

Ilana Gleicher-Bloom
Chevruta Session Journal Entry

1. What happened? (Describe the workshop)

At Mishkan, we meet as a full staff once/week. We always begin with a short learning, and I led chevruta learning at this meeting. There were 6 people there, including me, so we had 3 chevrotot. I participated in one of them to help balance things out. I started by introducing the concept of chevruta, the idea that we support and challenge each other's ideas in order to strengthen them, and how this might be seen as counter-cultural. I handed out the text of Reish Lakish and R. Yochanan, and told the chevrotot to take turns reading each line out loud to each other, and that each person should come up with their own interpretation, responding to the prompts: "According to my/our understanding, this story is about [please be as specific as possible]" and "The following sentences, words, emphasis, omissions, images, symbols etc. provide strong textual evidences for my/our interpretation(s)..."

1. How did you (or did you not) use the prompts and language that were provided in the guidelines for the assignment?

I handed out the guidelines for everyone to look at, and better understand what it looks like to support and/or challenge your chevruta. We looked at them together before our learning began. I also used the MTEI language (mentioned above) to help people develop their own interpretations.

2. How did this compare with what you assumed or hoped would happen?

In an ideal world we would have had more time. The only way I could get the staff together to learn is during this learning time slot before our staff meetings, but that's also a busy/stressful time, and we have lots to cover in those meetings. I think with more time people could have had deeper discussions. Although, I did have the opportunity to model "challenging" when I made an interpretive statement and a staff member challenged it and I encouraged her to use the challenging language, and I responded using chevruta language from the guidelines as well.

3. Were there aspects of what happened that surprised you?

One staff member said "Isn't everyone right in chevruta learning, anyway?" I was surprised to hear that someone thought that

4. Were there aspects that pleased you? Why?

I think people were able to understand chevruta in a new way, and think of it as something more than just sitting with someone and having a conversation.

5. What did participants report about their experience and/or learning?

The participants gave me positive feedback after the learning. One of them told me that it was meaningful to learn that chevruta was about sharpening each other's ideas and challenging each other. One staff member even told me that she's used the challenging statements in her life, and pointed out that she's sharpening ideas, not just being rude!

6. Read the Journal entry you wrote on your learning of these practices during our last seminar:

a. Anything new you've learned?

b. Any new question or insights you have about your learning of these practices?

c. Any new question or insights you have about teaching these practices to colleagues?

I was not at the last seminar, but this assignment made me think more about framing chevruta learning as counter-cultural, and giving students/chevrutot precise language to use and practice so they can adapt to this counter-cultural way of learning.