

Discussion Ideas for Combatting Menstrual Shame

Period Positive Jewish Text Study

1. There's a wild series of texts in the Talmud where one rabbi follows another rabbi into a private place. In one story ([Berachot 621:1-3](#)), a rabbi follows his teacher into the bathroom to learn where to face while urinating and with which hand to wipe. The response that is offered to the story is that even this is Torah, implying that even how one conducts oneself in the bathroom should be thought about as something connected to values and worthy of discussion and even study (though probably not through direct observation)!

In another, a rabbi goes under the bed of his teacher and listens to his teacher and his wife having sex. When the student is discovered and sent away, he first defends himself with this same refrain "It is Torah, and I must learn."

So, of course, what we don't have in the Talmud is the story of a young Talmud scholar learning about her period from her hevruta and calling that Torah. At least we don't have that yet. Invite students to write that story as if it was a manuscript recently discovered in a cave in the Galilee *OR* have them write about why learning about menstruation is important and how it connects to a Jewish value, for instance "b'tzelem elolim" (we are all created in the image of God) or "Kedushat ha-guf" (sanctification of the body).

2. Study the [Asher Yatzar](#) prayer together. (Note that the word "adam" here translated as man could be more inclusively translated as humanity). Look also these interpretive translations:
 - a. [by Reb Zalman Schacter-Shalomi, z"l](#)
 - b. [by Rabbi Emily Aviva Kapor](#) (honoring the experience of trans Jews)
 - c. [by Rabbi Shoshana Meria Freidman](#) (creating space for naming the challenges of body positivity)

Use the prayer to discuss the following questions:

- What is this prayer conveying about Judaism's relationship to the body?
- What are some of the wonders of the body?
- Have you ever heard menstruation discussed as one of the wonders of the body and how might you do that?
- Why do you think historically there has been so much stigma and shame connected to periods? How might this blessing suggest a different approach to menstruation?