

Parents as Partners in Jewish Education: Home Schooling Lesson for Snow Day

Quotes to Focus on for this Lesson:

1. This week's Torah Portion: *Yitro* Exodus 18:1 – 20:22, specifically Exodus 20:14 “You shall not covet...”
2. Pirkei Avot 4: 1 “Ben Zoma said: Who is rich? Those who are happy with their portion.”

Why is this lesson important to me?

Jews throughout our history have struggled to understand how the ancient words in the Torah apply to their own lives. Today you will struggle to understand the meaning of the words of the 7th Commandment: “You shall not covet...” and find ways to apply these words to your life.

What should we get out of this lesson?

- Students and parents will discuss the meaning of the two quotes above.
- Students will be able to apply their interpretation of the texts to their own lives.
- Students will be able to demonstrate their understanding of these two quotes (texts).
- Parents and their children will engage in Jewish learning, just as families have done since ancient times.

Timing: One to two hours- this can be over several sessions. The project should take less than 45 minutes.

Lesson Plan

1) **Discussion (10 – 20 minutes):** Parents engage your children in discussion (age appropriately of course) using some of these discussion points:

- **Think of things that you want, that you don't already have. Why do you want these things?** (TV, friend has them, just want them)
 - Tie this to the definition of covet for older children, continue to use the word ‘things you want that others have’ for younger children.
 - Definition of Covet: “to feel inordinate desire for what belongs to another” Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11 ed., [Springfield, Massachusetts, 2003]
- **Let's pretend you received 3 of the things that you really, really want (listed above). Discuss why this would or would not make you happy or happier.**
 - Lead the discussion to how wanting one thing and receiving it can actually make you want more, and then more.
 - With older children you might bring up how some people want what others have so badly that they steal, or do something even worse.
- **Can you think of a way coveting could be good?**

- Possible answers: working to get good job, striving to be a good person just like...
- **What do you really need to be happy? What if you didn't have this? Or that? Could you still be happy?**

2) **Read the story:** “It Could Always be Worse” by Margot Zemach- attached copy. (10 minutes)

Discuss the following:

- Why wasn't the poor unfortunate man of the story happy? What did he want?
- Why do you think the rabbi had the man put more and more things in the house?
- When the man took out everything but his family from the house, what did he learn?
- What do you learn from this story?

3) **Tying this together (5 minutes):** Pirkei Avot 4: 1 “Ben Zoma said: Who is rich? Those who are happy with their portion (what they have).”

Tell your children that Ben Zoma, a rabbi from ancient times was concerned that people were ‘coveting’ what others have- and he wrote the words in the quote.

- **What is Ben Zoma telling us? Why should you be happy with what you have? How does that make someone rich?**
- Tie this back to the story “It Could Always be Worse”. **Do you think that Ben Zoma could have written this story?**

4) **The Project (30 – 40 minutes):** Students, with help from their parents (if desired) are to complete one of the following projects. The projects should show what the children have learned from the discussion above. One project per family must be completed, but each child may do his/her own project if s/he prefers.

Below is a list of project options. Age appropriateness is provided but feel free to combine and/adapt to fit your family. The parent may just choose the project or may let the children make their own choices. **CHOOSE ONE!**

Younger Children

- 1) **Richness Container:** Take a real container, preferably something clear. Label it: “My Family’s Riches”. Using magazine cut outs or hand drawings – add items into your container.
- 2) **Riches Collage-** use magazines, newspaper, ads, etc. Make a collage of items that makes your family ‘rich’.
- 3) **My House is full of Riches**
 - Parent or student draws a large outline of a house on plain paper.
 - Children draw pictures of what is in “my house” that makes us rich.

Mid- Elementary School Age Children

- 1) Riches Collage, Riches Container or My House idea from above, but each person in the family has to come to an agreement to what goes into the house, container or on the collage. Outside of the house, around the edges of the collage or around the container – put items that you would like to have, but won't make your family rich!
- 2) Write a story that tells about someone who wants and wants (covets), gets what s/he wants, and then isn't happy. The story can be dictated to a parent. Consider illustrating the story.

Late Elementary – Middle School Age Children

- 1) Create a parody that would teach others about not coveting or being happy with what you have.
- 2) Create a skit that tells a story that would teach the lesson. Video tape the skit if possible.
- 3) Do an artistic representation of "lifes' riches".
- 4) Make a comic strip story of someone learning what it means to be 'rich'.
- 5) Moving to Pluto: Your family has been selected to move to Pluto. You will have special housing that will provide your basic necessities (food, water, heat, air conditioning, etc). You will not need to worry about having enough money. But, each person in your family can only bring 10 items (not including basic medical and clothing necessities). Let each person make his/her list. No value judgments please! Share your lists. THEN – read this new announcement – the ruling has changed; each person can only bring 7 items. Go back and rework your lists. Turn in your lists of 10 and your lists of 7 items!

Don't forget to bring your SNOWY DAY projects to school on Sunday, February 21st!

For More Information on:

Torah Portion *Yitro* and "you shall not covet": <http://urj.org/learning/torah/>

Middot: Being Content with One's Lot (Ben Zoma's quote):
http://urj.org/holidays/shabbat/intro/middot/?syspage=article&item_id=4507

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