

Text Study Journal – Adam Schaffer

Preparations:

1. Why do I want to engage my faculty in learning this text?

I want to have our faculty look at this text from the point of view of the students in the Beit Midrash. Our teachers would naturally gravitate toward Rabbi Nehunyah's point of view both because he is the subject of the text and because he is the teacher in the story. However, I want our teachers to try to see the world more through their students' eyes, and that starts here.

2. What questions/confusions do I have about the text?

- Where are the students when Rabbi Nehunyah is praying?
- When do the students become aware of what Rabbi Nehunyah is doing?

3. What are the learning goals?

One key goal: Have the teachers look at the text first from the point of view of Rabbi Nehunyah, then from the point of view of the students.

4. What do I hope people will gain from studying this text?

I hope that our teachers will remember to look at all their lesson plans from their students' point of view (rather than strictly through their own eyes or through the eyes of the material).

5. How will I introduce the session?

This session won't need too much introduction. It will be the last thing we do on the first night of orientation. I will set it up as a text which talks about what happens as we "enter the Beit Midrash" for the year.

6. Questioning sequence:

- What does this text appear to be about?
- What do you think about Rabbi Nehunyah's answers?
- Now, let's take a look at this text from a different point of view. Let's put the "camera" at a student's desk. What does that student see?
- Why do the student ask the questions that they do?
- What do you think **now** about Rabbi Nehunyah's answers?
- How does this text look different when you look at it through the students' eyes?
- What might this text study teach us about our own classrooms and lessons?

Reflections:

When this text study was done, I had mixed reactions. I was pleased that the teachers had been able to “turn the text around” – that is they were able to see the text from both Rabbi Nehunyah’s point of view and that of the students. They were even able to articulate specific insights about what the students saw in the Beit Midrash. From that standpoint, the lesson was a success.

The challenge for me was watching the teachers struggle to translate their insights about the texts into meaningful lessons to use in their lesson planning and classroom management. I wanted the teachers to imagine themselves “on camera” the way that Rabbi Nehunyah was in our study of the text. They just couldn’t seem to go that deep. They could give some surface-level analysis, but I was hoping for more. Most importantly for me, as the year has gone on, I have not seen the changes in their lesson plans or planning that I had hoped for.

In the end, I wonder if I was asking too much too soon from this group of teachers. I know that my teachers are not as reflective as I wish they would be, nor do they have the self-critical eye I wish they had. One text study is not going to be the proverbial “A-ha” moment for them, especially when they are not looking for great change. I will have to cultivate that mentality over time. I will have to look at this text study as the seed that was planted, and I will have to “water” that seed with other exercises over the course of the year (if not years).