

Unity, Controversy and the Borders of Democracy

Study for Yitzhak Rabin Memorial Day (high school and adults)

Goals

- To learn about the socio-political reality that preceded Rabin's assassination, and the atmosphere that enabled the assassination.
- To gain an understanding of the power of words and images, and the power of incitement.
- To examining the boundaries of democracy and freedom of expression.
- To get acquainted with sources dealing with the disputes within the Jewish people and how they were dealt with.
- Understanding the importance of formulating and expressing one's position while maintaining democratic rules.

Procedure

1. Introductory game.
2. What do we know about the period in which Rabin's assassination took place? What was the background to the murder? What was the dispute over?
3. Screen a section of the series "Resurrection" on incitement while observing the posters.
4. A legitimate protest versus incitement - divide the group / class into pairs. Each pair receives cards containing expressions and acts from the film and the posters and is required to categorize those that constitutes a legitimate protest versus those considered incitement.
5. Discussion:
 - How and according to what, were the cards distributed?
 - What do you think of Rabin's statement that "even if there is a majority of one, I will go ahead with the move?"
 - What do you think of the statement that the problem was that there was no legitimate channel for the expression of the fierce protest?
 - What is a desirable democratic culture? Does it exist in Israel today? Did it exist in the past?



6. Reading Sources (Appendix)

- From the Place we are Right / Yehuda Amichai –

Why should flowers not bloom from where we are right?

What is the message of the poem?

What stands opposite justice? What makes the world 'loose'?

Why was the house destroyed?

- The Attic of Hananiah the son of Hezekiah

What is the situation? What was the problem with the decisions made in Hananiah's attic?

Why was this day as difficult as when the day the golden heifer was made?

How can a dispute lead to bloodshed? Is this the prevailing culture then and today?

- Both These and These are the Words of the Living G-d

What is the relationship between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel according to the passage?

Why did the legal verdict follow the 'House of Hillel'? (Lenient, Pluralists)

If Halacha is like the House of Hillel, why is it important to say that both these and these are the words of the living G-d?

- Order of women

What is the relationship between Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai according to the passage?

Why is it important to emphasize that members of the house of Hillel and – of the House of Shamai intermarry between them?

7. Summarizing Discussion

- What is the danger in extreme positions? How can freedom of expression be maintained without leading to incitement?
- What is the danger in the absence of a position and of standing on the sidelines?
- Are we a more cautious company? more democratic after the murder?

The Place Where We are Right /Yehuda Amichai

From the place where we are right
There will never grow
flowers in Spring.

The place where we are right
is hard and trampled
like a yard.

Yet doubts and loves make
the world as loose
as a mole, as ploughed earth.

And you shall hear a whisper in the place
where the house that had been
was destroyed.

Talmud Yerushalmi – Order of Moed, Tractate Shabbat – page 9a, chapter 1, Halacha 4 Mishnah

And these are the laws that were said in the attic of Hananiah, the son of Hezekiah the son of Geron, as the time there were those who ascended to visit him, and the house of Shammai had a majority over those of the house of Hillel. And they made 18 decrees on that day: ...

Page 9, Chapter A, Halacha 4, Gemara

That day was difficult for Israel as the day the golden calf was made. Rabbi Eliezer says that on that day they went too far. ... The Sage R. Yehoshua Onyea said that the disciples of Beit Shammai stood below and had killed some of the Beit Hillel disciples. We learn that six of them ascended and the rest of them were threatened with swords and spears. We learn that they decreed eighteen things, and for eighteen they were the majority and regarding eighteen they differed in opinion.





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Talmud Bavli, Tractate Eruvin chapter 1, 13, 2 Gemara

For three years, the House of Shammai and the House of Hillel disagreed. These say that Halacha is as we rule, and these say Halacha is as we rule. An echo came out from Heaven saying both these and these are the words of the living G-d and the verdict of the law goes according to Beit Hillel's rule. And why did Beit Hillel merit that the law should prevail as they ruled, because they were pleasant and humble and they would study both their deliberations and those of Beit Shammai; furthermore they would precede Beit Shammai's opinions to their own.

Tosefta, Order of Women – Tractate Yebamot Chapter 1, 3

Although Beit Shammai contradicted the opinions of Beit Hillel in the question of several women married to the same man [and sisters] and with regard to a woman's marital state and with regard to an old divorce certificate [And in regard to one who sanctifies a woman for marriage] with an object worth less than a pruta [And in regard to an individual] who divorces his wife and she sleeps in the same inn as he does, members of Beit Shammai did not refrain from marrying [women] of Beit Hillel, neither did members of Beit Hillel refrain from marrying women of Beit Shammai, rather, they each treated members of the opposing group with truthfulness and peace at it states (in [Zechariah 8](#)) 'And you shall love truthfulness and peace'.

