

Loving the Stranger: Parshat K'doshim

A Lesson Plan for 2012-2013 Adult Learning Series

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Essential Questions (EQs): What is the book of Leviticus? How does it bear relevance to a 21st century Jew? What can Leviticus teach our community about engaging with those who are different from us?

Lesson Goals:

- To help learners identify Leviticus a complex and meaningful example of community building in antiquity
- To demonstrate to learners how Leviticus contains myriad lessons for how one should live ethically in the modern era
- To relate concepts in *parshat K'doshim* to modern-day questions of engagement with “the other” (defined as ‘those who are different from the individual’)
- To root learners’ learning in a basic overview of the book of Leviticus
- To expand learners’ knowledge through a *hevruta* exercise
- To encourage learners to ponder their own personal boundaries

Lesson Objectives: (By the end of the lesson, learners should be able to...)

- Identify Leviticus as the third book of Torah
- Define “*K'doshim*” as “holiness” or “holies”
- Recall that Leviticus 19:33-34 contains the phrase “*love the stranger as yourself*”
- Describe how one can “*love a stranger as him/herself*”
- Define the Hebrew word “*ger*” in their own words
- Describe an encounter as a *ger* or with a *ger*
- Articulate personal boundaries
- Analyze Leviticus 19:33-34 with the aid of commentary
- Evaluate the presence of *gerim* in the greater KI community

Materials Needed/Recommended:

Leviticus as Literature, by Mary Douglas

Leviticus: A Continental Commentary, by Jacob Milgrom

Who Wrote the Bible, by Richard Elliot Friedman

Torah: A Women’s Commentary, edited by Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Andrea Weiss

Paper

Pens

Two posters or large papers with “US Constitution” and “Leviticus” written on each

Timeline:

00-05 – Set Induction

05-15 – Rooting Leviticus and Leviticus’ significance

15-25 – Laws of Leviticus vs. Laws of the United States (movement activity)

25-45 – Studying parshat *K'doshim* with commentary (in *hevruta* pairs)

45-55 – Defining “*ger*”

55-70 – Sharing experiences as and with *gerim*
70-85 – Community boundaries
85-90 – Conclusion

Set Induction:

Begin by having learners sit in chairs, in a circle. Ask people to sit next to someone they don't know well. Once everyone has situated themselves, begin with a whip-around activity. Pose the following question and have people answer as quickly as they can, going around the circle in order:

Instructor: *When I say the word "Leviticus," what is the first thing that comes to mind?*

Answers should be brief and succinct. Potential answers: *boring, unrelatable, filled with unnecessary rules, Kosher Kosher Kosher, etc.*

Instructor should respond by validating the comments and informing learners that Leviticus is probably the most misunderstood and yet most theologically and ethically rich book in the bible. Today's goal is to establish why and how Leviticus is meaningful to 21st-century Jews, specifically as it relates to engaging with "the other."

Leviticus' Significance:

Some reasons why Leviticus is meaningful and/or significant today:

- It offers examples for how to build a community
- It pushes its readers to think critically about being a member of a community
- It engages readers in ideas about relating to those *outside* the boundaries of a specific community
- It encourages thoughtful reflection on basic human functions and needs– eating, the treatment of animals, praying, sexual activity, creating boundaries, etc.

For these reasons and more, Leviticus is a book that deserves attention.

Instructor should point out to learners that in this 90-minute session, they will only begin to scratch the surface of *one* part of Leviticus. However – understanding *why* the book is important is a significant endeavor to any modern-day learner.

It is up to the instructor how he or she wishes to present the historical piece of Leviticus. Instructor should consider referencing Richard Elliot Friedman's Who Wrote the Bible or exploring a brief piece of the Documentary Hypothesis. Instructor may want to show a brief film or pass out a timeline which captures the development of sacred text in antiquity. (Included below for reference) Instructor should cater this to his or her audience, depending on their background knowledge and experience.

Laws of Leviticus vs. Laws of the United States

For this exercise, instructor should use a big open area and move any and all obstructive items. Learners will be moving from one side to the other of the room.

This activity will encourage learners to think about whether they think a law presented originates from the Book of Leviticus or the United States Constitution. Its main goal is to familiarize learners with Leviticus' laws, many of which echo or shadow the laws of the United States of America.

One side of the room should be designated as "Leviticus" and the other "US Constitution." (Instructor may want to put up posters to remind learners where they are going) Once the instructor reads the law aloud, learners should go to the side of the room they believe coincides with the law read aloud.

After reading each law, a brief discussion should follow. Why did learners feel that the law belonged in the Leviticus or US category? Did anything about the law connect to the law that was read before it? What seems "ancient" about the law? What sound more modern?

A Sample of Laws and their Origin, to be read aloud. *Instructor should feel free to add to or modify these laws:*

1. [The ruling body] shall have power to lay and collect taxes on incomes, from whatever source derived, without apportionment among the [tribes] and without regard to any census or enumeration. (US Constitution, Amendment 16)
2. When a man shall clearly utter a vow of persons unto [the ruling body], according to one's valuation, then one's valuation shall be for the male from twenty years old even unto sixty years old, even one's valuation shall be fifty [coins] of silver, after the [coin] of the [holy gathering place] (Leviticus 27:3)
3. A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free [community], the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed. (Bill of Rights, Amendment 2)
4. "I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down and no one will make you afraid. I will remove wild beasts from the land, and the sword will not pass through your country. You will pursue your enemies, and they will fall by the sword before you. Five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and your enemies will fall by the sword before you." – Leviticus 26:6-8
5. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within [this community], or any place subject to their jurisdiction. (US Constitution, Amendment 13)

6. “Your male and female slaves are to come from the [places] around you; from them you may buy slaves. You may also buy some of the temporary residents living among you and members of their clans born in your country, and they will become your property. Then they and their children are to be released, and they will go back to their own clans and to the property of their ancestors.” (Leviticus 25)

Conclusion: Instructor should wrap up this activity by explaining to learners that Leviticus, like the US Constitution, presents a system through which community was forged. Many laws are still relevant, however some are not. By and large, this was the attempt of the community to give structure to the community of ancient Israelites.

Instructor should allow time for questions and clarifications.

Studying parshat *K’doshim* with commentary (in *hevruta* pairs)

For this exercise, learners will be studying Leviticus 19:33-34. They will do so in *hevruta* pairs with the assistance of commentary. Instructor should ask learners to study with someone they do not yet know as a way of encountering the “one who is foreign to them,” as the passage suggests.

The full *daf* with commentary is below. Instructor should begin by walking learners through the *daf* to ensure they understand its content.

Defining the Ger/Encounters with the Ger

This is potentially the most meaty or substantial element of the learning piece. For this portion of the day’s learning, begin by asking *hevruta* pairs how they chose to define *ger*. How did that definition help them understand the *daf limud* and its content?

After all have shared their definition of *ger*, instructor should pose the following question:

I want you to spend a few moments reflecting. Think of a time in your life when either you yourself were the ger, or outsider, or think of a time in your life when you encountered the ger in a meaningful or impactful way. Think about how you related to the community or to the greater world in which you played a part. Or – think about how the person you encountered related to the greater community at large. What was that experience like: emotionally, physically, spiritually? Spend a few moments in reflection.

After learners have had a few moments to reflect, ask them to share either with their partner or with a small group. Give learners space to reflect in depth about the challenges and blessings of being an “outsider” or stranger. Instructor should be prepared that this might be a challenging endeavor for certain learners.

Rather than asking the entire group to share with one another, instructor should go around and ask for highlights from various pairs or small groups.

Instructor should conclude this exercise by pointing out that *“nearly all of us have had some encounter with the ger – with the outsider – at some point in our lives. This text advocates to love the outsider in spite of the fact that he or she is different from us. We love in spite of that barrier.”*

Instructor should allow time for questions and clarifications.

Community Boundaries

The final piece of this exercise will push learners further. They will be asked to articulate their own personal boundaries in a way that is both thought-provoking and challenging.

Instructor should say: *as a modern, progressive synagogue, Kehillat Israel is both an inclusive environment and a place where community is created. But – every community contains its boundaries. The question is, what are ours?*

Psalm 118 verse 19 reads, “open for me the gates of righteousness; I will enter them and praise God.” These metaphoric gates can serve either as symbols of welcome or barriers of separation. For our community, what lies inside or outside our gates?

Instructor should pass out pieces of paper and instruct learners to make two columns. At the top of one column, learners should write *“I Am Open To...”* and on the other, *“I Am Closed To...”* Learners should then spend several minutes silently writing in their columns the personal, private things that they themselves are open to and the things that they are closed off from. They should only write on one side of the page.

Once they have finished doing this, instructor should ask them to flip the page over and address the following question: *Am I comfortable with these boundaries? Do I want these boundaries to change? How? What is the process by which I can explore my own boundaries in these coming months?*

The goal of this exercise is to encourage learners to explore the idea that we all possess boundaries. With all due respect to Leviticus’ command to “love the stranger” and cherish what is different, like Leviticus at large we all have our barriers. We all determine for ourselves – or maybe our communities determine for us – what’s “in” and what’s “out.”

Concluding this exercise should go as follows:

Once learners have finished writing in their columns and on the backs of their papers, instructor should have them fold it up and put it away – in a pocket, purse, or backpack. This piece should serve as a reminder to learners that throughout their lives they will be asked to create, reinforce, and even challenge their own boundaries. Like the book of

Leviticus, which spends 27 chapters creating boundaries, we are striving to create a world that is both filled with order and open to difference. This activity should be a reminder that *that* is a daily, weekly, yearly, and lifelong personal struggle.

Conclusion

To conclude the day's learning, instructor should ask learners to form the original circle of chairs they did at the beginning of the lesson. Doing a quick whip-around closing activity, instructor should ask learners to identify something they learned today that they did not know before *or* the thing they are most looking forward to in their continued study of Leviticus.

Instructor should thank all learners for coming and encourage them to attend the next session.

Daf Limud – A Page of Study

Adult Learning Series 2012-2013

Leviticus 19:33-34: *Loving the Stranger*

לֹג וְכִי יִגּוּר אֶתְךָ גֵר, 33 And if a stranger sojourns with you in
בְּאַרְצְכֶם לֹא תוֹנוּ, אֹתוֹ. your land, you shall not do him wrong.

לֹד בְּאַזְרַח מִכֶּם יִהְיֶה לָכֶם 34 The stranger that sojourns with you
הַגֵּר הַגֵּר אֶתְכֶם, וְאַהַבְתָּ לוֹ shall be unto you as the home-born
כְּמוֹד כִּי גֵרִים הָיִיתֶם, בְּאַרְץ among you, and you shalt love him as
מִצְרַיִם: אֲנִי, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם. your self; for you were strangers in the
land of Egypt: I am Yahweh your God.

Commentaries:

1. Rashi, the medieval Jewish commentator *par excellence*, offers the following:

1a. [‘Do not taunt him’] refers to taunting him verbally. For example, do not say to him, *yesterday you were an idol worshipper and today you come to learn Torah.*

1b. “[With regard to ‘for you were strangers’], do not accuse your fellow man of your own defect.

2. The modern *Etz Chayim Torah Commentary*, published by the Rabbinical Assembly, offers the following:

2a. *For you were strangers in the land of Egypt* – Remembering our Egyptian experience, we might wish to be like the Egyptians when we have the opportunity, oppressing the powerless in our midst. Therefore, the Torah warns us to use the memory of slavery in Egypt to learn empathy for the oppressed.

2b. *A stranger* – The stranger, “ger” in the bible, most often referred to a foreign merchant, craftsman, or mercenary soldier. The term never refers to the prior inhabitants of the land, who are identified by ethnologic groupings such as Canaanites or Amorites, or by other specific terms of reference.

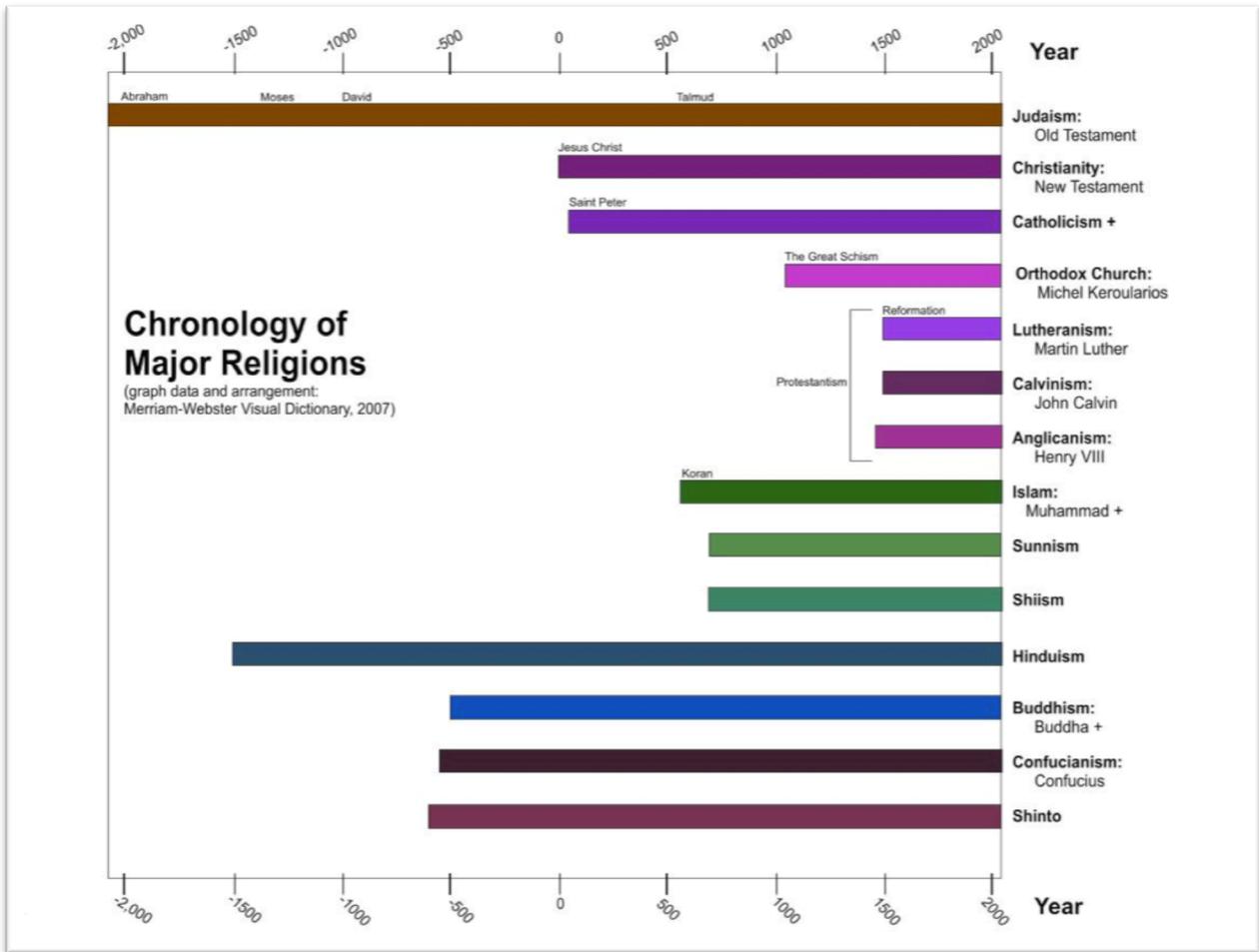
3. The modern *Torah: A Women’s Commentary*, edited by Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Andrea Weiss, offers the following:

3a. Every law collection in the Bible advocates care for the foreigner who resides in the land of Israel. ... These admonitions frequently remind the reader that our ancestors were once strangers in the land of Egypt and that we should remember the vulnerability of the outsider. Elsewhere in the Bible, the stranger is mentioned alongside the widow and orphan.

3b. The *ger* was the non-Israelite who lived either temporarily or long-term in the Land of Israel but did not belong to the ethnic or later political body of Israel.

Questions for *hevruta* study:

1. How does this passage portray the role of the “*ger*” within the larger Israelite community?
2. How do you or your *hevruta* partner choose to translate the word *ger*?
3. If Leviticus is all about creating laws and boundaries of community, why do you think so much attention in the Bible is paid to those outside those boundaries?
4. *Ger* is also a term used for a convert to Judaism. How might this text get us to think differently about how we encounter converts, or those thinking about converting to Judaism?
5. In your own words, what might this text say about outsiders’ obligations to the Jewish community at large?
6. What do you think is a modern interpretation of the phrase *love the stranger as yourself*? Think of a concrete example from your own life.



Source: Merriam-Webster's Online Visual Dictionary
<http://visual.merriam-webster.com/society/religion/chronology-religions.php>