

Hadracha Choveret



תנועת בני עקיבא
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BNEI AKIVA'S WEEKLY EDUCATIONAL HANDBOOK FOR MADRICHIM

In this pack:

1. A Choveret with the theme of the week for 'read-through'.
2. A selection of suggested games/activities that your madrichim can use in Sviva that are linked to the topic. (Attached separately).



Choveret – For Reading Through

The Rebbe of Kotzk would say about the verse: "And you shall be holy people to me" (Shemot 22:6), that God, as it were, is saying here: "Angels I have in sufficient quantity; I am looking for human beings who will be holy people."

Torah sheBichtav and Torah sheBe'al Peh are the fundamental bodies of work that are the basis for all Orthodox religious life. We use them to structure our lives and understand the world around us. They extend to both our thoughts/attitudes and to our actions and cover the duality of ben-adam lemakom and ben-adam lechaveiro; the spiritual and the societal aspects of our lives.

Often we can find that requirements of Torah and Halacha in our society/community lead to a way of life that is not only incredibly demanding but one that sets up the Tzaddik as the role model to follow. The person who prays with obvious fervour, the one who learns particularly well, the one who dresses in the frummiest way possible and all sorts of other things are set up as the ideal. They are never angry and always humble and forgiving. They epitomise self-sacrifice and let you know that they do so. They are an extreme of spirituality, and they strive to be like the angels; removed from the physical world and only focused on God. We might all know such a person in our lives whether that be one of our rabbanim or older role model.

This choveret will try to offer a different approach to how we live our lives. One that views as legitimate, even desirable, to live normal, human lives with all the complexity of emotion, failures, weaknesses and downright grittiness of existence that we encounter in the day-to-day.

1. Sin – not doing what we're 'supposed' to be doing:

One of the factors that have led into the approach described above is that of an emphasis on sources of Chazal that talk exclusively of our national heroes in glowing terms, and do not think to assume that they could ever sin. One of the oft quoted sources of this idea is 'Yeridat HaDorot' and the accompanying proof text: "if the first ones were like angels, then we are like humans. And if the first ones were like humans, then we are like donkeys" (Shabbat 112b). This source emphasises that, apparently, all of Chazal believed that they are nothing compared to their elders and that whilst they themselves may sin, obviously our forefathers and foremothers did not.

However we see throughout Chazal that they described the figures in Tanach in ways that certainly believed that they sinned, and that there was nothing inherently wrong with acknowledging this. For example:

- Sanhedrin 38b: Adam and Chava, specifically Adam was 'kofer beikar' – 'rejected fundamental principle'.
- Rashi's discussion of Noach not praying for his generation s"v Tzaddik Bedoro
- Nedarim 32b: Bnei Yisrael's exile to Egypt and the subsequent 210 years are blamed on Avraham's sin of questioning God.
- Sotah 36b: Yosef was intending to sin with the wife of Potiphar and actually went looking for her to do so.
- And many more examples.

Bnei Akiva Vayetzei – Humans not Angels Theme for Read Through

It is still of utmost importance that we relate to the figures in Tanach with complete respect and reverence, they are the founders of our religion and nation after all. However this respect does not mean that we cannot recognise that they are human still. Part of being human is sinning, it's going to happen at some point in our lives. The question is how to respond to it when it does.

In fact this way of relating to figures in Tanach often makes them greater role models for us: If Avraham sinned and did Teshuva, it's not the end of world that I have sinned, because I can do Teshuva too. If such a great figure as Avraham sinned, and he was still worthy of being the founder of our nation, then maybe I am still worthy and good even though I have sinned.

2. Emotions:

The Sefer Hachinuch writes:

However, as it would seem, this does not mean that if one Jew came along and began wickedly to inflict pain on his fellow with evil words, the listener should not answer him. For it is impossible for a person to be as a stone that has no one to turn it over.

The Sefer Chinuch goes on to talk about how that reacting angrily to somebody shouting at us is perfectly normal and is not something that we should avoid. Getting angry doesn't make us bad, it makes us human. What is important is how we react to it: do we lash out and hurt others or do we try and control our anger, perhaps avoiding the things that might make us want to lash out.

Key Point: Truth is of utmost importance

The Gemara (Yoma 69b) teaches:

"Moshe said, 'The great, mighty and awesome God.' Yirmiyahu said, 'Gentiles crow in His Sanctuary – where is His awesomeness?' Therefore he omitted the word 'awesome.' Daniel said, 'Gentiles are subjugating His children – where is His might?' Therefore he omitted the word 'mighty.' And how could [Yirmiyahu and Daniel] change the wording of the prayer instituted by Moshe? R. Elazar said, 'Because they knew that God is truthful – therefore they did not lie about Him.'"

The common theme between the two points above (Sin and Emotions) is recognising the reality of the situation. These things exist. The point is not to try and escape a world where these things exist but to do our best to control and utilise them for the good. Sin allows us to do teshuva and be better. You can get angry about the bad things in the world, and use that anger to motivate you do to good. Don't lie to ourselves and ignore that these things are present. Do something about it.

Truth and Humanity are incredibly important facets of the way we live our lives.

Suggested Activity

There are 3 main aspects to this Choveret:

- We all sin and that's fine – what matters is our response to it.
- We all get angry and that's fine – what matters is our response to it and how we use it.
- Truth: Truth is very important – we should always try and be honest about who we are and what we do, part of that is recognising that we're all human and the goal is not to be 'like angels'.

The overarching question is who are our role models?

- The standard 'youth movementy' answer to this question is to run an activity that emphasises the difference between positive and negative role models, and to encourage chanichim to pick positive (perfect) role models.
 - ➔ I prefer to encourage my chanichim to find role models that speak to them regardless of who they are. Having flawed role models is not only fine, it is perhaps even desirable. They more accurately reflect who we all are as human beings – flawed. And that's fine.

Games that can explore these themes:

Basic games:

- Trust fall
- Follow the leader games (role models)
- 2 truths, 1 lie

Advanced Game:

- Assassin (see below – page 5)
- Distinctly Human (a good one for sum-up activity)
 - Go around the room, ask each Chanich to say "I am distinctly human because..." where they have to complete the phrase with something specific to them.

Assassin: (variation on mafia)

- Truth gets stretched in this game by quite a lot - This opens up the opportunity to talk further about the importance of telling the truth, keeping your word and being trustworthy source. And about why society only really functions properly when Truth is placed as a value of extreme importance.

Assassin is a great game - it's simple to setup, needs no equipment, and is heaps of fun. You need at least 7 or 8 people to play.

There are five roles people play in the game - The killers, a medic, townspeople, and a moderator. For a group of eleven, the ratios should be approximately:

- 2 Assassins
- 1 Medic
- 1 Policeman
- 6 Townspeople
- 1 Moderator

Except for the Moderator, the other roles should be allocated secretly. Normally, the Moderator writes them on cards and hand them out, so no one knows what role others are playing. The moderator should be someone who knows the game well (perhaps a leader to start out with).

In a nutshell:

- The two assassin's objective is to work together to assassinate all the townspeople (including the police & medic)
- The townspeople's objective is to vote out both the assassins

The game starts with the moderator telling everyone to close their eyes.

Once all eyes are closed, the moderator asks the Assassins to open their eyes. Given it's the first turn, each assassin will discover the fellow 'assassins'. The moderator asks the two Assassins who they wish to kill. They silently agree (by pointing to someone) who to 'kill' that turn. Once they have selected someone, the moderator thanks them and asks them to close their eyes.

The moderator then asks the Medic to open their eyes. They can then choose someone to 'save' (more on what this means later). Once they have selected someone to save, the moderator asks the Medic to close their eyes

Finally the moderator asks the Policeman to open his/her eyes, and select someone to accuse (of being an assassin). The moderator must honestly (and silently) answer the policeman with a nod or a shake of the head whether the accused is one of the assassins or not. The policeman then closes their eyes.

That's the end of the first round, and the moderator then asks everyone to open their eyes.

The moderator announces to the group who was killed during the night. The person who has been killed takes no further part in the game. It is essential they are not allowed to talk.

(Note that if the person the assassins selected to be 'killed' was also the one selected by the medic, the moderator only reveals there was a failed assassination attempt (and doesn't give any further information) so the person remains alive).

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Theme for Read Through

It is then up to the remaining group members to discuss amongst themselves who they think the assassins are. After a few minutes of discussion, the group must vote (one at a time) who they think is an assassin. Given the roles have been handed out in secret, the early rounds are often full of speculation, people justifying their innocence, or explaining their suspicions. And as the game progresses, lies, deception and strategy creep in. When all votes have been cast, the person with the most votes is out of the game (and must also not speak again). If there is a tied vote, give the group another minute for further discussion then vote again.

The policemen add a twist to the game - if they have accused someone and learnt they are an assassin, they may choose to disclose this to the group, but doing so has consequences - will the group believe they are the policemen? Often doing so puts a bigger target on their back - the assassins may choose to target that person next round. Or if the group are suspicious they may revolt and vote that person off.

The game continues on this cycle, with everyone closing their eyes, the assassins again selecting someone to kill, the medic selecting someone to save, the policeman someone to accuse, the moderator announcing who was killed, then voting again. If the medic and/or policeman have been voted out, the moderator should continue pretending to ask them to select someone to save (or to accuse) just so the townspeople don't know who those people are. If one of the two assassins is voted out, the game still continues with one assassin.

As the game progresses, less and less people are in the game, and people (especially the medic and policeman) build up more and more knowledge of who the assassins may be. Thus the discussions get more and more interesting. It's recommended the medics and policemen keep their identity a secret in the early rounds to avoid being picked off by the assassins. There comes a time however when it may be beneficial to reveal their role to the group, especially if the policeman has an accusation confirmed. Whether they can convince the rest of the group they are genuinely a policeman (and not an assassin posing as a policeman) adds to the mystery!

Adjust the number of policemen / assassins according to the size of the group. For 15 players, have two policemen, for 20, have three assassins, etc.