

11/2/16 BAS Teachers' Meeting on *Becoming a Soulful Educator: How to Bring Jewish Learning from Our Minds, to Our Hearts, to Our Souls—and into Our Lives* by Aryeh Ben David, Founder and Director of Ayeka

Go to <http://www.ayeka.org.il/> for more information and a free booklet.

Abby Reiken's Notes from the book:

"It's not about 'learning,' it's about 'meaning!'" p.xv

"Know to Grow": Not every class will be life changing, but our overall goals should be to impact the lives of the students for the long term.

"Rav Kook writes that the primary purpose of learning Torah is to clear away the obstacles preventing us from being loving human beings." p.48

Creating a safe space intentionally where there is no cynicism, judging, attacking, criticizing, discrediting, defensiveness, so students can deeply listen to and support one another, value each individual's unique decisions and path in life, guard each other's privacy, express successes and failures. "Safe space enables us to let down our guard without concern that we will be wounded or neglected." p.30

Teaching individual students vs. content. Listen to the students to better understand what they are grappling with, where they are struggling to find meaning, then share our own struggles and ways that Judaism has helped us with our own journeys. What questions do we need to ask to have each student engaged in learning and personal reflecting?

Love is curiosity. Listening and loving go together. p.46

"When the mentor sees the greater potential in the student, it is as if he or she is holding up a mirror, showing the student the better self who is already there, but that he or she cannot yet see. Glimpsing this better self, the student is encouraged." p.43

Letting our ego voice go—"It's not about me." When the class isn't going well, take a deep breath and think about what the students need now. p.45

**Steps to Soulful Education:**

Transitioning into the class

- a. Before class teachers can take a few moments to gather their thoughts and direct their focus on teaching. Compose a short mantra to recite slowly before entering class and during class when needed. p.60
  - b. In pairs have students share what is holding them back from being more present in class. Each student talks for one minute.
  - c. Short stretching exercise
  - d. Everyone takes three deep breaths and relaxes
2. Introducing the learning—(framing a unit, not for every class)
- a. Be a role model for wrestling with what you are teaching. Talk openly and honestly about why the subject is meaningful to you. How is the subject helping you to grapple with ethical decisions in your life? By sharing our own struggles, students feel more connected to us and open to grappling with the subject matter. "Sharing with our students is possibly the greatest way of honoring them." p.27
  - b. "Modeling involves openness, vulnerability, sincerity, and acknowledging that I am a work-in-progress who also needs and wants to grow through learning." p.62

3. Mindful engagement
  - a. Learning section of the class—introduction of new material and ideas through a variety of modalities.
  - b. “Spiritual reading is a way of reading the word with our whole being, our present condition, our past experiences, and our future aspirations. As we **slowly** let the written words enter into our minds and descend into our hearts, we become different people.” p.66
  - c. It’s not the amount of knowledge but its effect. “Now that you understand the subject, what does this subject mean to you? How does it impact your life?” p.19
4. Heartful engagement
  - a. “Any learning, without processing, never happened. Learn—Process--Share” p.67
  - b. Journal writing for students to process the learning in silence. They don’t need to share what they learned. No self-judgment, self-censoring or editing. Everyone is processing at the same time. p.69
  - c. Four questions for writing prompts p.71:
    - i. Neutral: Where are you (*Ayeka*) regarding the subject we studied? How would you describe your relationship to the ideas we learned together?
    - ii. Futuristic: How do you think these ideas can affect your life? If you were to become more connected to these ideas, what do you think would be different in your life?
    - iii. Reflects gap between present reality and future possibility: What do you think are the obstacles for you to reach this future reality? What is holding you back?
    - iv. Visualize life after class: If you could give yourself one small but practical piece of advice to help you grow, something that you could actually implement in the upcoming week or month—based on what we learned and what you wrote—what piece of advice would you give yourself?
  - d. Sharing with a partner—spiritual chevruta
    - i. Goal—create a quality conversation focused on how the students imagined that their learning could potentially affect their lives. p.74
    - ii. “...what we have been processing and writing about doesn’t become completely real for us until we talk about it with others.” p.73
    - iii. No pressure to share. Share only what they feel comfortable sharing.
    - iv. Each student talks for 3-5 minutes and then they switch. Safe space rules. Be 100% present for each other. Don’t give advice or guide your partner toward a certain answer. Don’t switch the focus back to yourself by saying—I know how you feel, the same thing happened to me...
    - v. Listening without judgment is to encourage and enable students to listen to themselves deeply.
    - vi. One of the greatest acts of kindness is to listen fully. Students’ connections are deepened because they are caring for one another by listening.
5. Summarizing the learning
  - a. What are you taking away from today’s session? Students respond to this question in different formats—orally or in writing.
  - b. Students need to reflect, crystalize and concretize what was significant for them in class. They leave on a positive note about what they gained from class.
6. Transitioning out of the class—application of learning with support, p.82-83
  - a. Goals: application of learning, connects the students with the subject matter and with each other, keeps the topics alive
  - b. With a partner—it could be the partner of their spiritual chavruta or someone different—students check in on one another about how they have applied what they have learned in class—see step 4.c.iv above. They ask each other, “How are you doing with the advice you gave yourself?”