

A Havruta Text Study for Shavuot

Talmud Shabbat 88b–89a

Pedagogy of Partnership (PoP) is a comprehensive Jewish educational model that supports educators to bring Torah to the next generation. PoP's method reinvigorates the practice of havruta—learning in pairs—for today's learners and educators. Guided by PoP-trained educators, learners become more adept at studying with one another, while engaging with the text as an essential third partner in their discovery. For PoP, learning Jewishly means learning in intentional relationship with self, others, and Torah.

PoP was founded to strengthen Jewish teaching and learning so that students of all ages can learn texts in a meaningful and empowered way throughout their lives, in school, and beyond. Powered by Hadar, PoP offers training and resources for Jewish educators, school leaders, and families.

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וְאָמַר רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻעַ בֶּן לֵוִי: בְּשָׁעָה שֶׁעָלָה מֹשֶׁה לְמָרוֹם אָמְרוּ מַלְאָכֵי הַשָּׁרֵת לִפְנֵי הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא: רַבּוֹנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, מָה לִּילֹד אִשָּׁה בֵּינֵינוּ? אָמַר לָהֶן: לְקַבֵּל תּוֹרָה בָּא. אָמְרוּ לִפְנֵיו: חֲמִידָה גְּנוּזָה שֶׁגְּנוּזָה לָךְ תֵּשַׁע מֵאוֹת וְשִׁבְעִים וְאַרְבָּעָה דּוֹרוֹת קוֹדֶם שֶׁנִּבְרָא הָעוֹלָם, אַתָּה מִבְקֵשׁ לִיתֵּנָה לְבָשָׂר וָדָם? "מָה אֲנוֹשׁ כִּי תִזְכְּרֵנוּ וּבֶן אָדָם כִּי תִפְקְדֵנוּ?" "ה' אֲדִינֵנוּ מָה אֲדִיר שְׁמֶךָ בְּכָל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר תִּנָּה הוֹדָךְ עַל הַשָּׁמַיִם!"

A And Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: At the time that Moses went up on high, the ministering angels said before God: Master of the Universe—why is there a human-born one among us? God said to them: He came to receive Torah. They said before God: The hidden object of desire, which has been hidden for you 974 generations before the creation of the world,¹ and you wish to give it to flesh and blood? *As it was stated:* “What is man that you have been mindful of him, mortal man that you have taken note of him?” (Psalms 8:5). “God our Lord, how majestic is your name throughout the earth, you who have covered the heavens with your splendor” (Psalms 8:2).

אָמַר לוֹ הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא לְמֹשֶׁה: הַחֲזִיר לָהֶן תְּשׁוּבָה. אָמַר לִפְנֵיו: רַבּוֹנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, מִתִּירָא אֲנִי שְׂמָא יִשְׂרָפוּנִי בְּהִבֵּל שְׂבִיפֵיהֶם. אָמַר לוֹ: אַחֲזוּ בְּכֶסֶּא כְבוֹדִי וַחֲזוּר לָהֶן תְּשׁוּבָה. שָׁנְאַמַר: "מֵאַחַז פָּנֵי כֶסֶּא פֶרֶשׁ עָלָיו עֲנֵנוּ," וְאָמַר רַבִּי נַחוּם: מְלַמֵּד שֶׁפִּירֵשׁ שְׂדֵי מִזֵּיו שֶׁכִּינְתּוּ וַעֲנֵנוּ עָלָיו.

B The Holy Blessed One said to him: Give them an answer! He said before God: I fear that they will burn me with the breath of their mouths. God said to him: Hold onto my throne of glory and answer them. *As it was stated,* “God causes him to grasp the front of the throne, and spreads God's cloud over it” (Job 26:9). And Rabbi Nahum said: This verse teaches that God spread the radiance of God's presence and God's cloud over Moses.”

אָמַר לִפְנֵיו: רַבּוֹנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, תּוֹרָה שֶׁאַתָּה נוֹתֵן לִי מָה כְּתִיב בָּהּ? "אֲנֹכִי ה' אֶל־לִהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם." אָמַר לָהֶן: לְמִצְרַיִם יֵרֵדְתֶּם? לְפָרְעָה הִשְׁתַּעַבְדְתֶּם? תּוֹרָה לָמָּה תְּהֵא לָכֶם!

C Moses said before God: Master of the Universe—the Torah which you are giving me, what is written in it? *God said to him:* “I am the Lord your God who took you out of Egypt” (Exodus 20:2). He (*Moses*) said to them: Did you go down to Egypt? Were you enslaved to Pharaoh? Why should Torah be for you?

¹ “The word which He commanded to a thousand generations” (Psalms 105:8). According to a tradition, Torah (the word of God) was given 1,000 generations after it came to be and 26 generations after Adam. Therefore, the remaining 974 generations must have preceded the creation of the world.



שוב: מה כתיב בה? "לא יהיה לך
אלהים אחרים". בין הגוים אתם
שְׂרוּיִין. שְׁעוּבְדֵין עֲבוֹדָה זָרָה?

D Again Moses asked: What *else* is written in it? God said to him: "You shall have no other gods" (Exodus 20:3). Moses said to them: Do you live among the nations who worship idols?

שוב: מה כתיב בה? "זכור את יום
השִׁבְתָּ לְקֹדֶשׁ" — כָּלוּם אַתֶּם עוֹשִׂים
מְלָאכָה. שְׂאֲתֶם צְרִיכִין שְׁבוּת?

E Again Moses asked: What *else* is written in it? God said to him: "Remember the Shabbat day to sanctify it" (Exodus 20:8). Moses said to them: Do you perform labor that you require rest?

שוב: מה כתיב בה? "לא תשא
מִשָּׂא וּמִתֵּן יָשׁ בֵּינֵיכֶם?

F Again Moses asked: What *else* is written in it? "Do not take the name of the Lord your God in vain" (Exodus 20:7). Moses said to them: Do you conduct business with one another *that may lead you to swear falsely*?

שוב: מה כתיב בה? "כִּבֵּד אֶת אָבִיךָ
וְאֶת אִמְךָ" — אָב וָאִם יֵשׁ לָכֶם?

G Again Moses asked: What *else* is written in it? God said to him: "Honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12). Moses said to them: Do you have a father or a mother?

שוב: מה כתיב בה? "לא תרצח", "לא
תנאף", "לא תגנב". קִנְיָה יֵשׁ בֵּינֵיכֶם?
יָצָר הָרַע יֵשׁ בֵּינֵיכֶם?

H Again Moses asked: What *else* is written in it? God said to him: "You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal" (Exodus 20:13). Moses said to them: Is there jealousy among you, or is there an evil inclination among you?

מִיָּד הוֹדּוּ לוֹ לְהַקְדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא,
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "ה' אֱדִינֵנוּ מֶה אֲדִיר שְׁמֶךָ
וְגו'", וְאֵילּוּ "תִּנָּה הוֹדָה עַל הַשְּׁמַיִם"
לֹא כְּתִיב.

I They immediately conceded to the Holy Blessed One as it is stated: "God our Lord, how glorious is Your name in all the earth" (Psalms 8:10), while "that Your majesty is placed above the heavens" is not written.²

² Unlike in Psalms 8:2 which we see in section A of this midrash, the parallel verse of Psalms 8:10 does not include the phrase "Your majesty is placed above the heavens." Rather, it says only, "God our Lord, how majestic is Your name throughout the earth!"



Havruta Text Study Guide for Talmud Shabbat 88b-89a

At PoP we believe “how we learn is what we learn” and Shavuot, with its celebration of the giving of the Torah, just might be the holiday that reflects this idea most vibrantly. Our tradition tells us many riveting recountings that report not just **that** the Torah was given to Moshe but **how** the process unfolded. In this study guide, you will find one such recounting from the Talmud, accompanied by a PoP study guide that sets the stage for you on your own or together with others, to have a learning experience imbued with the same exhilaration found in the story told in the recounting itself.

Together with your havruta, follow these steps and enjoy.

Introducing the Partners

- 1 Greet your partner.
- 2 One of you read the text aloud in the language of your choosing.

Zoom In

- 3 Individually, take a minute to read through the text from the beginning (section A) on your own and notice 2-3 details in the text that stand out to you.
- 4 Take turns sharing details you noticed, alternating who is sharing each detail. Discuss each detail’s possible significance. Why did it stand out to you? What could it mean?

*In your discussion, remember to use prompts such as “**Tell me more...**” to draw out your partner’s ideas and to keep the text in your conversation.*

Zoom Out

- 5 Now that you have spent some time noticing particular details of the text, consider the text as a whole. Discuss: **What do you think this text is trying to teach?**

If it helps you, you may consider the following questions:

- How do you understand the angels’ objection?
- How do you understand Moses’s response?
- How do you understand God’s role in this interaction?

*The question, “What do you think this text is trying to teach?” invites many plausible answers and the partners need not agree. Help one another articulate your ideas and ground your ideas in evidence using the prompts, such as, “**Where do you see that in the text?**” You may want to challenge yourselves to come up with more than one idea about what this text is trying to teach. Ask yourselves, “**Is there another way of understanding this?**”*

Personalization

- 6 As we approach the holiday of Shavuot, known as the “Time of the Giving of the Torah,” how does this text help you think about your own relationship with Torah? Does it resonate with you, challenge you, raise a new idea or question? Take turns sharing with your partner.

Appreciation

- 7 Each of you share one thing you appreciated about learning with your partner.

