**Balak: Debates**

Peulat Shabbat Week 2

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Goals

Encourage healthy discourse amongst the Chanichim

Reinforce good habits for casual debate

Teach skills for listening to viewpoints we don’t agree with.

How it connects to the parsha:

Balaam blessed the israelites even though he was hired to curse them. He was respectful and civil even with his enemy.

Overview

Break them into groups. Read half the groups a story from one point of view, then the others a story from another point of view, designed to ingrain an opinion about some subject. Bring togerther/intermingle groups into new groups and give a prompt that will cause conflict between the points of view. After a fair bit of discussion, reveal the deception, talk about how conflict went down, whether or not it was healthy.

Steps

1. Break into 8 groups. 4 Groups read story version A, 4 read story version B
2. The groups answer questions to reinforce belief in something about their particular version
3. Groups coalesce into larger groups made out of an A group and a B group
4. These groups are asked questions that prompt disagreement, possible argument. Let them get upset.
5. With ~15 minutes left, or when they figure out that they have read different stories, let them know that there have been duped. Discuss problems about perspective, rhetoric, and healthy discourse.

Prompt A:

Emmett’s hands shake a little bit as he takes the Yad and begins to read Torah. He’s incredibly nervous because this is his first time reading Torah since his Bar Mitzvah. He had been making jokes about it earlier to some friends to calm his nerves, but he was still apprehensive. The first two pasukim come out fine, but after that he starts failing. He can’t remember which trope goes to which word, the sounds slip out softer and softer until his voice cracks a bit. The gabbi tries to correct him, and finally he pushes through to the end. Looking around most people were kind of zoned out, but a few look annoyed and irritated with him. He lets out a nervous smile. Other than that a few people were giggling. Emmett finds his seat and his friend Jack smiles big and gives him a loud “yasher coach” as if nothing unseemly had just happened, reassuring him it was a job well done.

Emmet hears Sarah and Rachel talking one table over at breakfast. “You’d think he’d at least give the torah service the respect it deserves.” Emmet buries his head in his bowl of Raisin Bran hoping they don’t notice he’s in earshot. “Rabbi Gelb was even there. It was kind of embarrassing for the edah.” Emmet’s throat made a weird involuntary noise, like a strange gulp. He had forgotten about Ha Rav. RG even knew his name because he had been going to camp for a while. His stomach turned a little thinking about whether or not RG would think anything of it. He didn’t finish the bowl of cereal, and spent the last couple minutes of the meal in the bathroom.

During Nikayon Emmett gets pulled aside by his madrich Michael. “Sorry about earlier, we really should have had someone go over the reading with you.” Emmett’s heart sinks a little bit. Michael crosses his arms and gives a Emmett a sad look as he talks. “I guess this was really the tzevet’s fault. If you want to read more torah this won’t happen again, ok?” Emmett nods half heartedly and heads back to grab the dustpan. Yossi’s still sweeping but he turns and laughs when Emmet gets back “I bet I know what that talk was about.” Despite a little voice in his head telling him not to, Emmett laughs with him.

Questions:

1. Is it possible to bully someone unintentionally?
2. Is it ok to talk maliciously about someone if there's a possibility that they can overhear it? What if we know for sure they won’t overhear it?
3. Why do you think Emmett laughed with Yossi?

Prompt B:

Emmett’s hands shake a little bit as he takes the Yad and begins to read torah. Everyone knows that he isn’t really the type to participate in T’fillot like this. He wonders if they suspect something is up. He had been making jokes about it earlier to some friends, but he was still apprehensive. He gets the first two pasukim out normal, but then the flailing starts. He mixes up which trope goes to which word and at one point mumbles softer and softer until his voice even cracks a bit. The gabbi tries to correct him, but he triumphantly pushes through to the end. Looking around most people were kind of zoned out, but some were giggling. He lets out a victorious smile. Other than that, a few look annoyed and irritated with him. Emmett finds his seat and his friend Jack smiles big gives him a loud “yasher coach” as if nothing wonky had just happened, perhaps trying to reassuring him it was a job well done.

Emmet hears Sarah and Rachel talking one table over at breakfast. “You’d think he’d at least give the torah service the respect it deserves.” Emmet buries his head in his bowl of Fruit Loops hoping they don’t notice he’s in earshot. “Rabbi Gelb was even there. It was kind of embarrassing for the edah.” Emmet’s throat made a weird involuntary noise, like a strange chuckle. He had forgotten about Ha Rav. RG even knew his name because he had been going to camp for a while. His stomach turned a little thinking about whether or not RG would think anything of it. He left the bowl of cereal half full on the table during passup.

During Nikayon Emmett gets pulled aside by his madrich Michael. Emmett’s heart sinks a little bit as Michael crosses his arms. “We really should have had someone go over the reading with you.” Michael gives a Emmett a stern look as he talks. “I guess this was really the tzevet’s fault. If you want to read more torah this won’t happen again, you understand?” Emmett knods half heartedly and heads back to grab the dustpan. Yossi’s still sweeping but he turns and laughs when Emmet gets back “I bet I know what that talk was about.” Despite a little voice in his head telling him not to push his luck, Emmett laughs with him.

Questions:

1. Are there some topics or situations that shouldn’t be turned into jokes?
2. Is it fair for the bad actions of an individual to reflect poorly on a group? Should there be more consequences to an individual if they cause this sort of unfairness?
3. Was Michael’s punishment too light given that it seems Emmett didn’t learn his lesson and was still laughing with Yossi?

Final Prompt:

At lunch Emmet sits down next to Rachel. Being lost in his thoughts due to everything that had happened that day, he accidentally knocks over her water, which spills onto her plate. She cuts him off before he can even say anything. “You know what Emmett, I’m kind of frustrated with you today. I don’t even really care about this water thing, I just want you to apologize for what you did earlier during the torah service. You kind of made a fool out of everyone, and I want to hear you say sorry!”

Questions:

1. Should Emmett apologize, or should Rachel apologize for being rude?
2. Do you think Emmett should be given another chance, even if he doesn’t apologize?

(Note for madrichim: these questions are designed to get the chanichim to argue a bit. It’s ok if you want to egg them on a little to bring up tensions, and if they get heated over just the first question, you don’t have to read the second.)

If the groups realize that they have been read different stories, begin these questions. If not and ten minutes pass, explain that they have been read different stories and begin these questions.

Mention how Balaam strikes his donkey three times to get him to move forward but the donkey does not move until the following verse:

Balak 31*: “Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand; and he bowed down his hand, and fell on his face.”*

Encourage the chanichim to think about this change in perspective when answering the following questions.

1. Did anyone feel frustrated when their opinions were invalidated by others? What was that like?
2. Were there things that anyone said that made these misunderstandings worse?
3. Were there things that anyone said that made these misunderstandings better?
4. How can we actively try to bridge misunderstandings that we may not even know exist?
5. What are some other examples of how differences in perspective of a given situation cause a breakdown in communication?