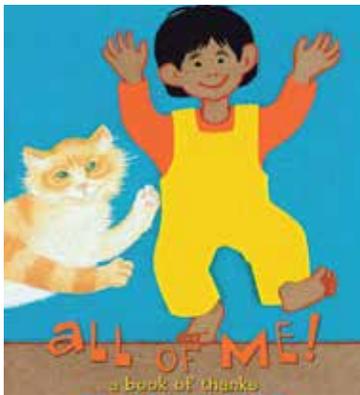


Global Day of Jewish Learning

Curriculum: Blessings & Gratitude



NOV·18·12

www.theglobalday.com

A Project of the Aleph Society



Written by: **Devorah Katz**

Introduction (10 minutes)

Welcome to the Global Day of Jewish Learning. Today in Jewish communities around the world, people are studying texts on blessings and gratitude. In this class, we're going to explore a Talmudic passage that asks us to bless those who are different.

How many of us have been in this situation? You're walking down the street with your young child. She suddenly points to someone coming toward you and makes a loud (and embarrassing!) declaration commenting on the height, weight, clothing or facial features of the person. Whatever it is that she is pointing at, it is clear that she is surprised by how different that person is from those she is used to seeing. While our first inclination is to sink through the floor, this is actually the perfect teachable moment for our child: there are differences everywhere, and we can choose to embrace them or to fear them.

➤ Ask your students to share their experiences feeling different or encountering differences.

Text #1: Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 58b (20 minutes)

➤ Hand out print and sourcesheets.

Jerusalem-based artist Dov Abramson created a print based on the passage in the Tractate of Berakhot (blessings) that teaches us not only to embrace differences, but to bless them. At the very moment that we may choose to fear the different or the unknown, we are told to do just the opposite, to offer up a blessing.

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 "ברוך משנה הבריות". מיתיבי [ומקשים] ראה את הכושי ואת הגיחור [מי שהוא אדום
 ביותר] ואת הלוקן [לבן ביותר] ואת הקפח [רזה מאוד וגבוה] ואת הננס ואת הדרניקוס
 [שפיו מעוקם] אומר "ברוך משנה הבריות".

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: One who sees spotted people recites: Blessed...Who makes creatures different. The gemara raises a challenge: One who saw a person with unusually black skin, a person with unusually red skin, a person with unusually white skin, an unusually tall and thin person, a dwarf, or one with warts recites: Blessed...Who makes creatures different.

Using the above source as your guide, you can uncover the person Dov is alluding to in each square of his print. Take a moment to truly understand the diversity that we are blessing.

Celebrating Differences: If we are all created in the image of God, why do we all look so different?

► Ask:

1. Match the words in the Talmud to each square.
2. Why has Dov chosen this way to represent differences?
3. What role does color and shape play in Dov's print?
4. What other ways could Dov have chosen to present this piece of Talmud?

Meet the Artist Dov Abramson discusses the inspiration behind his piece:

I remember a teacher of mine, when teaching this mishna, felt that it could be translated in one of two ways. On the one hand, the Hebrew term "mishane" can mean strange, but my teacher, a man I respected deeply, thought differently. "Mishane" can be defined simply as different. That motivated me to look more deeply at this mishna.

As an artist, I like deconstructing lists. I like lists that need explanations. I see it as a code waiting to be cracked or a puzzle that needs to be pieced together.

Here, I wanted to bring this mishna back to basics. We are all the same, so I searched to find a common denominator. That common denominator was represented in this piece by variations on a square. Each person begins as a square but then I build in the differences, or the nuance to each person.

I want people to walk away from this piece realizing that we do not lament differences; we celebrate them.

Text #2: Genesis 1:27 (6 minutes)

We're told that when God created the world, He created man in His own image.

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ, בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ: זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה, בָּרָא אֹתָם.

And God created man in God's own image, in the image of God, God created him; male and female God created them.

At the start of humanity, the Torah makes it clear that God had a plan when creating humankind. All of humankind, no matter what shape or size or look, are made in God's own image. And by virtue of that fact, all of mankind deserves our respect.

► Ask:

1. Who is someone you respect? What are actions you take to convey that you respect him or her?

Text #3: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz: *Biblical Images: Men & Women of the Book* (8 minutes)

Adam and Eve represent the complete course of human life: in other words, they project an image not of men in their individuality and particularity, but of man as a species, of humanity as humanity. So it is that mystics taught that all human souls are not only descended from Adam but are actually dependent upon him, are components of his being. Adam is that man who includes all men. Adam and Eve are not merely archetypes but the very stuff of mankind, and their story is the story of the human race.

Rabbi Steinsaltz asks us to look at the very first man and first woman, Adam and Eve. Rabbi Steinsaltz believes that we are all descended from and dependent on Adam and Eve because they represent all of humanity. It seems then that we are all a variation on the same theme.

➤ Ask:

1. How does this interpretation effect our reading of the original mishna?
2. How do we then look at differences?

Text #4: Ethics of our Fathers (Pirkei Avot) 2:15 (5 minutes)

Ethics of our Fathers (Pirkei Avot) chapter 2, verse 15 encourages us to honor everyone.

רבי אליעזר אומר, יהי כבוד חברך חביב עליך כשלך

Rabbi Eliezer said: “Let the honor of your fellow person be as dear to you as your own.”

➤ Ask:

1. Who is someone you honor? What are actions you take to convey that you honor him or her?

The passage in Tractate Berakhot (Text #1) may be pulling ideas of respect and honor from the Bible and Ethics of our Fathers. Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Levi takes the idea one step further and tells us of a blessing to give over one who is different.

Celebrating Differences: If we are all created in the image of God, why do we all look so different?

Text #5: Seder Eliyahu Rabbah 26 (8 minutes)

We'll end with a piece from Seder Eliyahu Rabbah 26, a collection of midrashim compiled at the end of the 10th century.

כך אמר להם הקב"ה לישראל, בניי, כלום חיסרתי לכם, מה אני מבקש מכם, הא איני מבקש אלא כדי שתהיו אוהבין זה את זה, ותהיו מכבדין זה את זה, ותהיו יראין זה מזה.

This is what the Holy Blessed One said to Israel: "My children, have I deprived you in any way? I only ask that you should love each other, treat each other with dignity, and stand in awe of each other..."

➤ Discuss:

1. What if we feel God did deprive us, does that mean we don't need to love others?
2. In Ethics of our Fathers we are told to honor others, and here we are asked to love others. Are honor and love the same thing? Does love mean something different here?
3. How do you stand in awe of another? What would that require?

Conclusion (3 minutes)

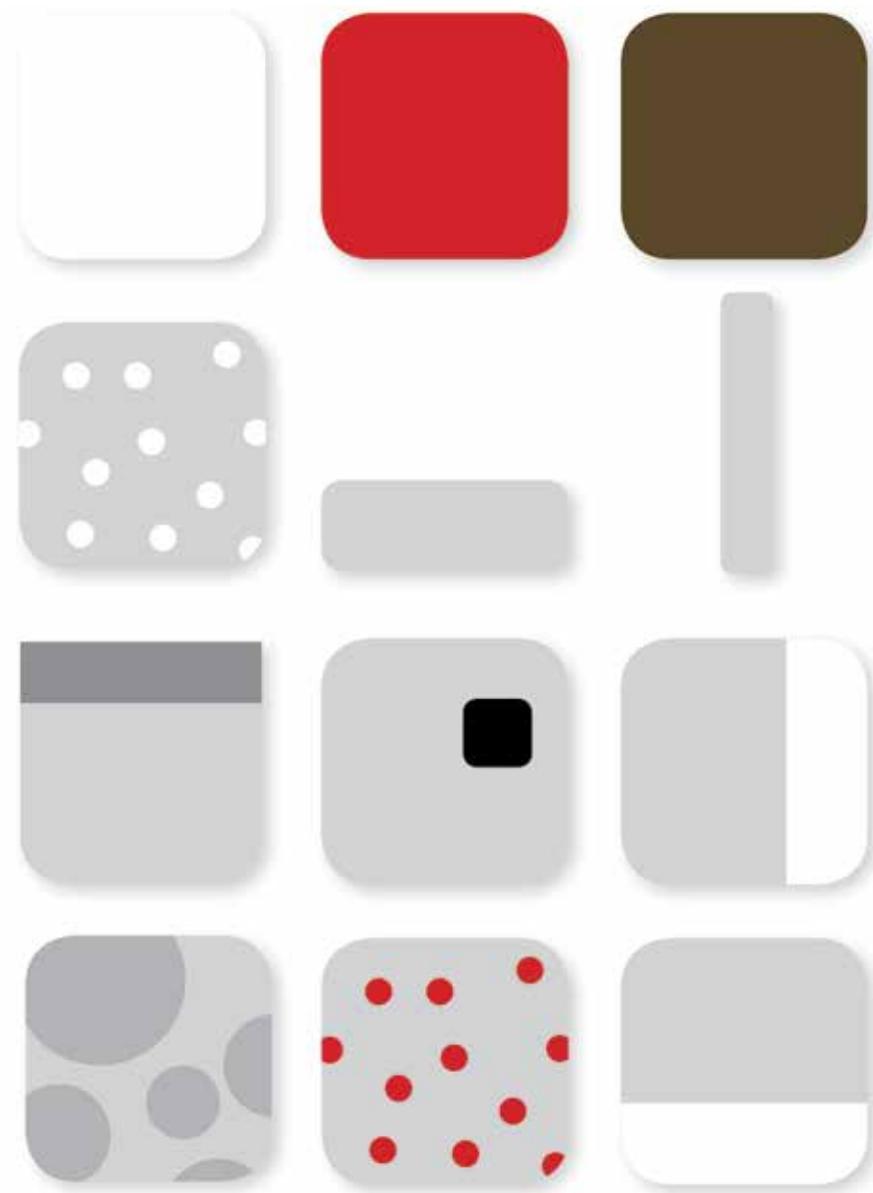
What's our ultimate goal? To treat all with dignity.

Dov's print, full of different colors and different shapes, always returns to the same basic shape, a variation on a square. We strive to find the common denominator among people while celebrating their differences.

Blessed...Who makes creatures different.



Celebrating Differences: If we are all created in the image of God, why do we all look so different?



ראה את הכושי ואת הגיחור ואת הלוקן ואת הקיפח ואת הננס
ואת הדרניקוס את הקיטע ואת הסומא ואת פתויי הראש ואת
החגיר ואת המוכה שחין, ואת הבהקנים אומר

ברוך משנה הבריות



Celebrating Differences: If we are all created in the image of God, why do we all look so different?



קיטע
an amputee



כושי
a person with unusually black skin



סומא
a blind person



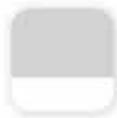
גירוד
a person with unusually red skin



פתוי ראש
a flat-headed person



לווקן
a person with unusually white skin



חיגר
a lame person



קיפח
an unusually tall and thin person



מוכה שחין
a person affected with boils



ננס
a dwarf



בהקן
a spotted person



דרניקוס
a person with warts

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