beloved Stuffed Animal?**



**Today's Lesson:**  
**What Makes Something**  
***Kadosh*?**