BEAUTY AND UGLINESS

Global Day of Jewish Learning: Curriculum

A Project of the Aleph Society

NOV. 12. 17
www.theglobalday.org
Welcome to the Global Day of Jewish Learning!

Today, we are exploring beauty in our world. Let's look together at how Judaism and beauty connect.

Ask:
1. What is something beautiful that you own? What makes it beautiful to you?
2. What is something beautiful that you cannot own?

Part One: Beauty in Nature (15 minutes)

When God created the world, he made the Garden of Eden. He put so many beautiful things in it, and he was very proud of his garden. There were many different types of trees, plants and flowers in the Garden of Eden. There were many rivers running all through it.

In our first source there is a conversation between God and Adam. It is from Ecclesiastes Rabbah, a collection of comments (midrashim) on the Book of Ecclesiastes.

Read Text #1.

Text #1: Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:13.

When God created Adam, God led him around all the trees in the Garden of Eden. God said to him, “See how beautiful and praiseworthy all of My works are? Everything I have created has been created for your sake. Think of this, and do not corrupt or destroy my world; for if you corrupt it, there will be no one to set it right after you.”

God is pleased to show Adam around the Garden of Eden, but He has some strong words for Adam.

Ask:
1. What does God warn us against?
2. How are we told to keep our world?

God believes He has given us a great and beautiful present — the Earth. But then God tells us that it is our responsibility to take care of the Earth.
Embracing a Beautiful World (Elementary School)

Ask:

1. What are some ways that you can help take care of the planet?

Anne Frank was a teenage girl during the Holocaust. She kept a diary while she and her family were in hiding from the Nazis. You might expect Anne to see the world in a very sad way, but she had an inspirational outlook.

Text #2: Diary of Anne Frank.

Think of all the beauty still left around you and be happy.

Ask:

1. How do you think Anne is able to look at the world and still find beauty?

Part Two: Blessing the Beautiful (20 minutes)

There are so many unexpected places to find beauty.


The Sages taught: One who sees an elephant, a monkey or a vulture (Rashi) recites: “Blessed...Who makes creatures different.” One who saw beautiful or otherwise outstanding creatures or beautiful trees recites: “Blessed...Who has such things in His world.”

Ask:

1. Did you know that in Judaism we have special blessings to say over animals or trees? Does that surprise you? Why or why not?

2. Why do you think the Talmud is telling us to bless things that are different or beautiful?

Activity: Create a Blessing

Create your own blessing! What is something you think deserves a blessing? It could be a good friend or your favorite sport. Write a blessing for it.
Ask students to share their blessings with the class.

**Activity: Stop and Smell the Roses**

We’re often taught the value of “stopping to smell the roses”. Imagine that you are walking through a park — you might be trying to get from one end to the other as quickly as you can. But stopping to smell the flowers makes you appreciate the park more, even if it means pausing for a minute or two. The idea is that while living such a busy life we shouldn’t forget to enjoy the small pleasures all around us.

**Preparation**

Either before class or as a class activity, create sensory smell stations. Spray a little scent on cotton balls and put them individually into small jars, or place items that have unique scents into jars. Some ideas may be vanilla, peppermint extract, lavender, orange, cinnamon, rosewater, flowers etc... Give your students time to take a deep breath at each jar and make notes or drawings inspired by what they smell.

Ask:

1. Which is your favorite scent and why?
2. What do you think about when you’re smelling each scent?

Saying a blessing over something is like stopping to smell the roses. It is taking a minute out of your day to stop and show appreciation for the world around you. This is like what you did with our “smell stations”: you stopped and took the time to really think about what each of those scents was, and to appreciate the thoughts and pictures those smells brought to your mind.

**Conclusion (10 minutes)**

Let’s look at how mindfulness can change the way we do everyday things.

**Text #4: Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 133b.** English translation [bold text] and commentary [plain text] by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz in the Koren Talmud Bavli.

Even if one fulfills the mitzva by performing it simply, it is nonetheless proper to perform the mitzva as beautifully as possible. Make before Him a beautiful sukkah, a beautiful lulav, a beautiful shofar, beautiful ritual fringes, beautiful parchment for a Torah scroll, and write in it in His name in beautiful ink, with a beautiful quill by an expert scribe, and wrap the scroll in beautiful silk fabric.

Ask:

1. What do you think is the difference between just doing what is asked of you, and doing something beautifully?
Let’s say your parents ask you to clean your room. You can go and clean your room as quickly as you can, so that you can say you’re done. But you can also go and clean your room and make it beautiful, by lining up your toys nicely and arranging your books — you can turn your room into something beautiful. There is a difference between doing what is asked of you and doing it beautifully.

That is what this piece of Talmud is telling you. There are all sorts of mitzvot (commandments) that are asked of us, and there is a simple way to do them. The text is letting us know that sometimes you can go beyond what is simply asked of you and make it beautiful.

**Ask:**

1. Can you think of a time where you added beauty to your world?
2. Who else do you think adds beauty into the world?
Part One: Beauty in Nature

Text #1: *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 7:13.

When God created Adam, God led him around all the trees in the Garden of Eden. God said to him, “See how beautiful and praiseworthy all of My works are? Everything I have created has been created for your sake. Think of this, and do not corrupt or destroy my world; for if you corrupt it, there will be no one to set it right after you.”

Text #2: *Diary of Anne Frank.*

Think of all the beauty still left around you and be happy.

Part Two: Blessing the Beautiful

Text #3: *Babylonian Talmud* Berakhot 58b. English translation [bold text] and commentary [plain text] by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz in the Koren *Talmud Bavli.*

The Sages taught: One who sees an elephant, a monkey or a vulture (Rashi) recites: “Blessed...Who makes creatures different.” One who saw beautiful or otherwise outstanding creatures or beautiful trees recites: “Blessed...Who has such things in His world.”

Conclusion

Text #4: *Babylonian Talmud* Shabbat 133b. English translation [bold text] and commentary [plain text] by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz in the Koren *Talmud Bavli.*

Even if one fulfills the mitzva by performing it simply, it is nonetheless proper to perform the mitzva as beautifully as possible. Make before Him a beautiful sukkah, a beautiful lulav, a beautiful shofar, beautiful ritual fringes, beautiful parchments for a Torah scroll, and write in it in His name in beautiful ink, with a beautiful quill by an expert scribe, and wrap the scroll in beautiful silk fabric.