

MTEI COHORT SEVEN –SEMINAR 3
March 27-30, 2016 - Adar Bet 17-20

Learning *supporting* and *challenging* as interpretive practices

Study Guide

Background

R. Yochanan and Resh Lakish (*Rabbi Shimon the son of Lakish*) lived in the second half of the 2nd century. R. Yochanan was the head of the leading Yeshiva (Talmudic school) in those days. The knowledgeable Talmud reader already knows that R. Yochanan is handsome and clean-shaven, while Resh Lakish is a former gladiator or the leader of a band of bandits—in short, a man of great physical strength. Until his critical encounter with R. Yochanan, as described in this story.

Study with your Havruta Partner - Part I

- a. This story can be read as a parable, which probably draws upon some historical and biographical details of both characters. As learners of this text, we ask ourselves what ideas might those who wrote it, want us to learn and/or become aware of.
- b. Closely read the text. The story narrates what the characters say and do. It does not reveal their motivations for their actions. A close reading entails both ***understanding what happens*** and finding explanations for ***why*** people in the story choose to say and do as presented in the text. A close reading entails considering the details of the story and how they contribute toward the larger meaning of the story. So you may want to pay particular attention to sentences, words, emphasis, omissions, images or symbols.
- c. At this stage, please study the text **up to line 24 only** ("and Resh Lakish became ill"). Because this is a relatively long story, it is easy to develop an interpretation of the end without figuring out how the earlier details fit into your explanation. Therefore, make sure to revisit the text and consider how the different pieces contribute to what you believe this story is about. **Write** down your interpretation(s) of what this story is about (again, up to line 24 only).

Please prepare yourself to report the interpretation you find to be the most compelling, in the following way:

- a. According to my/our understanding, this story is about [please be as specific as possible]
- b. The following sentences, words, emphasis, omissions, images, symbols etc. provide strong textual evidences for my/our interpretation(s)...

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Study with your (original) Havruta Partner - Part 2

In these last twenty minutes, your earlier interpretation(s) have been supported/challenged. You have also been exposed to alternative interpretations. Together with your havruta, examine again your original interpretation(s) in the light of this experience (fishbowl and learning with second havruta partner).

- a. If you decide to change your interpretation, explain to each other what has caused you to change it and why you find this interpretation more compelling, particularly in terms of textual evidence.
- b. If you decide not to change your interpretation explain how you address the comments and the questions that you have heard.

Study with your (original) Havruta Partner - Part 3

So far, we've focused on supporting and challenging as two central practices of havruta learning designed to contribute to **both** partners' learning. Now, we continue to focus on these practices by using them in our study of a text which has been viewed over the centuries as dealing with the nature of havruta learning.

Your **goal** is to figure out what the story is saying **in regard to havruta learning**:

Go back to study our text together, beginning with page 1, line 13 ("One day") through the end on page 2.

- Closely read the text.
- Support and challenge each other, using the practices' guidelines.