Na’aseh v’Nishma

we will do and we will “hear” (“understand”)

Try it—Learn by Doing

The Jewish approach includes taking an action without necessarily knowing why it’s important or how it will work out, but trusting that it will lead to understanding.
On One Foot: Na’aseh v’Nishmah

IMPORTANT TEXTS

“All that the Lord has spoken we will do and we will hear” (understand) — Exodus 24:7

“The heart follows the actions a person does.” — Sefer HaChinuch Mitzvah 16

“Ruth replied, ‘Do not urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.’” — Ruth 1:16-17

The Implications

We will look at Na’aseh v’Nishmah in the context of:

• Learning to Trust and Trusting to Learn 23
• Ritual: What’s the Point? 26
• Soul Session: Following in Ruth’s Footsteps — Taking the Next Step 29
• Just for Hillel Professionals: Trusting In Your Work 34
• Textsheets for Students 35
Learning to Trust and Trusting to Learn

This Activity is Great For

- Learning
  - Beit Midrash
  - Group Learning
- Holidays
  - Shavuot
- Pastoral Counseling
- Identity & Relationships

Big Idea

The Israelites’ response of “Na’aseh v’Nishmah” created a relationship of trust and love, rather than mere obedience.

I. Beginning the Conversation

Trust Drive

Start your session by dividing students into pairs for a “trust drive.”

As Jim Cain explains in “Find Something to Do”:

Begin with partners of similar heights, in an open space with no obstacles, with one partner standing behind the other, both facing forward. The front ‘driver’ holds onto an imaginary steering wheel and closes their eyes. The ‘backseat driver’ opens eyes, places their hands on the driver’s shoulders and tells them, “I’ve got your back.” The front driver controls the speed, while the rear driver provides information and direction (sort of a human GPS system), avoiding collisions with other drivers and fixed objects. After a few minutes, the front driver opens their eyes and the two participants exchange roles.

TALK IT OUT

- What words would you use to describe the experience of being the front driver?

- What kind of relationship did you need to have with the back driver in order to feel comfortable as the front driver?
II. A Deeper Dive

A. Receiving the Torah

Read together the description of Matan Torah — the Receiving of the Torah, on Mount Sinai. If your group is open to more text study, you may wish to read Exodus 19-20 together to get the full effect of the drama of the Revelation. If not, describe to students the awesome scene at Mount Sinai and then read together Shemot 24.

Shemot (Exodus) 24

3 And Moses came and recounted to the people all the Lord’s words and the laws, and the people answered with a single voice and said, “all the words that the Lord has spoken we will do” (na’aseh).

4 And Moses wrote down all the Lord’s words, and he rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the tribes of Israel . . .

7 And Moses took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people, and they said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do and we will hear” (na’aseh v’nishmah).

(Translation adapted from Robert Alter, The Five Books of Moses)

• Ask students to compare the Israelites’ response in verse 3 and verse 7 — “naaseh” and “na’aseh v’nishmah”. What does the extra word “v’nishmah” imply about how the Israelites will accept the Torah?

• Tell students that the phrase “na’aseh v’nishmah” is traditionally seen as the Jews accepting the Torah without knowing everything it contained - and that this was considered praiseworthy. Read the following Talmud text together.

B. The Glorious Secret of Na’aseh v’Nishmah

Shabbat 88a-b

Rabbi Simla lectured: When the Israelites gave precedence to ‘we will do’ over ‘we will hear,’ six hundred thousand ministering angels came and set two crowns upon each man of Israel, one as a reward for ‘we will do,’ and the other as a reward for ‘we will hear’ . . .
R. Eleazar said: When the Israelites gave precedence to ‘we will do’ over ‘we will hear,’ a Heavenly Voice went forth and exclaimed to them, ‘Who revealed to My children this secret, which is employed by the Ministering Angels...?’

There was a certain Sadducee who saw Raba engrossed in his studies while the fingers of his hand were under his feet, and he ground them down, so that his fingers spurted blood.

‘You rash people,’ he exclaimed, ‘who gave precedence to your mouth over your ears: you still persist in your rashness. First you should have listened, if within your powers, accept; if not, you should not have accepted.’

Said he to him, ‘We who walked in integrity, of us it is written (Proverbs 11): “The integrity of the upright shall guide them.” But of others, who walked in perversity, it is written (Proverbs 11): “but the perverseness of the treacherous shall destroy them.”

Reflective Questions
Students should write down their answers to the following reflective questions. If you wish, you can end the class here; or you may wish to then group students in pairs and give them a few minutes to discuss their reflections together.

• Have you ever had a Na’aseh v’Nishmah relationship with someone? Would you want to?

• How do you think the Jews were capable of having this Na’aseh v’Nishmah relationship with God?

• In your own relationship with God and Judaism, do you have a need for proofs and all the information before you sign on?

• What kind of relationship would you like to have with God and Judaism?

© 2016. Our goal is to disseminate these materials as widely as possible. Hillel International grants you permission to copy or otherwise distribute this curriculum to anyone who might find it valuable.
Ritual: What’s the Point?

I. Beginning the Conversation

Put a piece of matzah in the center of the table.

Ask participants:

• Do you eat matzah on campus on Passover?
• If yes, what is it like to eat matzah on campus?  If not, why not?
• What happens when you see another student on campus eating matzah?
• How is eating matzah on campus on Passover so much more than just eating a cracker?
• Jews have a lot of rituals.  What is one word you would use to describe how you feel about Jewish rituals?

II. A Deeper Dive

A. 60-Second Debates

Before this session, write the following debate statements on separate sheets of paper, and then fold them and put them in a container.

Ask for two volunteers.  One should stick his/her hand into the container and pull out a statement.  Assign one volunteer to argue “for” and the other “against” this statement.  Time them so that they each have only one minute to make their points:

• Jewish rituals are not important.  What is important is how you feel.
• You should never do a Jewish ritual unless you know everything about it beforehand.
• Rituals are destructive.  They let people feel righteous even when they are oppressing other people.
• Keeping kosher is an outdated ritual.
• [Add whatever statements are relevant to your group and the time of year.]

© 2016. Our goal is to disseminate these materials as widely as possible. Hillel International grants you permission to copy or otherwise distribute this curriculum to anyone who might find it valuable.
B. Text Study — Why Jewish Rituals?

Ask for a volunteer who can read the following selection in a dramatic fashion. In this text, the Sefer HaChinuch makes the case for why rituals are so important in Judaism:

Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 16 (Outward actions have the power to shape character. The mitzvot are those actions which will guarantee the improvement of one’s character):

A person is influenced by his actions, and one’s heart and thoughts follow the acts he or she does whether they are good or bad. Even one who is a completely wicked person, who constantly thinks of doing bad deeds, if s/he is inspired for the better and puts time into fulfilling Torah and mitzvot, even if it is not for the sake of Heaven, s/he will turn to the good and he will overcome his/her Evil Inclination through the power of these actions, since the heart follows the actions a person does. Similarly, even if one is a completely righteous person who desires Torah and mitzvot but always involves himself or herself in bad deeds . . . after a certain amount of time s/he will become a wicked person, for we know, and it is true, that every person is affected by his or her actions.


• According to the Sefer HaChinuch, what is the point of rituals and mitzvot (commandments)?

• Do you agree that ultimately that “the heart follows the actions a person does”? Is it what you do that determines what kind of person you are?
C. Step Into the Circle Discussion
Invite the group to stand in a circle.

Ask:
Have you ever had a time when a Jewish festival, object, or practice had an impact on you? Describe what happened.

• Anyone who would like to share an answer should step into the middle of the circle.

• If many people step forward, after each person has said their piece they step back to join the rest of the group.

• If others want to comment, they should step forward into the middle of the circle at any point.

• The discussion ends when everyone has stepped back to join the rest of the group.

OFF THE PAGE AND INTO LIFE
Year of Living Jewishly
Abigail Pogrebin is a journalist who decided to embark on an experiment: she was going to celebrate every Jewish holiday - major and minor, famous and obscure - for a full year. Watch this video as she begins her “year of living Jewishly”:
https://vimeo.com/104432639

TALK IT OUT
• Have you ever tried out a Jewish holiday or ritual that you had never done before? What was the experience like?

• Is there a Jewish holiday or ritual that you would like to try? What would you need in order to give it a go?

© 2016. Our goal is to disseminate these materials as widely as possible. Hillel International grants you permission to copy or otherwise distribute this curriculum to anyone who might find it valuable.
Soul Session: 
Following In the Footsteps of Ruth — Taking the Next Step

This Activity is Great For

- Learning
  - Group Learning
- Holidays
  - Shavuot
- Spirituality
  - Alternative Service

Big Idea
The book of Ruth can help us think about how we make decisions in our lives.

I. Beginning the Conversation

Soul sessions are based on the work of Parker Palmer, specifically his development of the “circle of trust” and his emphasis on drawing out the soul and giving it a safe space. In these soul sessions, we will use a piece of text or artwork connected to a sensibility, and give ourselves the time and safe space to fully experience the text and discover our relationship to it. Our goals in these sessions are: (1) to get in touch with the wisdom that we have within; (2) to have real, meaningful encounters with Jewish ideas; and (3) to create a welcoming community that nurtures true, honest and kind communication.

For more information about Parker Palmer, the Center for Courage and Renewal, and the principles and procedures of Circles of Trust, see http://www.couragerenewal.org/approach/.

Note to Facilitator: As the facilitator, your role is to help the circle participants create a secure space where they can meaningfully encounter themselves, each other and the text. As much as possible, try to facilitate and not teach: you should be involved in the discussions, journaling and small discussions like other members of the group. Give the group the space and trust to proceed without telling them what they should think or how they should interpret.
II. A Deeper Dive

A. How to conduct a soul session:

1. Set up chairs in a circle, where everyone can see each other.

2. Welcome students to the soul session, and explain what a soul session/circle of trust is. You may wish to distribute the Courage and Renewal touchstones, and read each touchstone out loud, in order to set the stage for the work that the group will do together. (http://www.couragerenewal.org/PDFs/CourageRenewal-Circle-of-Trust-Touchstones-(c)2015.pdf)

3. Explain that the principle of double confidentiality will apply to this session: What other people mention in this soul session, and in the breakout sessions, is totally confidential. You may not tell anyone what someone else said in this session. In addition, if you see participants from this soul session after the session has concluded, you may not ask them about what they talked about here, unless they specifically invite you to do so.

4. Introduce the text: Tell students that we traditionally read the Book of Ruth on the holiday of Shavuot. In our session today, it does not matter whether you have read the Book of Ruth 100 times or if this is your first encounter with the book. What we will do, is read it as if it is the first time, and create the space and atmosphere to have a deep and meaningful personal encounter with the text.

5. Ask for two volunteers to read the text out loud, one after the other, so that we can hear the text in two different voices. (See below for text)

6. Invite members of the circle to comment on what resonates for them in the piece they just read. You should be involved as a member of the circle, but don’t rush to fill the silence — give participants the time and space to comment and reflect. Encourage participants to speak into the middle of the circle, rather than to each other.

7. Journaling: Before the session, write out the following questions — or any other questions you would like to pose - on a large sheet of paper. At this point in the session, post the paper on the wall and read the questions out loud.

- How do you think Ruth is able to make her decision when there is so much that is unknown and scary?

- Are you more of an Orpah, or a Ruth?

- Have you ever had a time when you needed to make a big decision? How did it work out? What advice would you give yourself if you had to do it all over again?

- What are some of the values that are most important to you when taking your next steps? How much information do you need before you leap?
Invite students to spend 10 minutes writing in their journal, or if this session occurs on Shabbat or a holiday, silently reflecting on these questions. They should find a place to sit comfortably, and take their time. Their written reflections will be kept private unless they choose to reveal them.

8. Small Group Discussion: Bring the group back together and explain that you will now separate them into groups of two or three (depending on how much time you have carved out for this session, and your space constraints). Each group will find someplace to gather, and then each individual in the group will have 10 minutes to talk about their reflections on the text and questions, or whatever thoughts the text has prompted in them. Each group should appoint a timekeeper to raise his or her hand when the 10 minutes are up. After each member of the group has had his or her ten minutes, they should return to the circle.

**Ground rules for the breakout groups:**

a. Sit in silence and give the individual who is speaking, the space and time to talk at his or her own pace. Do not jump in with questions or comments. Hold the space for them to talk. If they take all 10 minutes to talk, then your job is simply to listen. If they decide they do not want to talk at all, sit in silence with them for 10 minutes. If they have finished what they have to say, and they invite questions before the 10 minutes are up, ask brief, open and honest questions — without introducing your own opinion or offering advice.

b. Do not give advice — your job is not to tell the others what they should do. Your job is to help create a safe, open space where honest, soulful reflection can occur.

c. The rule of double confidentiality applies. Members of the group may not tell anyone else what they heard in this conversation. In addition, if you see a member of your group later on, you may not ask them about what they talked about, unless they specifically invite you to do so.

9. Whole Group Reflection: When everyone returns to the circle, invite participants to share with the whole group something they have discovered (about themselves only - no talking about what others had said) through their journaling and small group discussions, or to reflect on the soul session and its process of reflection and building of safe space. Allow students to sit in silence to reflect; do not rush to close.

10. Closing: Thank students for their time and for creating a welcoming, honest, safe space. Remind them again that double confidentiality applies. Tell students that you are always happy to speak with them about some of the issues that have come up for them in this session, but that because of double confidentiality you will not refer back to what they said unless they explicitly and proactively invite you to do so (make sure to let them know that, so no misunderstandings occur).
Ruth Chapter 1

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab.

The man’s name was Elimelech, his wife’s name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

Now Elimelech, Naomi’s husband, died, and she was left with her two sons.

They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years,

Both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

When Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there.

With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.

Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go back, each of you, to your mother’s home. May the Lord show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me.

May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.” Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud

And they said to her, “We will go back with you to your people.”

But Naomi said, “Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands?

Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have...
Ruth Chapter 1 (continued)

13 Would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord’s hand has turned against me!”

14 At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

15 “Look,” said Naomi, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.”

16 But Ruth replied, “Do not urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.

17 Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.”
As Hillel professionals, we invest so much in our students, teaching them and caring about them. Sometimes we may feel that we are throwing away our efforts, and that nothing is taking hold. At those times, it may be helpful to hold onto the Na’aseh v’Nishmah sensibility — we do our best, and have faith that it will yield returns.

Use these questions to reflect on how you can incorporate some of the lessons of na’aseh v’nishmah into your teaching and relationships with students:

1. When do you feel that your teaching and work with students is successful?

2. Have you ever thought that you did not have an impact with your teaching or work, and find out later that you did?

3. What are some tools you could use to bolster yourself when you work hard, but you do not see the effects?

4. Think about some of your role models. Have you let them know how much they have meant in your life?
Textsheets for Students

On the next pages, you’ll find just the texts mentioned in each of the sections of this curriculum, without the facilitator’s guide. Use these sheets if you would like to make copies of the texts for students, while keeping the facilitator’s notes just for you!
Shabbat 88a-b

Rabbi Simla lectured: When the Israelites gave precedence to ‘we will do’ over ‘we will hear,’ six hundred thousand ministering angels came and set two crowns upon each man of Israel, one as a reward for ‘we will do,’ and the other as a reward for ‘we will hear.’ . . .

R. Eleazar said: When the Israelites gave precedence to ‘we will do’ over ‘we will hear,’ a Heavenly Voice went forth and exclaimed to them, Who revealed to My children this secret, which is employed by the Ministering Angels . . .?

There was a certain Sadducee who saw Raba engrossed in his studies while the finger[s] of his hand were under his feet, and he ground them down, so that his fingers spurted blood. ‘You rash people,’ he exclaimed, ‘who gave precedence to your mouth over your ears: you still persist in your rashness. First you should have listened, if within your powers, accept; if not, you should not have accepted.’

Said he to him, ‘We who walked in integrity, of us it is written (Proverbs 11): “The integrity of the upright shall guide them.” But of others, who walked in perversity, it is written (Proverbs 11): “but the perverseness of the treacherous shall destroy them.”

2 And Moses came and recounted to the people all the Lord’s words and the laws, and the people answered with a single voice and said, “all the words that the Lord has spoken we will do” (na’aseh).

4 And Moses wrote down all the Lord’s words, and he rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the tribes of Israel . . .

7 And [Moses] took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people, and they said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do and we will hear” (na’aseh v’nishmah).

(Translation adapted from Robert Alter, The Five Books of Moses)
Ritual: What’s the Point?

Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 16 (Outward actions have the power to shape character. The mitzvot are those actions which will guarantee the improvement of one’s character):

A person is influenced by his actions, and one’s heart and thoughts follow the acts he or she does whether they are good or bad. Even one who is a completely wicked person, who constantly thinks of doing bad deeds, if s/he is inspired for the better and puts time into fulfilling Torah and mitzvot, even if it is not for the sake of Heaven, s/he will turn to the good and he will overcome his/her Evil Inclination through the power of these actions, since the heart follows the actions a person does. Similarly, even if one is a completely righteous person who desires Torah and mitzvot but always involves himself or herself in bad deeds . . . after a certain amount of time s/he will become a wicked person, for we know, and it is true, that every person is affected by his or her actions.

Na’aseh v’Nishma

Textsheets for Students

Soul Session: Following in the Footsteps of Ruth — Taking the Next Step

Ruth Chapter 1

1 In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab.

2 The man’s name was Elimelech, his wife’s name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

3 Now Elimelech, Naomi’s husband, died, and she was left with her two sons.

4 They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years,

5 Both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

6 When Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there.

7 With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.

8 Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go back, each of you, to your mother’s home. May the Lord show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me.

9 May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.” Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud

10 And they said to her, “We will go back with you to your people.”

11 But Naomi said, “Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands?

© 2016. Our goal is to disseminate these materials as widely as possible. Hillel International grants you permission to copy or otherwise distribute this curriculum to anyone who might find it valuable.
Ruth Chapter 1 (continued)

12 Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons—

13 Would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord’s hand has turned against me!”

14 At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

15 “Look,” said Naomi, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.”

16 But Ruth replied, “Do not urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.

17 Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.”