

Miriam Philips

Chevruta Journal Entry for June seminar

I invited two teachers to study text with me with the explicit explanation that we would study using chevruta, and practicing supporting and challenging language. They both were interested because they are exploring how to teach TaNaKh from the original text in their classrooms (one is even tackling creating a curriculum for Third Grade based on the parshah). They also knew this was my homework for MTEI.

We read the twelve spies/scouts episodes in the selections sent to us as homework: Numbers, Chapter 13:1-3-20, 25 – 14:3.

I began by giving them the supporting/challenging language handout from the March seminar. Then we read the story, then we privately wrote an interpretation, then we each shared our interpretation, taking time to unpack each interpretation before moving to the next (although that was difficult). Then I shared the chevruta-chevruta-text triangle with them, and explained my understanding of how this form of text study fit into bigger curricular goals, and what its objectives and outcomes were (to give voice to the text, practice listening to it, and practice listening to each other. Truly learning TaNaKh and internalizing it. Building holy community). Finally, I asked for feedback.

It went very well, better than I hoped. I was surprised by a couple things. One of the teachers (let's call her Leah) was very comfortable using the supporting and challenging language. The other teacher felt very uncomfortable, and used "feeling statements." Both teachers had a hard time setting aside what they already "knew"—the broader context of the story, and how it has been interpreted. The second teacher (Rachel) in particular had a hard time with this, and had difficulty for the first half of our meeting making arguments, challenges, support from the evidence. She'd often bring in midrash or traditional interpretations to support her reading or argument, and had difficulty "citing." But equally surprisingly, after constant reinforcement, she was challenging and supporting like a pro by the end!

The feedback was that it was useful, and that writing our interpretations initially was a good way to begin it. They both asked for more context for the texts, and more resources to be able to pursue lines of questioning, and still support them with evidence.

I also note that the experience was not as much a practice of *kavod* as I'd noted in my original journal entry. Or rather, it was equally such a practice, but since our relationships with each other were different and newer, the quality of listening felt more forced.