

YOUR DECLARATION NAVIGATOR

Please read the central texts out loud to each other. Then, starting in the upper left-hand corner, follow the commentary around the page. Read the texts, absorb them, and discuss them with your partner. If you choose, use the following questions as your guide.

Midrash Genesis Rabba 8:5

1. What do truth and peace have in common that they see no reason for Adam to be created?
2. What do chesed (lovingkindness) and tzedaka (righteousness) have in common that they do see a reason for Adam to be created?
3. How is truth changed now that it arises from the earth?

Pirke Avot 1:18

1. How is this relationship among justice, truth, and peace different from the relationship portrayed among the angels in the previous text?
2. In the previous midrash, the angel Truth argues against creating Adam. Here, Rabban Shimon Ben Gamliel says that truth is one of the things that sustains the world in which Adam lives. Reconcile these two statements.

Babylonian Talmud, Derech Eretz, The Peace Chapter

1. How does Rav Muna interpret what Rabban Shimon Ben Gamliel says?
2. In the words of Al Sharpton, “No justice, no peace.” Why is justice a prerequisite for peace?
3. Is war ever a prerequisite for peace?

Genesis 1:26

1. To whom is God talking when God says “our”? (Hint: see the first midrash in the opposite column.)
2. What do you think of when you imagine God’s “own image” or “likeness”?
3. Why would God have chosen to create Adam in his/her own image, rather than to give the human a unique image like the animals already created?
4. Why would God have felt the need to announce this distinction?
5. What implications does this creation have on the way we behave towards others?

Pirke Avot 3:14

1. What do the framers have in mind when they say that “all men are created equal”?
2. How is Rabbi Akiva’s statement similar to or different than the statement in the Declaration of Independence?
3. How is the verse “in the image of God was the human made” justification for killing a murderer? Wouldn’t the opposite be true? How could this verse legitimate taking another’s life?
4. How would you feel if the Declaration of Independence said, “all men are created in God’s image” instead of “all men are created equal”?

Babylonian Talmud, Moed Katan 28a

1. How does the author of the Declaration define life? How does Rava define it?
2. What does life mean when you compare it to liberty and happiness? What does it mean when compared to fertility and income? How do these meanings differ?

Sefat Emet, on Leviticus 25:10

1. How is being blessed essentially the same thing as being free?
2. Why is liberty a prerequisite for blessing?

Avraham Ibn Ezra on Leviticus 25:10

1. How is liberty being defined here?
2. Why does a bird perish in captivity, and how does that define liberty?

Pirke Avot 4:1

1. What do the framers mean by happiness?
2. How is happiness defined in Pirke Avot?
3. How are these definitions the same or different?