

Climbing Toward Yom Kippur: A Box Hike Family Education Program

Margaret Frisch Klein

SESSION SUMMARY

What happened when Moses came back down the mountain? What did he see when people were dancing around the Golden Calf? How did he bargain with God? How did we learn to say "I'm sorry?" How did God learn to accept the apology? A hands-on, interactive, intergenerational activity to prepare us for *Yom Kippur*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Margaret Frisch Klein's dream of becoming a rabbi, according to a note that her eighth grade teacher wrote, began with her *Bat Mitzvah*. She reached that dream and believes that perhaps the most important thing we do as Jews is pass that love of life and joy of Judaism to our youth. She engages families of all ages with cooking, movies, games, and, of course, social action projects.
rabbi@ckielgin.org www.theenergizerrabbi.org



AGENDA:

- Why does this matter to me?
- Why does it matter in our classrooms?
- Goals and Objectives
- Supplies
- Texts
- Methodology
- Results

WHY DOES THIS MATTER TO ME?

I grew up in Grand Rapids, MI, a community that is less than 2% Jewish and, at that time, 85% Dutch Reformed, a conservative, evangelical, Calvinist community where the Christian God was the God of love and the Jewish God, well...not.

The 13 Attributes of the Divine (*Exodus 34:6-7*) were part of my *Bat Mitzvah* portion, which is chanted on Passover. My rabbi growing up, Rabbi Albert M. Lewis, was a fabulous rabbi and a great Jewish educator, who made this text come alive. We actually did my *D'var Torah* as a debate between Moses and God.

He also used to say that each student gets exactly the right portion for him or her. That has certainly been true for me. Driving down a highway in Connecticut, listening to an old Beged Kefet tape (remember those?) to a different setting of "*Adonai, Adonai*," it suddenly hit me, this verse is the answer to that old Grand Rapids question. Jews, too, have a God of love. A God merciful and compassionate, abounding in lovingkindness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin.

I applied to rabbinical school. I wrote my thesis about this verse. I wrote a book. I have taught this very verse to countless students so they have an answer, too, and they don't have to wait until they are adults.

**WHY DOES THIS MATTER IN OUR CLASSROOMS?**

- It matters because it arms our students with another tool.
- It matters because when Moses went up the mountain a second time, the tradition teaches us that his journey began on *Rosh Hodesh Elul* and ended on *Yom Kippur*.
 - ♦ That the word *Elul* can be seen as an acronym for "*Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li*," "I am my beloved and my beloved is mine," another phrase from the *Song of Songs* for that loving God.
 - ♦ That after the spies returned from scouting the Land of Israel, (*Numbers 14:19-20*), Moses again bargains with God and God pardons the Israelites and says "*Salachti kidvarecha*." The 13 Attributes and this response become the central part of the *Selichot* liturgy.
- It matters because it is a piece of the High Holiday liturgy that gets repeated over and over again.
- It matters because knowing this text, students can participate more fully.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

By the end students will be able to:

- Connect "*Selichot*" with the modern Hebrew word "*Slicha*," meaning "sorry."
- Tell the story of the Golden Calf and smashing of the Ten Commandments.
- Learn other ways to handle anger.
- Experience what Moses might have felt climbing back up the mountain to get the second set of the Ten Commandments.
- Chant "*Adonai, Adonai*" to be able to participate more fully in the High Holiday liturgy.

Age Appropriateness and Duration:

- Family Ed Program
 - We have used this program prior to *Selichot*, the service usually held the Saturday night before *Rosh Hashanah*. Discussion at NewCAJE suggested that some educators would like to use it in a family service setting, perhaps instead of a *Tashlich* walk. Some wanted to tweak it in order to make it more “*chag*-appropriate” for their settings.
- K-7, best with 3-6 grades and parents.
- 1 hour to 1.5 hours ,depending on how long you “wander.”

Supplies:

- A set of texts (attached)
- The book *The Hardest Word, A Yom Kippur Story*, written by Jacqueline Jules and illustrated by Katherine Janus Kahn
- A cardboard box with North, South, East, West, Left, Right written one on each side (could be written in Hebrew)
- Handouts of the words for “Adonai, Adonai.” Can be in transliteration or Hebrew
- Paper, markers, stencils, stickers, whatever you want to use to make New Year’s cards
- Shofar
- Water bottles for “hike”
- Added at NewCAJE: Blankets for sitting on (optional)



Methodology: Station One

- Begin in the synagogue building
- Read the story of Moses smashing the tablets after finding the Israelites dancing around the Golden Calf
 - ♦ Could act this out in some way
 - ♦ Could be a role play between Moses and God
- Discuss anger—
 - ♦ Is it good?
 - ♦ Bad?
 - ♦ How did Moses deal with it?
 - ♦ How does God deal with it?
 - ♦ How do we deal with it? How else can we deal with it?
 - Israelites picked up the pieces of the shattered tablets and carried those with them, too.
 - ♦ What does that teach us about anger?
- Explain the box hike
 - ♦ Going outside.
 - ♦ Going for a hike.
 - ♦ Don’t know where we are going.
 - ♦ Like Israelites wandering in the desert or Moses needing to go back up the mountain.
 - ♦ Rules: Listen to the leader. Don’t get ahead of the group. One leader will be at the back of the pack. Do not fall behind that person.

Methodology: Wandering

- Go outside. Have one student throw box up in air.
- Go whichever direction it says for one block.
- Repeat three or four times.
- Read section of *Exodus* saying that Moses needs to go back up mountain.
- How did Moses feel? How did God feel? How would you feel?

Methodology: Station Two: I’m Sorry

- Read *The Hardest Word, A Yom Kippur Story*, or excerpts, depending on the median age of the group.
- What does it mean to say “I’m sorry”?
- To whom do you need to say “I’m sorry”?
- Introduce Hebrew word: *Selicha*, “sorry,” and *Selichot*, the service for saying “I’m sorry.”
- Continuing wandering with the box, another 3-4 times.

Methodology: Station Three: Hiding in the Cleft of the Rock

- Teach the song, “*Adonai, Adonai, El Rachum V’chanun.*”
- Explain that it these are the very words that Moses heard on top of the mountain, hidden in the cleft of the rock.
 - ♦ Could also use words “crack,” “cranny,” “hiding place.”
 - ♦ Could have students find a hiding place.
 - ♦ Could play hide and seek with God.
- Ask
 - ♦ What does it mean that Moses could see God’s back?
 - ♦ How do we see God?
 - ♦ What does it mean that God will give us rest?
 - ♦ How is God loving?
 - ♦ How does God forgive?
 - ♦ How can they be like God?
- Could use “Bonus Text” on being like God.
- Use box again to wander back to synagogue. (Sometimes you have to manipulate how the box lands to facilitate that!)

Methodology: Still Wandering

- Begin to wander again, using the box for direction.
 - ♦ If you are inside, for instance, in case of rain or heat, consider wandering up the stairs.
 - ♦ Repeat three to four times.
 - ♦ If you are outside, find a hill or mountain.
 - ♦ Look for what could be a “cleft” in the rock.



Methodology: Station Four: Return

- Return to the synagogue.
- Introduce “*Teshuvah*,” Return.
- Saying “I am sorry” is a form of *Teshuvah*
- Have students make New Year’s Cards focusing on saying “I’m sorry.”
- Sing “*Adonai, Adonai*” one more time.
- Invite parents and students to attend “*Selichot*” services.
- Blow shofar.
- Dismissal.

Results: Measurable and Intangible

- Do the students (and parents) know the words *Selichot* and *slicha*?
- Can they sing “*Adonai, Adonai*”?
- Did they have fun making *Rosh Hashanah* cards?
- Do families show up for *Selichot* services?
- Did this experience create more “meaningful observance”?

APPENDIX: THE TEXTS

Viewing the Golden Calf. How do we deal with anger?

- The Lord spoke to Moses, "Hurry down, for your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt, have acted basely...they have been quick to turn aside...They have made themselves a molten calf and bowed low to it...I see that this is a stiffnecked people...My anger may blaze forth...and I may destroy them.
- But Moses implored the Lord, "Let not your anger blaze froth against Your people...Let the Egyptians not say, He delivered them only to kill them off in the mountains...Turn from Your blazing anger...
- And the Lord renounced the punishment.

Selections from *Exodus 32* (New JPS translation)

- As soon as Moses came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, he became enraged, and he hurled the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain.

Exodus 33 (New JPS translation)



Bargaining with God:

- Moses said to the Lord, "See, You say to me, 'Lead this people forward,' but You have not made known to me whom You will send with me' Now, if I have truly gained Your favor, pray let me know Your ways, that I may know You and continue in Your favor. Consider, too, that this nation is Your people."
- And God said, "I will go in the lead and will lighten your burden." And he said to Him, "Unless You go in the lead, do not make us leave this place. For how shall it be known that that Your people have gained Your favor unless You go with us, so that we may be distinguished, Your people and I, from every people on the face of the earth?"
- And the Lord said to Moses, "I will also do this thing that you have asked; for you have truly gained My favor and I have singled you out by name."
- He said, "Oh, let me behold Your Presence!"

Go Back Up that Mountain!

- And He answered, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim before you the name LORD, and the grace that I grant and the compassion that I show.
- But," He said, "you cannot see My face, for man may not see Me and live."
- And the LORD said, "See, there is a place near Me. Station yourself in a cleft of the rock and, as My Presence passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock and shield you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will take My hand away and you will see My back; but My face must not be seen."

The Thirteen Attributes of the Divine

- *Adonai, Adonai, El Rachum v'chanun. Erech Apayim, v'rav chesed v'emet. Notzer chesed, la'alafim, nosei avon, vafesha, v'chata'a v'nakeh.*
- The Lord! The Lord! A God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and faithfulness, extending kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin.

Bonus Text: From the *Midrash*

- “To walk in God’s ways” (*Deuteronomy 11:22*). These are the ways of the Holy One: “gracious and compassionate, patient, abounding in kindness and faithfulness, assuring love for a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and granting pardon.” (*Exodus 34:6*). This means that just as God is gracious, compassionate, and forgiving, you too must be gracious, compassionate, and forgiving. (*Sifre - Devarim, Ekev*)
- Follow the Lord your God” (*Deuteronomy 13:5*). What does this mean?...The verse means to teach us that we should follow the attributes of the Holy One...As He clothes the naked, you should clothe the naked. The Bible teaches that the Holy One visited the sick; you should visit the sick. The Holy One comforted those who mourned; you should comfort those who mourn. The Holy One buried the dead; you should bury the dead. (*Sotah 14*)
Harlow, Siddur Sim Shalom, page 19.