

- **What happened? (Describe the workshop)**

- Two friends of mine, both of whom are Jewish educators, studied a short passage from the Babylonian Talmud (Makkot 10b ). I explained the assignment to them, doing my best to introduce the techniques that I was taught at the last seminar. In the interests of full disclosure, I also told them that the text I had chosen was one that I had taught a number of times as a Melton teacher, but I nonetheless wanted them (in the spirit of the exercise) to feel free to challenge me and the points of view that I brought.

The actual study of the text was wonderful. I had the others read the text out loud first (an appropriate move given that I was already familiar with the story). I then asked them to give me their first impressions of what the text said to them. Not surprisingly, the two of them gave a very good rendering of the *p'shat* of the text. Following the "Holzer technique" (HT), I did my best to check for understanding with both of them to see if I had fully grasped what they had gleaned from the text. They quickly confirmed that indeed, I had done so.

At that point, I continued with the HT and asked them to show me what they had seen in the text that brought them to the conclusions they had drawn. I assured them that I was not challenging them; I merely wanted to see how they had arrived at their understanding of the text. They proceeded to show me which parts of the text had shaped their reading. I commented that they had shown a level of comprehension that I had not seen in the many years I had had been teaching this text!

I then proceeded to build upon the interpretations that the two of them had provided. I essentially took what they had said and added an additional layer. They had read the text from the point of view of an outsider (i.e. the way we usually read text today). I looked at the same text from the vantage point of one of the characters in the text itself. In doing so, I was able to give us all a different reading of the text that still left their views fully "intact."

My partners then did their best to check for their own understanding (we were all quite successful in that endeavor). Having seen what I did with one of the lines (i.e. reading it from a different point of view), they then picked up where I had left off and looked at a different part of the text from that same character's point of view. They challenged my reading of one line of the text and offered an alternative interpretation. Again, they were not saying that my interpretation was wrong, rather that there was another possible way to look at the same line. They presented their evidence, and I completely agreed with their assessment. Indeed, they offered a point of view that I had never thought of in my years of working with this text.

At this point, we hit that wonderful moment where we needed to stop studying (we all had other appointments that were starting shortly), but no one wanted to do so. We all

agreed that we had enjoyed studying with one another and that the HT had helped us do so even more fruitfully than we had done before (and between the three of us, there were a lot of years of text study).

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

- For me, the most important part of the HT language was the check for understanding. There is a tremendous power in letting someone feel that they have been heard - even if I am about to disagree with what that person said. Making certain that I said something to the effect of, "I want to see if I understood what you just said," really made a difference in our time in havruta.

The other piece of language that was useful was the piece dealing with challenge. Being able to offer up an interpretation in a non-threatening way was liberating. So often it can be difficult to offer a challenge to a partner's reading because I fear that I will be perceived as "talking down" to him/her. Using the HT language I was able to give a different interpretation without any of those concerns.

- **How did this [experience] compare with what you assumed or hoped would happen?**

- I'm not sure I really had assumptions about this process because I didn't really know how it would play out with two people who had not learned the HT with me (I also didn't have that much confidence that I would be able to explain it as well as Elie did for us). As such, when things worked out well it was a pleasant surprise.

- **Were there aspects of what happened that surprised you? Were there aspects that pleased you? Why?**

- Absolutely. The biggest surprise (as alluded to in the last question) was the success of the HT in allowing for opposing viewpoints. I was worried that despite the assurances, using the HT would still result in the participants feeling like one person was "taking charge" of the text and not allowing room for multiple interpretations. The language of the HT really helped make room for everyone's point of view.

- **What did the participants report about their experience and/ or learning?**

- In a nutshell, they both reported that they enjoyed the experience. One of them even commented that they had not studied text for a while with other adults (she is a preschool director), and that using this technique had reminded her of the best that text study has to offer.

- **Read the last journal entry you wrote on your learning of these practices during our last seminar: Anything new you have learned? Any new question or insight(s) you have about your learning of these practices? Any new question or insights you have about teaching these practices to colleagues?**

- The biggest learning takeaway for me is how being transparent with the rules before studying begins makes a big difference. I needed to be very clear about how the HT works so that we could all be on the same page. When I was first trying the HT back in March, I wasn't all that clear for myself what the "rules of the game" were. Having

had some time to digest things, I was able both to have a command of the HT for myself and to explain it well to others.

In my journal entry, I had written how important it was to have everyone on the proverbial same page when study began. In other words all the participants needed to know the rules and constraints that the HT sets up. Being as transparent as possible at the beginning helped achieve that goal.