

Source Sheet #2 - Morality

- Breindy Lazor / Rivka Djavaheeri

Note To Teachers in advance of the lesson:

- Teachers should keep in mind the maturity level of students to ensure that the discussions are age and stage appropriate..
- Teachers should also keep in mind - and perhaps should consider saying this outright to the students at the beginning of the lesson - that in many cases the questions are better than the answers, and the value of the lesson is more in the class conversations that will emerge and less about a definitive resolution of the issues...

LESSON:

Ask students (individually or in pairs) - Can they think of stories in Tanach that seem to raise certain moral questions or issues? Or that seem to present people that we consider to be “good guys” (i.e. Avos/Imahos, Tzadikim, etc) acting in ways that we would consider to be bad / not good. Students will record their responses in the box. Then students share their answers with the class...

Students may supply:

- Mitzvah to destroy Amalek
- Dovid and Batsheva
- Ben Sorer Umoreh
- Kibbush Haaretz - This is the one we will run with for this lesson.
- And more...

Teacher transitions -

Let's talk about what are some of the Moral issues raised with the Mitzvah of conquering Eretz Yisrael. Students will record answers in the box. Then share their ideas with the class. ...

Students may supply:

- Kicking people out of their homes
- Killing innocent people
- Using war and violence to accomplish your ends
- Claiming to be fighting because G-d/Hashem said to
- And more...

Teacher Transitions -

The war between Russia and Ukraine in current events has highlighted this issue of the Morality of wars of conquest.... Outside of the Middle East and Africa war is so uncommon today that the start of a new War is a big deal. Why is War in general more uncommon today than in the past?

- Watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NbuUW9i-mHs> And respond to the question in the box...

Teacher Transitions -

Even from a Jewish perspective, the idea that war and violence will one day be no more is prophesied in multiple places throughout Neviim Acharonim. And we should all merit to see that soon in our days. But overall Tanach is nevertheless full of wars. And also full of examples of various Moral issues in general... Learning through any of the sifrei Tanach, it's impossible to have a conversation about Morality (and right and wrong in general) without a common language of what Morality means, and who determines standards of Morality. Let's look at some different perspectives...

- Students will read/learn through the 4 sources and answer the questions underneath each source. Go over answers after.
1. Socrates Source - *Basic idea: Is morality external or does it come from G-d..*
 2. Rav Leff Source - *Basic idea: Definitively, for a Jew, Morality comes from Hashem alone...*
 3. Rav Sacks Source 1 - *Basic Idea: Moral Relativism = a total breakdown of all Morality*
 4. Rav Sacks Source 2 - *Basic Idea: But Morality may also be found inherently within us...*

Teacher Transitions - Concluding points about Morality issues in general: -

- We judge people/ leaders freely, but the circumstances they grapple with are far more complex than we can assess on the outside.
- Often it comes down to having to make a judgment call between a few different values that are all inherently important but that can't all be prioritized simultaneously.
- Just be grateful you are not in that situation to be responsible for making those decisions.
- And for us, we should appreciate that we can study their stories and learn from them

Homework.... Assign passage from "Not In God's Name" P. 1-14/15 for students to read and respond to...

Student Name _____

Date _____

MORALITY

THOUGHT QUESTION:

What are some examples of stories in Tanach that seem to raise certain moral questions or issues? Or that seem to present people that we consider to be “good guys” (i.e. Avos/Imahos, Tzadikim, etc) acting in ways that we would consider to be bad / not good.

What are some of the Moral issues related to the Mitzvah to Conquer Eretz Yisrael?

Based on the video, what are some reasons War and violence is less common today than in the past? Do YOU think wars are “going out of fashion?”

Instructions: Read the sources and answer the questions below each source.

Source #1: From *Euthyphro*, a Socratic dialogue about the nature of morality. Classical Greek Text.

SOCRATES: And what is morality, and what is immorality?

EUTHYPHRO: Morality is ... prosecuting any one who is guilty of murder... or of any similar crime

SOCRATES: But what is "morality" itself? When asked, you only replied... charging a guilty man with murder... you would admit that there are many other moral acts?

EUTHYPHRO: There are.

SOCRATES: Remember that I did not ask you to give me two or three examples of morality, but to explain the general idea which makes all moral things to be moral... Tell me what is the nature of morality, and then I shall have a standard to which I may look, and by which I may measure all actions, whether yours or those of any one else, and then I shall be able to say that this action is moral, while another action is immoral.

EUTHYPHRO. I would say that what the gods love is moral, and that which they hate is immoral.

SOCRATES: ... The point which I should first wish to understand is whether the moral is beloved by the gods because it is moral, or [whether the moral is moral] because it is beloved of the gods?

Questions:

1. What is Socrates asking Euthyphro to do? What does Socrates mean by asking for a "standard" rather than for a few examples?
2. What are the options Socrates is presenting with that last question? How would YOU respond to Socrates' last question?

Source #2a: Rav Sacks, *Faith in the Future*, p.14

“In teaching our children moral relativism we have placed them in the world without a moral compass... In the name of tolerance we have taught that every alternative lifestyle is legitimate and that moral judgement is taboo, even ‘judgemental’. What is right becomes what does not harm others, and in time degenerates to what I feel like doing and can get away with.”

Source #2b: Shoftim, 21:23

בְּיָמֵים הָהֵם (אִין מֶלֶךְ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל) אִישׁ הִיָּשֵׁר בְּעֵינָיו, יַעֲשֶׂה.

Questions:

1. What is the context of the second source, and what is the connection between these 2 sources?
2. What is Rav Sacks saying that Moral Relativism will inevitably become?
3. How does Rav Sack’s perspective on Moral Relativism relate to Socrates’s comments about the nature and origin of Morality?

Source #3: Rav Zev Leff, “Where is the Religious Aliyah From the West” in *To Dwell in the Palace, Perspectives on Eretz Yisrael* P. 28

“Why was it ordained that we should have to conquer Eretz Yisroel from seven nations who inhabited it for hundreds of years? Why was it arranged that we should have to kill the men, women, and children of those nations? Why did Eretz Yisroel have to become ours in a manner so open to question that the whole Torah would have to start from Bereishis* just to provide an answer? [*Rashi 1,1]

"It seems that HaShem sought to teach us a lesson so significant that it is the foundation of the entire Torah. It is the preface necessary before we can approach even the first mitzva. This lesson is that the basis of our ethics and morals, standards and values is

one sole source – HaShem Yisbarach. If He says to conquer and kill, that is what is “ethical’ and “moral.” Where HaShem mandates mercy and peace, they are “ethical” in that case. Our value system can have no other basis than the written and oral Torah. By mandating the conquest of Eretz Yisroel in an apparently disputable manner, the Creator forced us to focus our attention on the only basis we have for our actions. He is the Creator of all that exists; only He can dictate proper conduct among the peoples and lands He created. Only on the basis of this reasoning are we not thieves nor murderers. The Torah, at the very outset, is laying the foundation for our frame of reference to mitzvos, and to the world.

Questions:

1. According to this passage, in what way is Hashem’s creation of the world a necessary component of the Mitzvah of Kibbush Haaretz?
2. According to Rav Leff, what is the only source of a Jew’s Moral standard? What are the implications of this?
3. Which perspective offered by Socrates in his final question is consistent with Rav Leff’s approach?

Source #4 Rav Sacks, *Morality*, p. 288

... God punishes Cain for murdering Abel despite not having told him, 'You shall not murder.' He punishes the citizens of Sodom, despite not having revealed a moral code to them. The Egyptian midwives who disobey Pharaoh and save the lives of the Israelite children- the first recorded act of civil disobedience in history- are described by the Bible as God-fearing. This is a general term that the Bible uses of everyone who acts morally. ... The Hebrew Bible, in these early stories, seems to assume that we have an innate moral sense. This is the voice of God within the human heart- which exists even prior to the rules and rituals, holy deeds and holy days that we call religion.

Questions:

1. How does Rav Sack's approach here to what determines Moral Conduct differ from Rav Leff's approach to Moral Conduct?
2. How can one live by the concept Rav Sacks describes here without falling into the Moral Relativism he described in Source 2?

THOUGHT QUESTION:

Which of these four sources resonates with you most strongly? Why?

HOMEWORK:

Read Pages 1-14/15 from Chapter 1, "Altruistic Evil" in Rav Sack's book, *Not in God's Name*. Record your thoughts, questions..etc below