

Sift through the sources and try to see which best suit the aims and method of the peulah: which are most relevant, clear, concise, and interesting. In the end, only a tiny fraction of the materials found and studied may be used in the peulah. It may seem a bit frustrating, but was all that extra time wasted?¹³



This test case provides an example of how to take a specific theme and trace the Jewish tradition for relevant sources. However, if a madrich/a is interested in finding out more about the specific Jewish sources themselves, the central books in the Jewish library, the following two books are extremely valuable:

1. Back to the Sources
2. The Schocken Guide to Jewish Books

Both books were edited by Barry Holtz. "Back to the Sources" presents a wonderfully clear introduction to traditional Jewish texts. It has a full chapter on the Bible, Talmud, Midrash and other sources. The "Guide to Jewish Books" presents a bibliography of each genre of literature. For example, it takes the topic of Jewish mysticism and walks us through the major books of mystic literature, and equally or even more useful, it notes the books which write about these texts, noting which are books for beginners and which for more advanced students.

¹³ You will have noticed that in this test case, we did not examine several very central books that we outlined in our general overview of Jewish sources, for example, the Mishna and Gemara. This is because we tried to focus on those books that one really might turn to while preparing a given peulah. Many of the books mentioned quote the relevant portions of the Talmud; it is important that when the Encyclopedia Judaica quotes a talmudic passage, madrichim understand the general context (i.e. what kind of work the Talmud is). It is probably less realistic, for these purposes at least, to expect madrichim to examine the original source.

EPILOGUE

Whenever I enter a classroom crowded with boys who could be, as far as age is concerned, my grandchildren, I enter the classroom as an old man, with a wrinkled face and eyes reflecting fatigue and the sadness of old age, and sit down. I enter in a very pessimistic mood, in despair. Opposite me are rows of young boys with beaming eyes, beaming faces, clear eyes radiating the joy of being young.

And I ask myself can there be a dialogue between young students and an old teacher, between a rebbe in Indian summer and boys enjoying the spring of their lives?

Whenever I start the shiur (the class), the door opens up and another old man comes in and sits down. He is older than I am. He is my grandfather. His name is Reb Chaim Brisker, without whom I cannot say my shiur.

Then the door opens quietly again and another old man comes in. He is older than Reb Chaim. He lived in the seventeenth century. His name is Shabbetai ben Meir Hacoen, who might be present when you study Baba Kamma and Baba Metzia (sections of the Talmud).

And then more visitors show up. Some of the visitors lived in the eleventh century and some lived in the twelfth century, some in the thirteenth century, some even lived in antiquity - Rashi, Rabbenu Tam, Rava, Rashba. More and more come in. Of course, what do I do? I introduce them to my pupils and the dialogue commences. The Rambam says something; the Rava disagrees. A boy jumps up; he has an idea. The Rashba smiles gently. I try to analyze what the young boy meant.

Another boy intervenes. We call upon the Rabbenu Tam to express his opinion and suddenly a symposium of generations comes into existence. Young boys 18, 20, 23 years of age from one generation join with my generation, then the generation of Reb Chaim, then the generation of the Shakh, the the generation of the Rahba, the generation of the Rambam, the generation of Rashi, the generation of Rabbenu Tam - there is no end.

What about Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai? What about Rabbi Akiba? We all speak one language. We all chat. We speak together. We discuss. We enjoy each other's company. We all pursue one goal. We are committed to a common vision and we all operate under the same categories. There is a collegiality, a friendship a comradeship between young and old, between antiquity and Middle Ages and modern times.

(Transcribed from a talk given on his birthday by Rabbi Joseph Soloveichik, printed in Learning Torah, Joel Grishaver)