

Some of you may know this, but I was once sitting in the exact same seats where you are now. I graduated from Schechter in 2007, Gann Academy in 2011, and Simmons University in 2016. I then spent a year in Miami, Florida working for the Hillel at University of Miami before returning to Boston and working at a local synagogue for a few years. I spent last year working at Gann, and now here I am, back where it all started.

I've always known that I wanted to be a teacher in some way. I suppose it started in 8th grade, when my LA teacher (shout out to Rachel Chiel/Katz!) had us break into small groups to learn a sonnet by Shakespeare and then teach it to the rest of the class. I loved the feeling I got from explaining the text to someone else and being able to answer their questions about it. And, to be completely honest, I was a little eager to show off that I understood something as hard as Shakespeare. It was exciting for me to be able to "translate" the text into modern English, and by doing that, I was also interpreting what I thought it meant.

My love for text carried over to Tanach; even though I struggled with modern Hebrew, especially having full conversations, I loved working with the Tanach. By breaking down the grammar, sentence structure, and even individual words, the text became something that I was able to connect with on a personal level. Every time that I translated a word, or phrase, or entire pasuk, I was also interpreting what I thought the text meant. It allowed me to think about the characters as real people; their motivations, what they were experiencing, why they behaved the way that they did. My teachers also encouraged me to ask questions about the text, as opposed to taking it for granted or as the "absolute truth." My favorite thing about learning Rashi and studying Talmud is the fact that scholars start by asking questions or finding something problematic in the text, and then using the text itself to try to answer those questions.

My ability to read Torah - thank you David Wolf! - and familiarity with the Tanach enabled me to work as a B' Mitzvah tutor throughout college, where I really fell in love with teaching Tanach. Just like in 8th grade, I really enjoyed working with students and helping them start to understand something - the lightbulb, aha! moment. But I liked when they asked questions even more. I once had a student ask if the reason that unicorns don't exist is because Noah didn't put any on the ark. My response? On a textual level, it makes sense that if Noah didn't put any on the ark, then there wouldn't be any. He asked me this, not because he necessarily thought that unicorns existed at some point, but because he saw something missing from the text and found a way to connect it to the world around him. His next question? Why did Noach save geese - they're so annoying! And just this week a student asked how the Israelites dealt with going to the bathroom while they were wandering b'midbar Sinai. The student may have been joking, but it raised a genuine point about the Israelites being real people with real needs, and how that would impact the people around them.

I came back to Schechter, not just because they offered me a job, but because I truly believe that we can learn more from reading, translating, and interpreting the Tanach than we can from reading Harry Potter, or Shakespeare, or the Percy Jackson series (all of which I love, by the way). The brain muscles we use in decoding and reading, and then translating, and then trying to understand what we just read and translated are the same brain muscles that we use to solve problems in other areas in our lives. Plus, there's the added bonus that the text relates to our own daily lives. Even when reading about shatnez, why we don't mix wool and linen, we're not just discussing the simple prohibition against mixing materials; we're also thinking about why, and how this mitzvah came about, and why it was important to those people, and why it's still important today, and how that reflects our values as individuals and communities, etc etc.

But we can't get there until we start asking questions. And, ultimately, that's what Schechter began to teach me: that learning doesn't start, or end, with facts or answers, it starts with a question, that leads to another question, that leads to another question....I believe that questions are inherently more important than answers. And what better to question than the Tanach itself? After all, we, the Jewish people, have been reading the Torah for two thousand years, known as the oldest book club in the world, and have been asking questions the entire time.