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TEXT IMMERSION IN BAVLI TAANIT

SAMANTHA THAL

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

Rabbinical Program

Los Angeles, California

Date: March 2024

Adviser: Rabbi Dvora Weisberg, Ph.D.

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Introduction

Bavli Taanit, as described by its name, is a tractate of Talmud about fasts and fasting, often in the context of praying for rain. Like any tractate of Talmud however, Taanit covers a wide variety of other topics as well including learning, teaching, plagues, prayer, communal responsibility, holidays, the water cycle, and character traits. I chose to study Taanit because of how relevant it seemed to my work as a Jewish leader. As a global community, we are dealing with unprecedented challenges and disasters more and more frequently. What better way to prepare myself for my rabbinate than to go back and learn about how our rabbis dealt with communal disaster? As I studied the tractate, I took note of the parts I found interesting and relevant to teach in a variety of settings. In the written portion of my text immersion, I took those parts from my notes and turned them into a sermon for Sukkot, a mini curriculum for religious school teacher trainings, and several stand-alone text studies about what it means to be a good person in community. I look forward to using what I learned from Taanit throughout my rabbinic career.

Sermon - Sukkot 2023

It's 3 o'clock in the morning, I hear loud groaning from outside, someone clearly suffering. I get up, look out my window, and see a man trying to sleep on the steps of the church next to my apartment building. He's tossing and turning, crying out in pain, adjusting his thin blanket to try to keep out the cold. Eventually, he sits up, puts his head in his hands, looks around, packs his bag, and walks off into the night.

I lay back down in my bed, wondering what I could have done, if I could have helped him, if I could have called anyone. I stare up at the ceiling and think of how grateful I am to have a ceiling, a bed, a room, an apartment. I think of how he's a person and I'm a person, and we both deserve to have a safe place to be.

As disruptive to my sleep as this might seem, I appreciate living in a place where all I have to do is pay attention in order to push myself outside my comfort zone and remind myself of the work I have to do in the world. Living here in LA, and more specifically Koreatown, where I can't ignore the problems around me, I feel driven to do something. Laying in my safe, warm bed, I think about how I can use my voice, and my power, to advocate for societal change. I can support efforts to provide resources to people who are unhoused. I can work to pass legislation which makes affordable, safe housing available to all those who need it. I have the responsibility to shape the world I want to live in.

I won't always be able to rely on my environment to push me. Sometimes I need to take an active role in pushing myself. I need windows out of my comfortable, privileged existence to keep me on track.

This week, we complete our yearly season of High Holy Days with the festival of Sukkot. On Sukkot, we go out of our warm, comfortable spaces. We go out into nature, into the elements. We are literally supposed to sleep on the ground in an incomplete shack, just as the season is changing from summer to fall, and the weather is becoming more unpredictable. We give up our perceived control of our environments and remember that we are connected, dependent on, and responsible for the world around us.

This is also the time of year when we begin to mention and request rain in our daily liturgy. At the end of Sukkot, we begin to mention rain in the *g'vurot*, *mashiv haruach u'morid hagashem*, God makes the wind blow and the rain fall. We start this at the end of Sukkot, because, as Rabbi Yehoshua says (in Bavli Taanit 2a), rain that falls during Sukkot is the sign of a curse¹.

...I would have to agree.

Now you may or may not be surprised to know that this is not the end of the conversation, but rather the beginning of a long debate over exactly when and how and who should mention rain, and then when and how and who should request rain,

¹ Bavli Taanit 2a

interrupted only by the most important tangents about idol worship, teaching pedagogy, prayer, and other things.

But regardless of how they get there, the rabbis determine that we should begin to mention rain starting at the end of Sukkot, and begin to request rain around when we expect it to fall. In Eretz Yisrael, that's the 7th of Cheshvan, and in the diaspora...or at the time of the rabbis, Babylonia...that's December 4th, or 5th in a leap year². The December date is calculated by counting 60 days from the autumn equinox³.

Why pray for rain? In the time that Rabbinic Judaism was developing, we were an agricultural people. We were completely dependent on the land for survival. And the land where we lived did not have a natural source of freshwater, so we were entirely dependent on rain. The way we took agency in this situation, which felt completely out of our control, was through prayer. We truly believed that **when** and **how** we prayed for rain had an impact on the rain that God would give us, and therefore our survival.

Why the distinction between mentioning and requesting rain? If we refer back to Ta'anit, it seems the distinction is made in order to resolve a question about timing and rain being a curse during Sukkot. But I'm not satisfied with that answer. I think there's more to it.

² The Complete Artscroll Siddur, p.105

³ My People's Prayer Book: Amidah, p.122

We begin to mention that God brings rain, that God is *responsible* for bringing rain, just after Sukkot, when we leave our houses and reconnect with the land. At this time of year, when we can feel the change of season in the air, we are more aware than ever of our lack of control in the world. We know the winter is looming and our existence will depend on how much rain falls from the sky. We mention rain when Sukkot forces us to face our vulnerability.

Mentioning is reckoning. Mentioning is spreading awareness. Mentioning is taking stock of what we have and what we need.

We request rain only when we are ready for the rain to come. We've packed up our sukkot, we've prepared our fields, we've dusted off our umbrellas and rain boots, we've reckoned with our reality. We are ready for the necessary inconveniences of rain. Even the rabbis in Ta'anit acknowledge how uncomfortable rain can be. Rabbi Yitzchak says that rain, that interferes with preparations for Shabbat, is a curse⁴. Rain is necessary to survive, but it isn't always easy. ...It sort of reminds me of people's reactions when it rains here in LA...

Requesting rain is taking action. Requesting rain is dealing with discomfort for the sake of survival. Requesting rain is stepping out of our comfort zones and doing what is hard.

⁴ Bavli Ta'anit 8b

I want to propose that the way we pray about rain could be a metaphor for the way we fight for social justice. First, we *mention* rain. We go *out* of our comfort zones, turn our attention out beyond ourselves, witness the brokenness in our world, and start to spread the word. We need to talk before we can act. We need to organize our team. We need to combine our strengths, rally our allies, educate ourselves, and come up with a plan.

Then, we *request* rain. We've done the work to prepare ourselves; now we can take action. We take agency in our environment. We push past doubt and self-consciousness. We believe in the power of our voices, and we won't let the enormity of the problems deter us.

And, just like the rain, our work must come in cycles. The rainy season comes to an end, the legislative cycle starts over, our action turns to reflection. We stop praying for rain on Pesach and we can ask our own four questions: What did we learn? How did we succeed? What still needs to change? How can we bring more people in? And as we answer our questions, we'll begin to prepare to mention again.

Social justice is just as existentially necessary as water. As current and future leaders in the Jewish community: educators, scholars, lay leaders, and clergy, it is up to us to take the lead in this work. We cannot afford to sit comfortably in our houses all year. We need to go out into the world, expose ourselves to difficult realities, and inspire, in ourselves and others, a vision of something better.

This week, we dwell in a sukkah, as Rabbi Alan Lew z'l calls it, "the interrupted idea of a house"⁵, and we give up our illusion of control and our notions of safety. We acknowledge that our lives are fragile, that nothing is a guarantee.

"The interrupted idea of a house". When that man sleeping outside my window was a kid, I wonder if he dreamed about where he would live when he grew up. I wonder how his path to a house was interrupted.

It is up to us to dream of a world where housing is a human right, where everyone has what they need, and where everyone can sleep through the night in a safe, warm bed.

If you are interested in taking steps towards action with me, I invite you to join me at an upcoming information session about *Guaranteed Basic Income: Through a Jewish Lens*. We will join together on Sunday, October 29, at 2pm at Leo Baeck Temple to hear first-hand how pilot programs for Guaranteed Basic Income have impacted people's lives and how we can get involved as a Jewish community. Let me know if you're interested and I'll send you the information and link to register.

May this Sukkot remind us of our responsibility to our world around us and remind us of our agency and influence in working towards change. Moadim L'simcha.

⁵ This Is Real and You Are Completely Unprepared, Rabbi Alan Lew z'l, p.265

Mini Curriculum - Religious School Teacher Training

A common theme in Rabbinic Literature is the theme of education. Since the context of the rabbis is based in teaching and learning, there are many texts which speak about relationships between teachers and students, pedagogy, and educational philosophy. Education is still a core focus of the Jewish community. I wonder how the experience of the rabbis can inform the way we teach today.

This series of lessons will explore four different cases in rabbinic literature relating to the theme of teaching. The lessons will be set as part of a curriculum for religious school teacher trainings throughout a school year. Religious school teachers come from a variety of backgrounds and experience levels. In order to make the most of a year, it is important to educate, support, and inspire teachers in their important work of guiding the next generation of learners.

One goal of the lessons will be to inspire thought and conversation about what it means to be a good teacher. In my experience, one of the most powerful parts of text study is learning from the learners. I love the conversations which learners can have around text, and the connections and experiences learners share. Another goal of the lessons will be to ground religious school teachers in a chain of tradition of teachers and learners. I want teachers to feel connected to our tradition and empowered with the knowledge that they are participating in a conversation which has lasted for centuries.

As a result of these lessons, learners will think intentionally about their role as educators and unpack how their teaching will impact their students. Learners will determine which teaching methods of the rabbis they will emulate and which they will

not take on. Learners will develop their relationships with one another as partners in their educational work.

These lessons will be from the Torah/Instruction orientation. They are meant to inspire conversations based on the rabbinic texts, but with the goal of contextualizing the learning in their current work as educators. The texts will be chosen based on themes which can translate into useful teaching skills or philosophy for learners. It is possible that I will introduce the lessons with some contextual orientation framing in order to explain the texts we are studying.

Lesson 1: Learning from our Students

Enduring Understanding:

- Learning and teaching are core elements of Judaism.
- Teachers have a great impact on students' lives.
- Ancient texts are relevant in what we do today.

Objectives:

- Learners will think intentionally about their role as educators and unpack how their teaching will impact their students and themselves.
- Learners will set the intention to be open to learning from their students as they meet students where they are.

- Learners will develop their relationships with one another as partners in their educational work.

Text:

(Koren Steinsaltz Translation as found on Sefaria.org)

Taanit 7a:12

Rav Nahman bar Yitzhak said:

Why are Torah matters likened to a tree, as it is stated: “It is a tree of life to them who lay hold upon it”

(Proverbs 3:18)? This verse comes to tell you that just as a small piece of wood can ignite a large piece, so too, minor Torah scholars can sharpen great Torah scholars and enable them to advance in their studies. And this is what Rabbi Hanina said: I have learned much from my teachers and even more from my friends, but from my students I have learned more than from all of them.

תענית ז' א:י"ב

אמר רב נחמן בר יצחק: למה נמשלו דברי תורה כעץ, שנאמר: "עץ חיים היא למחזיקים בה", לומר לה: מה עץ קטן מדליק את הגדול, אף תלמידי חכמים קטנים מחזקים את הגדולים. והיינו דאמר רבי חנינא: הרבה למדתי מרבותי, ומחבירי יותר מרבותי, ומתלמידי יותר מכולן.

Guiding Questions:

- Can you think of a time when you learned from a student or someone less experienced than you? How did it feel?
- What can we do to prepare ourselves to be open to learning while we teach?
- How can we create learning environments which encourage students to express their thoughts and opinions?

Description:

The lesson will begin with the set induction of asking learners to share a positive experience they have had of a good teacher from their own educational experience. The teacher will give some basic context for Talmud and the group will read the text together out loud. Learners will turn to a partner and discuss the first question. The teacher will bring learners back together and contextualize the experience of teaching religious school. In that context, the group will brainstorm answers to the second question together. In pairs or small groups, learners will brainstorm answers to the third question. The group will come back together and share answers to the third question. The teacher will close with a blessing for the teachers beginning the school year open to learning as they teach.

Lesson 2: Separating our Emotions from our Students

Enduring Understanding:

- Learning and teaching can affect our emotions.
- Teachers have a great impact on students' self-image and esteem.

- Even the rabbis of the Talmud sometimes struggled with their students sometimes.

Objectives:

- Learners will think intentionally about their role as educators and unpack how their emotions will impact their teaching.
- Learners will determine which teaching methods and philosophies of the rabbis they will/will not emulate.
- Learners will develop concrete strategies for mitigating negative impacts of their emotions on their students.

Text:

(Koren Steinsaltz Translation as found on Sefaria.org)

Taanit 9a:14

The Gemara relates a story concerning the aforementioned verse from Zechariah. **Rav Huna bar Manoah, Rav Shmuel bar Idi, and Rav Hiyya from Vastanya** were often **found before Rava**, as they were among his most distinguished students. **When Rava died, they came before Rav Pappa** to learn

תענית ט' א:י"ד

רב הונא בר מנוח ורב שמואל
בר אידי ורב חייא מווסתנא
הוו שכיחי קמיה דרבא. כי נח
נפשיה דרבא, אתו לקמיה דרב
פפא, כל אימת דהוה אמר להו
שמעתא ולא הוה מסתברא להו,
הוו מרמזי אהדדי. חלש דעתיה.

from him. However, as also they were great Sages, **whenever Rav Pappa would say a *halakha* that did not sound reasonable to them, they would gesture to each other** that Rav Pappa was not equal in stature to Rava. Rav Pappa **was offended** by their behavior.

Taanit 9b:1-2

A verse **was read to** Rav Pappa **in a dream: “And I cut off the three shepherds in one month”** (Zechariah 11:8). **The next day, when they took their leave from him, Rav Pappa said to them: May the Rabbis go in peace,** a hint that this would be their final parting. Rav Pappa thought that the three Sages would die as punishment for their behavior and he would never see them again. The Gemara relates a similar incident: **Rav Shimi bar Ashi was often found before Rav**

תענית ט' ב:א'-ב'

אֶקְרִינָהּ בְּחֻלְמִיהָ: ”וְאַכְחַד אֶת
שְׁלֹשֶׁת הָרֹעִים.” לְמַחֵר, כִּי הָיוּ
מִיַּפְטָרֵי מִיָּנִיָּה, אָמַר לָהֶם: לִיזְלוּ
רַבָּנָן בְּשִׁלְמָא. רַב שְׁמִי בַר אֲשִׁי
הָיָה שֹׁכֵיחַ קָמִיָּה דְּרַב פַּפָּא,
הָיָה מְקַשֵּׁי לֵיהּ טוּבָא. יוֹמָא חַד
חֲזִינָה דְנִפְלַל עַל אִפִּיָּה, שְׁמַעִיָּה
דָּאָמַר: רַחֲמָנָא לִיּוֹצֵלָן מְכִיסוּפָא
דְּשְׁמִי. קָבִיל עֲלֵיהּ שְׁתִּיקוּתָא,
וְתוּ לָא אֶקְשִׁי לֵיהּ.

Pappa and **would raise many objections against** the opinions of Rav Pappa. **One day** Rav Shimi bar Ashi saw Rav Pappa **fall on his face** after prayer. **He heard him say: May the Merciful One save me from the embarrassment of Shimi, and** as a result Rav Shimi bar Ashi **resolved to be silent and not to raise any further objections** against Rav Pappa, as he saw how greatly they pained his teacher.

Guiding Questions:

- Can you think of a time when you had to deal with a frustrating student? How did it feel? How do you think the student felt?
- What preconceptions might impact our teaching or our relationship with our students?
- How can we prepare ourselves to teach from an open mind and not let our emotions get in the way? (List some concrete strategies)

Description:

The lesson will begin with the set induction of asking learners to share a memory of a time a teacher misunderstood them or was mean to them. The teacher will remind the group of some basic context for Talmud and the group will read the text together out loud. Learners will turn to a partner and discuss the first question. The teacher will bring

learners back together and contextualize the experience of teaching religious school. In that context, the group will brainstorm answers to the second question together. In pairs or small groups, learners will brainstorm answers to the third question. The group will come back together and share answers to the third question. The teacher will close with a blessing for the teachers as they navigate the challenges of keeping an open heart and mind in their teaching.

Lesson 3: The Power of Learning Together

Enduring Understanding:

- Learning and teaching are most effective with others.
- It is Jewish tradition to learn in pairs.
- Ancient texts are relevant in how we learn today.

Objectives:

- Learners will think intentionally about how they can encourage their students to learn from each other.
- Learners will understand that lessons driven by student questions can lead to impactful learning.
- Learners will develop strategies for incorporating chevruta style learning into their curriculums.

Text:

Taanit 7a:8

The Gemara cites other expositions that deal with Torah study. **Rabbi Hama, son of Rabbi Hanina, said:** **What is** the meaning of that **which is written: “Iron sharpens iron,** so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend” (Proverbs 27:17)? This verse comes **to tell you** that **just as** with **these iron implements, one sharpens the other** when they are rubbed against each other, **so too,** when **Torah scholars** study together, they **sharpen one another in halakha.**

תענית ז' א:ח'

אמר רבי חמא ברבי חנינא, מאי דכתיב: "ברזל בברזל יחד",
לומר לך: מה ברזל זה — אחד
מחדד את חבירו, אף שני
תלמידי חכמים — מחדדין זה
את זה בהלכה.

Guiding Questions:

- How does the metaphor of sharpening iron fit with your understanding of learning?
- What are some of the advantages or challenges of including chevruta style learning in our classes?
- What are some concrete ways we can incorporate chevruta style learning into our lessons?

Description:

The lesson will begin with the set induction of asking learners to share a memory of a time they learned something important from a peer. The teacher will remind the group of some basic context for Talmud and the group will read the text together out loud. Learners will turn to a partner and discuss the first question. The teacher will bring learners back together and introduce the concept of studying in chevruta. Together, the group will brainstorm answers to the second question together. In pairs or small groups, learners will brainstorm answers to the third question. The group will come back together and share answers to the third question. The teacher will close with a blessing for the teachers as they inspire their students to learn from each other.

Lesson 4: Sparking Creativity in One Another

Enduring Understanding:

- Jewish learning doesn't happen alone.
- We can spark creativity and learning in one another.
- Ancient metaphors can help us understand how we learn today.

Objectives:

- Learners will think intentionally about how they can lift up their students' voices and perspectives.
- Learners will understand the value of collaborating with students in a learning environment.

- Learners will develop strategies for encouraging curiosity in their students.

Text:

(Koren Steinsaltz Translation as found on Sefaria.org)

Taanit 7a:9

Rabba bar bar Ḥana said: Why are matters of Torah compared to fire, as it is stated: “Is not My word like fire, says the Eternal” (Jeremiah 23:29)? To tell you: Just as fire does not ignite in a lone stick of wood but in a pile of kindling, so too, matters of Torah are not retained and understood properly by a lone scholar who studies by himself, but by a group of Sages.

תענית ז' א:ט'

אמר רבה בר בר חנה: למה נמשלו דברי תורה כאש, שנאמר: "הלא כה דברי כאש נאם ה'", לומר לך: מה אש אינו דולק יחידי, אף דברי תורה אין מתקיימין ביחידי.

Guiding Questions:

- How does the metaphor of igniting fire fit with your understanding of learning?
- What are some of the advantages or challenges with collaborating with students in a learning environment?
- What are some concrete ways we can incorporate student collaboration into our lessons?

Description:

The lesson will begin with the set induction of asking learners to share a memory of a time they worked successfully with someone else on a project. What made it successful? The teacher will remind the group of some basic context for Talmud and the group will read the text together out loud. Learners will turn to a partner and discuss the first question. The teacher will bring learners back together and introduce the topic of student collaboration in lessons. Together, the group will brainstorm answers to the second question together. In pairs or small groups, learners will brainstorm answers to the third question. The group will come back together and share answers to the third question. The teacher will close with a blessing for the teachers as they find the strength to let go of some control and allow their students to inspire learning.

Stand-alone text studies

Better to be a Reed than a Cedar

Enduring Understanding:

- Rabbinic texts can teach us lessons which are still relevant today.
- Being rooted and flexible can be better than being sturdy and stiff.
- No matter how far we've come in life, we are still able to learn and grow.

Objectives:

- Learners will reflect on the way they understand their relationship to the world in the context of Rabbinic metaphors.
- Learners will think critically about the ways they can respond to situations of conflict.
- Learners will develop their Rabbinic text literacy skills by understanding the use of story telling in Rabbinic discussion.

Text:

(Koren Steinsaltz Translation as found on Sefaria.org and edited by Samantha Thal)

Taanit 20a:16-20b:3

The Sages taught in praise of the reed: **A person should always be soft like a reed, and he should not be stiff like a cedar. An incident occurred in which Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Shimon, came from Migdal Gedor, from his rabbi's house, and he was riding on a donkey and strolling on the bank of the river. And he was very**

תענית כ' א:ט"ז-כ' ב:ג'

תָּנוּ רַבָּנֵן: לְעוֹלָם יִהְיֶה אָדָם רָךְ
כְּקֶנֶה וְאֵל יִהְיֶה קָשָׁה כְּאַרְז.
מַעֲשֵׂה שָׂבָא רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּרֶבִּי
שִׁמְעוֹן מִמְּגִדָּל גְּדוֹר מִבֵּית רַבּוֹ,
וְהָיָה רֹכֵב עַל חֲמֹר וּמְטִייל עַל
שֹׁפֵת נָהָר, וְשִׁמַּח שְׂמִיחָה גְּדוֹלָה.
וְהָיְתָה דַּעְתּוֹ גֹּסֶה עָלָיו מִפְּנֵי

happy, and his head was swollen with pride because he had studied much Torah. He happened upon an exceedingly ugly person, who said to him: Greetings to you, my rabbi, but Rabbi Elazar did not return his greeting. Instead, Rabbi Elazar said to him: Worthless [reika] person, how ugly is that man. Are all the people of your city as ugly as you? The man said to him: I do not know, but you should go and say to the Craftsman Who made me: How ugly is the vessel you made. When Rabbi Elazar realized that he had sinned and insulted this man merely on account of his appearance, he descended from his donkey and prostrated himself before him, and he said to the man: I have sinned against you; forgive me. The man said to him: I will not forgive you until you go to the Craftsman Who made me and say: How ugly is the vessel you made. He walked behind the man until they reached Rabbi Elazar's city. The people of his city came out to greet him, saying to him: Greetings to you, my rabbi, my rabbi, my master, my master. The man said to them: Who are you calling my rabbi, my rabbi? They said to him: To this man, who is walking behind you. He said to them: If this man is a rabbi, may there not be many like him among

שְׁלֹמֹה תוֹרָה הִרְבָּה. נִזְדַּמֵּן לוֹ אָדָם אֶחָד שֶׁהָיָה מְכוֹעֵר בְּיוֹתֵר. אָמַר לוֹ: שְׁלוֹם עָלֶיךָ רַבִּי! וְלֹא הִחְזִיר לוֹ. אָמַר לוֹ: רִיקָה, כִּמָּה מְכוֹעֵר אוֹתוֹ הָאִישׁ! שָׁמָּה כָּל בְּנֵי עִירָךְ מְכוֹעְרִין כְּמוֹתְךָ? אָמַר לוֹ: אֵינִי יוֹדֵעַ, אֲלֵא לָךְ וְאָמַר לְאוֹמֵן שֶׁעָשָׂאֲנִי: "כִּמָּה מְכוֹעֵר כָּלִי זֶה שֶׁעָשִׂיתִי". כִּיּוֹן שֶׁיָּדַע בְּעֶצְמוֹ שֶׁחָטָא, יָרַד מִן הַחֲמוֹר וְנִשְׁתַּטַּח לְפָנָיו, וְאָמַר לוֹ: נִעֲנִיתִי לָךְ, מַחֲוֹל לִי! אָמַר לוֹ: אֵינִי מוֹחֵל לָךְ עַד שֶׁתֵּלֵךְ לְאוֹמֵן שֶׁעָשָׂאֲנִי וְאָמַר לוֹ: כִּמָּה מְכוֹעֵר כָּלִי זֶה שֶׁעָשִׂיתִי. הָיָה מְטִיִּיל אַחֲרָיו עַד שֶׁהִגִּיעַ לְעִירוֹ. יֵצְאוּ בְנֵי עִירוֹ לִקְרֹאתוֹ, וְהָיוּ אוֹמְרִים לוֹ: שְׁלוֹם עָלֶיךָ רַבִּי רַבִּי, מוֹרֵי מוֹרֵי! אָמַר לָהֶם: לָמִי אַתֶּם קוֹרִין רַבִּי רַבִּי? אָמְרוּ לוֹ: לָזֶה שֶׁמְטִיִּיל אַחֲרֶיךָ. אָמַר לָהֶם: אִם זֶה רַבִּי — אֵל יִרְבוּ כְּמוֹתוֹ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל. אָמְרוּ לוֹ: מִפְּנֵי מָה? אָמַר לָהֶם: כִּךְ וְכךָ עָשָׂה לִי. אָמְרוּ לוֹ: אֵף עַל פִּי כֵּן, מַחֲוֹל לוֹ, שֶׁאָדָם גָּדוֹל בְּתוֹרָה הוּא. אָמַר לָהֶם: בְּשִׁבְלֵכֶם הִרִינִי מוֹחֵל לוֹ, וּבִלְבָד שֶׁלֹּא יִהְיֶה רָגִיל לַעֲשׂוֹת כֵּן. מִיָּד נִכְנָס רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בְּרַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן, וְדָרַשׁ: לְעוֹלָם יִהְיֶה

the Jewish people. They asked him: For what reason do you say this? He said to them: He did such and such to me. They said to him: Even so, forgive him, as he is a great Torah scholar. He said to them: For your sake I forgive him, provided that he accepts upon himself not to become accustomed to behave like this. Immediately, Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Shimon, entered the study hall and taught: A person should always be soft like a reed and he should not be stiff like a cedar, as one who is proud like a cedar is likely to sin. And therefore, due to its gentle qualities, the reed merited that a quill is taken from it to write with it a Torah scroll, *tefillin*, and *mezuzot*.

אדם רך כקנה ואל יהא קשה
כארז. ולפיכך זכה קנה ליטול
הימנו קולמוס לכתוב בו ספר
תורה תפילין ומזוזות.

Taanit 20a:14-15

Rabbi Yohanan elaborates: Ahijah the Shilonite cursed the Jewish people by comparing them to a reed: “For the Lord will smite Israel as a reed is shaken in the water.” Although it seems to be a curse, this verse is actually a blessing. Just as this reed stands in a place of water, and its shoots replenish themselves when cut, and its roots are numerous for a plant of its size, and even if all the winds in the world come and blow against it, they cannot move it

תענית כ' א:י"ד-ט"ו

אחיה השילוני קללן בקנה,
אמר להם לישראל: "והכה ה'
את ישראל באשר ינוד הקנה",
מה קנה זה עומד במקום מים,
וגזעו מחליף ושרשיו מרובין,
ואפילו כל הרוחות שבעולם
באות ונושבות בו — אין מזיזות
אותו במקומו, אלא הולך ובא
עמהן. דממו הרוחות — עמד
הקנה במקומו. אבל בלעם

from its place, rather, it sways with them until the winds subside, and the reed still stands in its place, the same applies to the Jewish people. After all the difficulties that they endure, they will ultimately survive and return home. **However, Balaam the wicked blessed the Jews by comparing them to a cedar, as it is stated: “As cedars beside the waters” (Numbers 24:6). Just as this cedar does not stand in a place of water, and its shoots do not replenish themselves, and its roots are not numerous, Balaam wished that the same should apply to the Jewish people. Furthermore, while it is true that even if all the winds in the world blow against it they will not move it from its place, once the southern wind blows against it, it uproots the cedar and turns it on its face. And not only that, but the reed merited that a quill [*kulmos*] is taken from it to write with it a Torah scroll, the Prophets, and the Writings.** Evidently, the curse comparing Israel to a reed is better than the blessing likening them to a cedar.

הַרְשַׁע בִּירְכֵן בְּאֶרֶז, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר:
 “כְּאֲרָזִים עָלֵי מַיִם”, מָה אֶרֶז זֶה
 אֵינוֹ עוֹמֵד בְּמָקוֹם מַיִם, וְאֵין
 גִּזְעוֹ מִחֲלִיף, וְאֵין שָׂרְשָׁיו
 מְרֻבֵּין. אֶפִּילוֹ כָּל הָרוּחוֹת
 שֶׁבְּעוֹלָם נוֹשְׁבוֹת בּוֹ — אֵין
 מְזִיזוֹת אוֹתוֹ מִמְּקוֹמוֹ. כִּיּוֹן
 שֶׁנִּשְׁבָּה בּוֹ רוּחַ דְּרוֹמִית —
 עוֹקְרֶתוֹ וְהוֹפֶכֶתוֹ עַל פָּנָיו. וְלֹא
 עוֹד אֶלָּא שְׂזָכָה קִנְיָה לִישׁוּל
 הַיָּמֵנוּ קוּלְמוֹס לְכַתּוֹב בּוֹ סֵפֶר
 תּוֹרָה נְבִיאִים וּכְתוּבִים.

Guiding Questions:

- Can you remember a time when you were faced with the choice of standing firm or being flexible?

- What are some of the advantages or challenges with being rooted but flexible?
With standing firm?
- What are some examples of times when it is better to be like a reed? Are there times when it would be better to be like a cedar?

Description:

In a discussion spanning Taanit 20a and 20b, the rabbis use the metaphor of being like a reed or a cedar to discuss their ideals for positive character traits. These messages about how to live morally can still spark interesting conversation and introspection today. This text study will take learners through a rabbinic story which illustrates the importance of the way we treat one another and how our behavior reflects on our character. Then, learners will unpack the explanations of the metaphors in the story and discuss how they could apply to their own lives.

No One Should Suffer Alone

Enduring Understanding:

- Rabbinic texts can teach us lessons which are still relevant today.
- One can be both responsible for, and dependent on, their community.
- It is not good to isolate oneself from others.

Objectives:

- Learners will understand the importance of a connected community in the context of suffering.
- Learners will contemplate concrete ways that they can be present for people in their community who are suffering.
- Learners will connect their modern experience with old wisdom from Rabbinic texts.

Text:

(Koren Steinsaltz Translation as found on Sefaria.org and edited by Samantha Thal)

Taanit 11a:5

The Sages taught in a *baraita*:
When the Jewish people is immersed in distress, and one of them separates himself from the community and does not share their suffering, the **two ministering angels who accompany a person come and place their hands on his head**, as though he was an offering, **and say: This so-and-so, who has**

תענית י"א א:ה'

תָּנוּ רַבָּנָן: בְּזֶמֶן שֶׁיִּשְׂרָאֵל שְׂרוּיִין
בְּצָעַר וּפִירֶשׁ אֶחָד מֵהֶן, בָּאִין
שְׁנֵי מַלְאָכֵי הַשָּׁרֵת שְׂמֻלּוּיִן לוֹ
לָאָדָם, וּמְנִיחִין לוֹ יָדֵיהֶן עַל
רֹאשׁוֹ, וְאוֹמְרִים: פְּלוֹנִי זֶה
שֶׁפִּירֶשׁ מִן הַצָּבוּר אֵל יִרְאֶה
בְּנַחֲמַת צָבוּר.

separated himself from the community, let him not see the consolation of the community.

Taanit 11a:8

The *baraita* continues: **Rather, a person should be distressed together with the community. As we found with Moses our teacher that he was distressed together with the community, as it is stated during the war with Amalek: “But Moses’ hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat upon it” (Exodus 17:12). But didn’t Moses have one pillow or one cushion to sit upon; why was he forced to sit on a rock? Rather, Moses said as follows: Since the Jewish people are immersed in suffering, I too will be with them in suffering. And anyone who is distressed together with the community will merit seeing the consolation of the community.**

Taanit 22b:11

Rabbi Yosei says: An individual is not permitted to afflict himself by fasting, lest he become too weak to work and be beholden to other beings, and those beings will not have mercy on him. Rav Yehuda said that Rav said: What is the

תענית י”א א:ח’

אֶלָּא, יִצְעַר אָדָם עִם הַצָּבוּר, שֶׁכֵּן
מְצִינוּ בַּמֶּשֶׁה רִבִּינוּ שֶׁצִּיעַר
עֲצָמוֹ עִם הַצָּבוּר, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: “וַיִּדִּי
מֹשֶׁה כְּבָדִים וַיִּקְחוּ אֶבֶן וַיִּשְׁימוּ
תַּחְתָּיו וַיֵּשֶׁב עָלֶיהָ,” וְכִי לֹא הָיָה
לוֹ לְמֹשֶׁה כָּר אֶחָד אוֹ כֶּסֶת אֶחָד
לִישֵׁב עָלֶיהָ? אֶלָּא כֵךְ אָמַר
מֹשֶׁה: הוּאֵיל וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל שָׂרוּיִין
בְּצָעַר — אָף אֲנִי אֶהְיֶה עִמָּהֶם
בְּצָעַר. וְכָל הַמִּצְעָר עֲצָמוֹ עִם
הַצָּבוּר — זֹכֶה וְרוֹאֶה בְּנִחְמָת
צָבוּר.

תענית כ”ב ב:י”א

רַבִּי יוֹסִי אוֹמֵר: אֵין הֵיחִיד
רְשָׁאִי לְסַנֵּף אֶת עֲצָמוֹ בְּתַעֲנִית,
שֶׁמָּא יִצְטָרֵךְ לְבָרִיּוֹת וְאֵין
הַבָּרִיּוֹת מְרַחֲמוֹת עָלָיו. אָמַר רַב
יְהוּדָה אָמַר רַב: מַאי טַעְמָא

reason of Rabbi Yosei? It is as it is written: **“And man became a living soul”** (Genesis 2:7). Rabbi Yosei interprets this verse as a command: **The soul I placed within you, preserve and sustain it.**

דַּרְבֵּי יוֹסֵי — דִּכְתִּיב: “וַיְהִי
הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה” — נִשְׁמָה
שָׁנַתִּי בְךָ הַחַיִּיה.

Guiding Questions:

- Can you remember a time when you helped someone who was suffering or received help when you were suffering? How did that feel?
- Why do you think it is important not to isolate yourself from your community when the community is suffering?
- Why do you think it is important for suffering to happen in community and not alone?
- What are some concrete ways you can support people in your community who are suffering?

Description:

This text study would be great for a community working on their care committee or going through a particularly challenging time, locally or globally. Between 11a and 22b, Taanit offers two sides of the same issue, that it is not good to suffer alone. On 11a, the community is suffering, and the individual is instructed not to isolate themselves from the suffering of the community. This feels particularly relevant to times when bad things happen to one part of the Jewish community, and it is felt by Jewish communities around the world. 22b instructs the individual to not put themselves through suffering on their own by taking on an individual fast outside the structure of communal fasts. As

Taanit is full of discussion about the importance and power of fasting, it is significant that this passage acknowledges the danger of individuals taking on fasts by themselves, without the protection of their community. Without this caution, it is possible that people could take fasting out of proportion and endanger themselves. It is bad to suffer alone without a community's help and support.

Whether it is supporting one's community or receiving support from one's community, it is important not to isolate oneself and to be fully engaged in one's community. In this text study, the leader would give context for the different sections of text, the biblical quotes, and Taanit as a whole. Learners would engage with the text and with each other, guided by the leader and the guiding questions.

Appendix

Source Sheets:

Learning from our Students

Source Sheet by Samantha Thal

Taanit 7a:12

Rav Nahman bar Yitzhak said:

Why are Torah matters likened to a tree, as it is stated: “It is a tree of life to them who lay hold upon it”

(Proverbs 3:18)? This verse comes to tell you that just as a small piece of wood can ignite a large piece, so too, minor Torah scholars can sharpen great Torah scholars and enable them to advance in their studies. And this is what Rabbi Hanina said: I have learned much from my teachers and even more from my friends, but from my students I have learned more than from all of them.

תענית ז' א"י"ב

אמר רב נחמן בר יצחק: למה נמשלו דברי תורה בעץ, שנאמר: "עץ חיים הוא למחזיקים בו", לומר לך: מה עץ קטן מדליק את הגדול, אף תלמידי חכמים קטנים מחזקים את הגדולים. והיינו דאמר רבי חנינא: הרבה למדתי מרבותי, ומחבירי יותר מרבותי, ומתלמידי יותר מכולן.

Can you think of a time when you learned from a student or someone less experienced than you? How did it feel?

What can we do to prepare ourselves to be open to learning while we teach?

How can we create learning environments which encourage students to express their thoughts and opinions?

Source Sheet created on Sefaria by Samantha Thal

Separating our Emotions from our Students

Source Sheet by Samantha Thal

Taanit 9a:14

The Gemara relates a story concerning the aforementioned verse from Zechariah. **Rav Huna bar Manoah, Rav Shmuel bar Idi, and Rav Hiyya from Vastanya** were often **found before Rava**, as they were among his most distinguished students. **When Rava died, they came before Rav Pappa** to learn from him. However, as also they were great Sages, **whenever Rav Pappa would say a *halakha* that did not sound reasonable to them, they would gesture to each other** that Rav Pappa was not equal in stature to Rava. Rav Pappa **was offended** by their behavior.

Taanit 9b:1-2

A verse **was read to Rav Pappa in a dream: “And I cut off the three shepherds in one month”** (Zechariah 11:8). **The next day, when they took their leave from him, Rav Pappa said to them: May the Rabbis go in peace**, a hint that this would be their final parting. Rav Pappa thought that the three Sages would die as punishment for their behavior and he would never see

תענית ט' א:י"ד

רב הונא בר מנוח ורב שמואל
בר אידי ורב חייא מווסתניא
הוו שכיחי קמיה דרבא. כי נח
נפשיה דרבא, אתו לקמיה דרב
פפא, כל אימת דהוה אמר להו
שמעתא ולא הוה מסתברא להו,
הוו מרמזי אהדדי. חלש דעתיה.

תענית ט' ב:א'-ב'

אקרייה בחלמיה: "ואכחד את
שלשת הרעים". למחר, כי הו
מיפטרי מיניה, אמר להו: ליזלו
רבנן בשלמא. רב שימי בר אשי
הוה שכיח קמיה דרב פפא,
הוה מקשי ליה טובא. יומא חד
חזייה דנפל על אפיה, שמעיה
דאמר: רחמנא ליצלן מכיסופא

them again. The Gemara relates a similar incident: **Rav Shimi bar Ashi was often found before Rav Pappa and would raise many objections against** the opinions of Rav Pappa. **One day** Rav Shimi bar Ashi saw Rav Pappa **fall on his face** after prayer. **He heard him say: May the Merciful One save me from the embarrassment of Shimi, and** as a result Rav Shimi bar Ashi **resolved to be silent and not to raise any further objections** against Rav Pappa, as he saw how greatly they pained his teacher.

דְּשִׁמִּי בָר אֲשִׁי קָבִיל עָלַי שְׁתִּיקוּתָא,
וְתוֹ לֹא אֶקְשִׁי לֵיהּ.

Can you think of a time when you had to deal with a frustrating student?

How did it feel? How do you think the student felt?

What preconceptions might impact our teaching or our relationship with our students?

How can we prepare ourselves to teach from an open mind and not let our emotions get in the way? (list some concrete strategies)

Source Sheet created on Sefaria by Samantha Thal

The Power of Learning Together

Source Sheet by Samantha Thal

Taanit 7a:8

The Gemara cites other expositions that deal with Torah study. **Rabbi Hama, son of Rabbi Hanina, said: What is the meaning of that which is written: “Iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend” (Proverbs 27:17)? This verse comes to tell you that just as with these iron implements, one sharpens the other** when they are rubbed against each other, **so too, when Torah scholars study together, they sharpen one another in halakha.**

תענית ז' א:ח'

אמר רבי חמא ברבי חנינא, מאי דכתיב: “ברזל בברזל יחד”,
לומר לך: מה ברזל זה — אחד
מחדד את חבירו, אף שני
תלמידי חכמים — מחדדין זה
את זה בהלכה.

How does the metaphor of sharpening iron fit with your understanding of learning?

What are some of the advantages or challenges with including chevruta style learning in our classes?

What are some concrete ways we can incorporate chevruta style learning into our lessons?

Source Sheet created on Sefaria by Samantha Thal

Sparking Creativity in One Another

Source Sheet by Samantha Thal

Taanit 7a:9

Rabba bar bar Ḥana said: Why are matters of Torah compared to fire, as it is stated: “Is not My word like fire, says the Lord” (Jeremiah 23:29)? To tell you: Just as fire does not ignite in a lone stick of wood but in a pile of kindling, so too, matters of Torah are not retained and understood properly by a lone scholar who studies by himself, but by a group of Sages.

תענית ז' א:ט'

אמר רבה בר בר חנה: למה נמשלו דברי תורה כפֿאש, שנאמר: "הלא כה דברי כפֿאש נאם ה'", לומר לך: מה אש אינו דולק יחידי, אף דברי תורה אין מתקיימין ביחידי.

How does the metaphor of igniting fire fit with your understanding of learning?

What are some of the advantages or challenges with collaborating with students in a learning environment?

What are some concrete ways we can incorporate student collaboration into our lessons?

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Better to be a Reed than a Cedar

Source Sheet by Samantha Thal

Taanit 20a:16-20b:3

The Sages taught in praise of the reed: A person should always be soft like a reed, and he should not be stiff like a cedar. An incident occurred in which Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Shimon, came from Migdal Gedor, from his rabbi's house, and he was riding on a donkey and strolling on the bank of the river. And he was very happy, and his head was swollen with pride because he had studied much Torah. He happened upon an exceedingly ugly person, who said to him: Greetings to you, my rabbi, but Rabbi Elazar did not return his greeting. Instead, Rabbi Elazar said to him: Worthless [reika] person, how ugly is that man. Are all the people of your city as ugly as you? The man said to him: I do not know, but you should go and say to the Craftsman Who made me: How ugly is the vessel you made. When Rabbi Elazar realized that he had sinned and insulted this man merely on account of his appearance, he descended from his donkey and prostrated himself before him, and he said to the man: I have sinned against you; forgive me. The man said to him: I will not

תענית כ' א:ט"ז-כ' ב:ג'

תָּנוּ רַבָּנָן: לְעוֹלָם יִהְיֶה אָדָם רֶךְ כְּקִנָּה וְאֵל יִהְיֶה קָשָׁה כְּאֶרֶז. מַעֲשֵׂה שָׂבָא רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בְּרַבִּי שְׁמַעוֹן מִמְּגַדְלָא גְדוֹר מִבֵּית רַבּוֹ, וְהָיָה רְכוּב עַל חֲמֹר וּמְטִייל עַל שֹׁפֵת נָהָר, וְשִׂמַּח שְׂמִיחָה גְדוֹלָה. וְהִיתָה דַּעְתּוֹ גֹּסֶה עָלָיו מִפְּנֵי שֶׁלָּמַד תּוֹרָה הַרְבֵּה. נִזְדַּמֵּן לוֹ אָדָם אֶחָד שֶׁהָיָה מְכוּעָר בְּיוֹתֵר. אָמַר לוֹ: שְׁלוֹם עָלֶיךָ רַבִּי! וְלֹא הִחְזִיר לוֹ. אָמַר לוֹ: רִיקָה, כִּמָּה מְכוּעָר אוֹתוֹ הָאִישׁ! שָׁמָּה כָּל בְּנֵי עִירָךְ מְכוּעָרִין כְּמוֹתְךָ? אָמַר לוֹ: אֵינִי יוֹדֵעַ, אֵלָּא לָךְ וְאַמּוֹר לְאוֹמֵן שֶׁעֲשֵׂאֲנִי: "כִּמָּה מְכוּעָר כָּלִי זֶה שֶׁעָשִׂיתִי". כִּיּוֹן שִׁידַע בְּעֶצְמוֹ שֶׁחָטָא, יָרַד מִן הַחֲמֹר וְנִשְׁתַּטַּח לְפָנָיו, וְאָמַר לוֹ: נַעֲנִיתִי לָךְ, מַחֲוֹל לִי! אָמַר לוֹ: אֵינִי מוֹחֵל לָךְ עַד שֶׁתִּלָּךְ לְאוֹמֵן שֶׁעֲשֵׂאֲנִי וְאַמּוֹר לוֹ: כִּמָּה מְכוּעָר כָּלִי זֶה שֶׁעָשִׂיתִי. הָיָה מְטִייל אַחֲרָיו עַד שֶׁהִגִּיעַ לְעִירוֹ. יָצְאוּ בְנֵי עִירוֹ לִקְרֹאתוֹ, וְהָיוּ אוֹמְרִים לוֹ: שְׁלוֹם עָלֶיךָ רַבִּי רַבִּי, מוֹרִי

forgive you until you go to the
 Craftsman Who made me and say:
 How ugly is the vessel you made.
 He walked behind the man until
 they reached Rabbi Elazar's city.
 The people of his city came out to
 greet him, saying to him:
 Greetings to you, my rabbi, my
 rabbi, my master, my master. The
 man said to them: Who are you
 calling my rabbi, my rabbi? They
 said to him: To this man, who is
 walking behind you. He said to
 them: If this man is a rabbi, may
 there not be many like him among
 the Jewish people. They asked
 him: For what reason do you say
 this? He said to them: He did such
 and such to me. They said to him:
 Even so, forgive him, as he is a
 great Torah scholar. He said to
 them: For your sake I forgive him,
 provided that he accepts upon
 himself not to become accustomed
 to behave like this. Immediately,
 Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi
 Shimon, entered the study hall
 and taught: A person should
 always be soft like a reed and he
 should not be stiff like a cedar, as
 one who is proud like a cedar is
 likely to sin. And therefore, due to
 its gentle qualities, the reed
 merited that a quill is taken from
 it to write with it a Torah scroll,
 tefillin, and mezuzot.

מורי! אמר להם: למי אתם
 קורין רבי רבי? אמרו לו: לזה
 שמטייל אחריך. אמר להם: אם
 זה רבי — אל ירבו כמותו
 בישראל. אמרו לו: מפני מה?
 אמר להם: כך וכך עשה לי.
 אמרו לו: אף על פי כן, מחול
 לו, שאדם גדול בתורה הוא.
 אמר להם: בשבילכם הריני
 מוחל לו, ובלבד שלא יהא רגיל
 לעשות כן. מיד נכנס רבי אלעזר
 ברבי שמעון, ודרש: לעולם יהא
 אדם רך כקנה ואל יהא קשה
 כארוז. ולפיכך זכה קנה ליטול
 הימנו קולמוס לכתוב בו ספר
 תורה תפילין ומזוזות.

Rabbi Yoḥanan elaborates: **Ahijah the Shilonite cursed** the Jewish people **by** comparing them to a **reed**: “**For the Lord will smite Israel as a reed is shaken in the water.**” Although it seems to be a curse, this verse is actually a blessing. **Just as this reed stands in a place of water, and its shoots replenish** themselves when cut, **and its roots are numerous** for a plant of its size, **and even if all the winds in the world come and blow against it, they cannot move it from its place, rather, it sways with them until the winds subside, and the reed still stands in its place,** the same applies to the Jewish people. After all the difficulties that they endure, they will ultimately survive and return home. **However, Balaam the wicked blessed** the Jews **by** comparing them to a **cedar, as it is stated**: “**As cedars beside the waters**” (Numbers 24:6). **Just as this cedar does not stand in a place of water, and its shoots do not replenish** themselves, **and its roots are not numerous,** Balaam wished that the same should apply to the Jewish people. Furthermore, while it is true that **even if all the winds in the world blow against it they will not move it from its place, once the southern wind blows against it, it uproots** the

אֲחִיָּה הַשִּׁילֹנִי קִלְלָן בְּקִנְיָה, אָמַר לָהֶם לְיִשְׂרָאֵל: “וְהִכָּה ה' אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל כַּאֲשֶׁר יִנּוּד הַקִּנְיָה,” מָה קִנְיָה זֶה עוֹמֵד בְּמָקוֹם מַיִם, וְגִזְעוֹ מִחֲלִיף וְשָׂרְשָׁיו מְרֻבִּין, וְאִפְּלוּ כָּל הָרוּחוֹת שֶׁבָּעוֹלָם בָּאוֹת וְנוֹשְׁבוֹת בּוֹ — אֵין מְזִיזוֹת אוֹתוֹ מִמָּקוֹמוֹ, אֲלֹא הוֹלֵךְ וּבֹא עִמָּהּ. דִּמְמוֹ הָרוּחוֹת — עֹמֵד הַקִּנְיָה בְּמָקוֹמוֹ. אֲבָל בְּלָעַם הִרְשָׁע בִּירְכֵן בְּאֶרֶז, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: “כַּאֲרָזִים עָלֵי מַיִם,” מָה אֶרֶז זֶה אֵינוֹ עוֹמֵד בְּמָקוֹם מַיִם, וְאֵין גִּזְעוֹ מִחֲלִיף, וְאֵין שָׂרְשָׁיו מְרֻבִּין. אִפְּלוּ כָּל הָרוּחוֹת שֶׁבָּעוֹלָם נוֹשְׁבוֹת בּוֹ — אֵין מְזִיזוֹת אוֹתוֹ מִמָּקוֹמוֹ. כִּיּוֹן שֶׁנִּשְׁבָּה בּוֹ רוּחַ דְּרוֹמִית — עוֹקְרָתוֹ וְהוֹפְכָתוֹ עַל פָּנָיו. וְלֹא עוֹד אֲלֹא שְׂזָכָה קִנְיָה לִּישׁוּל הַיָּמֵנוּ קוֹלָמוֹס לְכַתּוּב בּוֹ סֵפֶר תּוֹרָה נְבִיאִים וּכְתוּבִים.

cedar **and turns it on its face. And not only that, but** the reed merited that **a quill [*kulmos*] is taken from it to write with it a Torah scroll, the Prophets, and the Writings.** Evidently, the curse comparing Israel to a reed is better than the blessing likening them to a cedar.

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No One Should Suffer Alone

Source Sheet by Samantha Thal

Taanit 11a:5

The Sages taught in a *baraita*: When the Jewish people is immersed in distress, and one of them separates himself from the community and does not share their suffering, the two ministering angels who accompany a person come and place their hands on his head, as though he was an offering, and say: This so-and-so, who has separated himself from the community, let him not see the consolation of the community.

תענית י"א א:ה'

תָּנוּ רַבָּנֵי: בְּזֶמֶן שֶׁיִּשְׂרָאֵל שְׂרוּיִין
בְּצָעַר וּפִירֶשׁ אֶחָד מֵהֶן, בָּאִין
שְׁנֵי מַלְאָכֵי הַשָּׁרֵת שְׂמֻלּוּיִן לוֹ
לְאָדָם, וּמְנִיחִין לוֹ יָדֵיהֶן עַל
רֹאשׁוֹ, וְאוֹמְרִים: פְּלוֹנִי זֶה
שֶׁפִּירֶשׁ מִן הַצָּבוּר אֵל יִרְאֶה
בְּנִחָמַת צָבוּר.

Taanit 11a:8

The *baraita* continues: Rather, a person should be distressed together with the community. As we found with Moses our teacher that he was distressed together with the community, as it is stated during the war with Amalek: "But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat upon it" (Exodus 17:12). But didn't Moses have one pillow or one cushion to sit upon; why was he forced to sit on a rock? Rather, Moses said as follows: Since the Jewish people are immersed in suffering, I too will

תענית י"א א:ח'

אֵלָּא, יִצְעַר אָדָם עִם הַצָּבוּר, שְׂכָן
מִצֵּינוּ בְּמִשָּׁה רַבִּינוּ שֶׁצִּיעַר
עֲצָמוֹ עִם הַצָּבוּר, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "וַיִּדִּי
מֹשֶׁה כְּבָדִּים וַיִּקְחוּ אֶבֶן וַיִּשְׁימוּ
תַּחְתָּיו וַיֵּשֶׁב עָלֶיהָ", וְכִי לֹא הָיָה
לוֹ לְמִשָּׁה כָּר אֶחָד אוֹ כֶּסֶת אַחַת
לִישֵׁב עָלֶיהָ? אֵלָּא כֵּן אָמַר
מֹשֶׁה: הוּאִיל וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל שְׂרוּיִין
בְּצָעַר — אָף אֲנִי אֶהְיֶה עִמָּהֶם
בְּצָעַר. וְכָל הַמִּצְעָר עֲצָמוֹ עִם
הַצָּבוּר — זֹכָה וְרוֹאֶה בְּנִחָמַת
צָבוּר.

be with them in suffering. And anyone who is distressed together with the community will merit seeing the consolation of the community.

Taanit 22b:11

Rabbi Yosei says: An individual is not permitted to afflict himself by fasting, lest he become too weak to work and be beholden to other beings, and those beings will not have mercy on him. Rav Yehuda said that Rav said: What is the reason of Rabbi Yosei? It is as it is written: “And man became a living soul” (Genesis 2:7). Rabbi Yosei interprets this verse as a command: The soul I placed within you, preserve and sustain it.

תענית כ"ב ב:י"א

רַבִּי יוֹסֵי אוֹמֵר: אִין הִיחִיד
רִשָּׁאִי לְסַגֵּף אֶת עֲצָמוֹ בְּתַעֲנִית,
שָׂמָא יִצְטָרֵךְ לְבָרִיּוֹת וְאִין
הַבָּרִיּוֹת מְרַחֲמוֹת עָלָיו. אָמַר רַב
יְהוּדָה אָמַר רַב: מַאי טַעְמָא
דְּרַבִּי יוֹסֵי — דְּכָתִיב: "וַיְהִי
הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה" — נִשְׁמָה
שָׁנַתְתִּי בְךָ הַחַיִּיהָ.

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