



Uncovering Your Jewish Roots

by Talking With G_d

Submitted by Eliyahu Krigel

Subject Area: Talking with G-d through Hitbonidut, a G-d interview, Psalm 27.

Target Age Group:

Three-Hour Seventh Grade B'nai Mitzvah Sunday School Class in a Synagogue School Environment.

Lesson Objective:

The goal of this lesson is to explore the pre-b'nai mitzvah students' relationship with G-d and to heighten this awareness and bond.





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Use quotes when indicated to highlight points of discussion and topics of interest when mentioned in the lesson and conversation:

1. "Let us make humanity in our image and in our likeness... And G-d created humanity in G-d's likeness, in the likeness of G-d humanity was created; male and female G-d created them." -Genesis 1:26-27
2. "The whole world of humans, animals, fish, and birds all depend on one another. All drink the earth's water, breath the earth's air, and find food in what was created on earth. All share the same destiny, what happens to one, happens to all." –Rabba De Bei Eliyahu Rabba 2nd Century
3. "G-d shall be for you an eternal light" –Isaiah 60:19
4. "Be holy for I the L-rd your G-d am holy" –Leviticus 19:2
5. "When we begin to speculate on a subject so vast and important as the nature of G-d, we must not decide any question by the first idea that suggests itself to our minds, or force our thoughts to obtain a knowledge of the Creator too quickly, but we must wait patiently and modestly advance step by step." - Rambam, *Guide to the Perplexed* 1:5



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6. “Does it really matter to G-d whether one slaughters an animal across the throat or across the back of the neck? {No, is his unrecorded reply.} Rather the mitzvot were given for the purpose of refining human beings.” -*Beresheet Rabbah 44:1*

7. “The best remedy for those who are afraid, lonely, or unhappy, is to go outside, somewhere where they can be quite alone with the heavens, nature, and G-d. Because only then does one feel that all is as it should be and that G-d wishes to see people happy, amidst the simple beauty of nature. As long as this exists, and it certainly always will, I know that then there will always be comfort for every sorrow. And I firmly believe that nature brings solace in all troubles.”—Anne Frank



(10 Minutes) Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav who lived during the 18th and 19th Century introduced a form of prayer to his Hasidim (pious students) called Hitbonidut, or meditation. Hitbonidut is a form of prayer and devotion when the practitioner talks directly to G-d and acts like G-d is right there, listening to every word and thought **(Discuss Quote 7)**.



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(2 minutes) A famous Rebbe Nachman prayer is, “Master of the Universe, grant me the ability to be alone; May it be my custom to go outdoors each day among the trees and the grass, among all growing things’ And, there may I be alone to enter into prayer. There may I express all that is in my heart talking to you, the one to whom I belong.” Many b’nai mitzvah students will probably feel like it’s funny or weird to talk to G-d directly. Ask for a volunteer to read Rebbe Nachman’s prayer to the class and see who can read it the most seriously.

(20 minutes) Instead of asking the students to voice their conversation with God, challenge them to write a prayer or letter to G-d on a piece of paper. Begin the letter by writing Dear G-d, and then allow the students the benefit of expressing their needs on paper. Remind the students that the letter to G-d is a conversation you would like them to begin that is from their heart and soul and has a higher purpose. Walk around the room while they are writing their letters and make sure they are following the lesson. Challenge students to share certain sentences from their letter to each other in chavruta partners. Ask the students how would they make a phone call to G-d? Suggest to the group that prayer and Hitbonidut is our way of making a direct phone call to G-d. In the



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letter, students should be encouraged to write about what they want out of life and what they are passionate about. **(Discuss Quotes 1, 3, and 4).**

(20 minutes) After the students are finished working on expressing their feelings on paper to God, as a class come up with questions you would like to ask G-d **(Discuss Quote 5)**. Imagine G-d was listening to all your questions, what questions would you have for G-d? Generate a list of questions that the class would like to ask G-d. Write all questions down on the board, no matter how silly they may seem **(Discuss Quote 6)**.

(5 minutes) After a complete list of questions is written on the board for all to see, narrow down the list to the top ten questions the class would like to ask G-d.

(25 minutes) Now that the top ten questions are determined, challenge the class to pretend they are role-playing the perspective of G-d and answer the ten questions to the best of the classes' ability.

(60 minutes) Introduce Psalm 27 that we say specifically between the first of Elul and Yom Kippur by passing out the prayer in Hebrew and English translation either in a prayer book or photocopied on paper. In essence, the psalm is about



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hope and faith, and the last line is, “Hope in G-d and be strong, take courage, and hope in G-d.” Turn off the lights in class; light a candle in the center of the room. Have the students take turns reading line-by-line the psalm in Hebrew and in English around the group. Challenge students to read one line in Hebrew then read the translation in English, and then ask if there are any questions about the message portrayed in the sentence. If there are students in the class who have a hard time sitting still while listening to their peers, have them draw a picture or build a clay figure that portrays in some way the Psalm read to the class by all the students. Raise the following questions to the class about the Psalm and have a class discussion based around the meaning of this particular Psalm:

1. What is the name of G-d referenced in this psalm and what does it mean?
2. How is the individual viewed in this psalm?
3. What is the role of the community in this psalm?
4. What will G-d do for you if you have hope and faith in G-d? Is this a good reason to have any form of devotion?
5. What is the role of the parents in this psalm? Does that fit with how we live our lives in contemporary life?



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6. What does it mean to hide from G-d? Is the psalm talking about physically hiding or spiritually hiding?
7. What does the following sentence mean to you? "To dwell in the House of the Lord all the days of my life to behold G-d's beauty, and to pray in G-d's sanctuary."

(25 minutes) Psalm 27 represents a particular prayer and way of relating to G-d based in hope and faith. Hitbonidut and speaking to G-d is universal in nature because the language comes from the heart. Ask the class what they hope in and what they have faith in. When one student says they "don't" believe, ask what do they "not" believe in **(Discuss Quote 2)?**

(13 minutes) Keep the discussion going by posing the following questions: Do you think your belief will ever change? Has it changed from when you were young? Challenge students to recite Psalm 27 when appropriate because of its strong message of hope and faith that can also be emphasized through Hitbonidut and conversations with G-d.