



A Winter's Talmud Tale

Topic

Seasonal

Grade Level(s)

Grades 6 and Up

Goals for the Lesson/Activity

Students will

- Retell, in their own words, a classic narrative about snow from the Talmud
- Analyze what makes people persevere through difficult times
- Identify what is important to them and create a video that uncovers what motivates them to persevere through difficult circumstances

Materials needed

- A copy of the story about Hillel the Elder (source sheet available for download)

Technology needed

- iPads/camera phones/tablets

Background for Teachers

See source sheet.

Description of Activities

1. Discuss the following questions as a class:
 - a. What is the longest you have ever stayed out in the cold and/or snow?
 - b. How did it feel to be outside in those conditions for that long?
 - c. What were you doing?
 - d. Were you eager to go back inside? Why or why not?
 - e. Why might someone be willing to stay outside in adverse weather conditions?
2. Share the source sheet. Recap the basics of the narrative:
 - Hillel works so that he can pay the guard of the *beit midrash* (house of study) to enter and learn Torah.
 - When he cannot make enough money to pay the guard in order to enter the *beit midrash*, he sneaks onto the roof on Friday so that he can hear the words of the living God between Shemayah and Avtalyon.
 - A hard snow falls and covers Hillel.
 - Shemayah and Avtalyon discover him and put him in front of a fire on Shabbat.
 - Shemayah and Avtalyon praise Hillel's efforts to learn Torah, implying that what he has done is so wonderful, that it would be alright to break the laws of Shabbat on his behalf by lighting a fire.

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3. Explain that the definition of "persevere" (according to m-w.com) is "to continue doing something or trying to do something even though it is difficult." You might choose to mention that one of way saying "persevere" in Hebrew is להתמיד (*le'hatmid*), which has the same root as תמיד (*tamid*), meaning "always," thus giving the additional meaning that one always keeps at something.
4. Ask students to think about why Hillel was willing to persevere and sit on the skylight through the snow. What other options might he have had? Why would he choose the option that he did?
 - a. Can students think of someone else who might have persevered under difficult circumstances to achieve a higher purpose? Some examples might include:
 - Ya'akov (Jacob) laboring for many years so that he could marry Rachel.
 - Yocheved saving her baby, Moshe.
 - David Ben-Gurion working towards the establishment of the State of Israel
 - Rosa Parks risking her liberty for the sake of civil rights
5. Pairing for Sharing Their Stories
 - a. Tell students that they will film each other telling their stories.
 - b. Ask students to think of something important to them that they persevered through difficult circumstances to accomplish. Categories and examples that they might choose include:

<i>Talmud Torah</i> (Learning Torah)	<i>Tikkun Olam</i> (Repairing the World)	<i>Kavod (Respect) for Family and Friends</i>	<i>Shleimut Enoshi</i> (Human Perfection)
Preparing for <i>Bar/Bat Mitzvah</i>	Collecting coats for a coat drive	Being an upstander for family/friends	Mastering a skill in your favorite sport
Leading part of the Passover Seder	Raising money for a food pantry	Teaching a life skill to a sibling with special needs	Mastering a difficult piece of music

- c. Give students a few minutes to jot down an outline of their stories. Provide them with the Story Guide to help them organize their thoughts.
 - d. Divide students into triads. Students will take turns being the interviewer, the interviewee and the filmmaker/recorder.
 1. Read over your partner's story outline and think of a follow-up question that you would like to know more about.
6. Record each other's short stories.
 - a. Tip for filming: Remember to look into the camera as you tell your story.
7. Pop some popcorn and have a mini-movie marathon.



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Differentiation Options

Knowing that students learn in a variety of ways and modalities, the following options are provided to adjust the above lesson to meet the unique needs of your learners.

For learners who need more assistance

- Ask them to draw a picture of Hillel and describe how he might be feeling.
- Assign a *madrish/madricha* to talk through the questions and help students to prepare their videos.

For learners who need extension opportunities

- Have students research Avtalyon, Shemayah, and/or Hillel and write or present a short biography of any or all.
- Have students find a number of quotes attributed to Hillel. Ask them to pick a favorite to teach the class; they might even make a poster. Alternatively, they could make a word cloud of a number of quotes to find the common themes.
- Have students find out more information about someone who persevered through difficult circumstances to accomplish a higher purpose.