



Course: Teaching Issues of Faith, Morals and Ethics in Tanakh

Rabbi Dr. Eli Kohn

The aims of the course are:

- (1) To challenge teachers to grapple with issues of faith, morals and ethics in the Tanach and to reflect on how these issues should impact on their teaching.
- (2) To explore with teachers different approaches held by Biblical and Talmudic commentators, later rabbinical texts and academic articles that grapple with these issues.
- (3) To discuss with teachers various pedagogic approaches, at different age levels, to teach issues of faith, morals and ethics in Tanach.

Children often struggle understanding issues of faith, morals and ethics in stories and mitzvot that appear in the Tanach. Teachers are not always well enough equipped to deal with their questions in a meaningful and significant way that speaks to the world in which their students live. The course will focus on **five** central questions that teachers may face in their teaching of Tanach texts.

Each question will focus on a different pedagogical issue that challenges teachers.

Each lesson will include:

1. A presentation of the moral or ethical issue, aimed at drawing the student into the lesson
2. An exploration of a case study of a relevant Tanach text and how commentators and scholarly articles deal with it.
3. A discussion of the pedagogical implications of what we have learned, including suggestions for teaching these texts at different age levels.

The issues will be explored and internalised using a host of different tools like on-line forums, group assignments and the reading of related academic articles.

Introductory Unit- (Two lessons) -Setting the Scene – Defining the challenges. Discussion and introduction to the topic including the approach of the Netziv and Rabbi Sacks to dealing with issues of faith, morals and ethics in the Tanach.

Lesson 3 -Synchronic lesson-zoom

Lesson 4 –Question 1 How does one teach stories, with particular reference to the Avot, which raise ethical issues about the treatment of others?

In this lesson we will explore how to teach texts, to various age groups, in which there are troubling interpersonal relationships between the characters. In this unit we will explore how to teach texts, to various age groups, in which there are troubling interpersonal relationships between the characters. We will study the following example:

Sarah, Hagar and Yishmael: How could Sarah have behaved as she did towards them? How does one deal pedagogically with a text in which the cultural norms and values of an ancient society conflict with those experienced by our students?

We will examine various approaches in the commentaries and related scholarly articles and discuss their pedagogic implications at various year levels. For example, how would the text be taught for elementary school students and how for high school students? **(1 lesson)**

Lesson 5- Question 2- How do we teach issues that raise questions of faith and belief in God?

There are stories in the Tanach that generate questions that challenge one's faith and belief in God. How do we deal with these issues in the classroom? One such example is the story of Akeidat Yitzchak. Among the questions we will explore are; how could Hashem have asked Avraham to offer his son as a sacrifice and how could Avraham have agreed to do it? We will explore how such a story can be taught in the classroom. **(1 lesson)**

Lessons 6 and 7- Question 3- How do we teach stories which raise ethical challenges like deception and deceit? This unit will explore various stories in the Tanach including the deceit of Yaakov in receiving the blessings of Yitzchak, Yoseph's deception and treatment of his brothers and Shmuel's deception of Shaul in anointing David as king. We will explore the pedagogic implications in the classroom. **(2 lessons)**

Lesson 8 –Synchronic lesson-zoom

Lessons 9 and 10 - Question 4 – How do we teach mitzvot that are morally challenging?

In the Tanach there are a number of mitzvot like the killing of Amalek, destruction of the seven nations in Sefer Yehoshua, and the war against the Persians in the book of Esther that pose serious moral challenges. In addition, there are a number of negative mitzvot (*mitzvot lo taaseh*) (like the prohibition of homosexual relationships) that pose serious challenges to the moral norms of today) We will explore this question and its pedagogic implications in the classroom at various age levels. **(2 lessons)**

Lesson 11 -Question 5 –How do we teach stories that pose serious moral questions about the actions of great leaders. For example, the story of David and Batsheva in Sefer Shmuel. How could David have behaved as he did in this story? Different approaches will be presented from the commentaries and scholarly articles and then the pedagogical implications of these will be discussed. **(1 Lesson)**

Lesson 12: How do we teach a text that has issues of faith, morals or ethics? A practical workshop in which teachers, after gaining insights from the course, will work in small groups to prepare a lesson on a specific text. They will write the lesson as the final assignment of the course.

Assessments and Grade for the Course

1. Participation and presentation of all assignments on the moodle of the course -60%
2. Preparation of final lesson-40%

Bibliography of the Course

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כהן ג. (תשע"ה) **סוגיות מוסריות במקרא**. הוצאה פנימית.

גלעד י. (תשע"ג) **את קולך שמעתי שיח אל אלוהים ואדם בספר בראשית**. ישיבת מעלה גלבע.

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