

# TANACH TEACHING TIPS

**BUILD EFFECTIVE LESSONS IN  
TORAH AND NACH**

**WITH TIPS FROM NECHAMA LEIBOWITZ**

**RABBI STANLEY PEERLESS**



## **MAKE SURE THAT YOU HAVE CLEAR GOALS, INCLUDING:**

- **Cognitive Goals concepts**– vocabulary, content, etc.
- **Independent Learning (Skills) Goals** – reading fluency, comprehension, grammar, etc.
- **Affective Goals** – values, performance, etc.

**But don't forget that the most important goal of all that facilitates all of the other goals is to foster a love of Torah learning.**



# HOW DO WE FOSTER A LOVE OF TORAH LEARNING?

## ACTIVE LEARNING!!

Engage student in higher level thinking by following the five “Prohibitions”:

1. **Do not lecture:** don't transmit knowledge, facilitate learning
2. **Do not allow students to take notes:** what you say is less important than what they say and think
3. **Do not introduce the material:** avoid pre-conceptions; don't direct their thinking
4. **Do not ask factual questions or to paraphrase:** develop higher level thinking
5. **Do not use repetitive style:** don't let their learning become a ritual, promote various ways of viewing the text



# BUT, HOW DO I START IF I DON'T INTRODUCE THE MATERIAL?

**GIVE THEM AN ACTIVITY THAT FORCES THEM TO PREVIEW THE TEXT AND TO PROCESS THE MATERIAL.**

Here are a few of Nechama's favorite "tricks" to inspire you:

1. **Categorizing:** Divide the chapter into at least three sections and label each section.
2. **Character Analysis:** Which character do you think is the main character in this story? Explain your choice.
3. **Empathy:** Dramatically read or record key verse(s).

Think up your own "tricks". The activity should be used as a trigger to begin discussing the material.

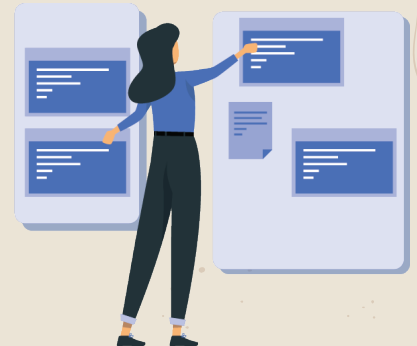
**Note:** These activities should be formulated to allow for a variety of justifiable responses as a great way to validate the students as learners.



## SELECT THE RIGHT TEXTS

**THERE IS NO SHORTAGE OF  
BIBLICAL TEXTS TO FILL OUR  
INSTRUCTIONAL TIME. MAXIMIZE  
STUDENT LEARNING BY FOCUSING  
ON TEXTS THAT PROVIDE GOOD  
LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES,  
INCLUDING TEXTS THAT:**

- Allow for **comparison** with other texts (inter-textuality)
- Include interesting textual difficulties such as grammatical inconsistency, words with **multiple meanings**, deviations from chronology, etc.
- Include unique Biblical literary style, such as the use of **key words**, poetic **parallelism**, juxtaposition of seemingly unconnected ideas, etc.
- Include varied midrashim and commentaries (not just Rashi) that are based directly on **different understandings** of the Biblical text
- Contain a significant **educational message**



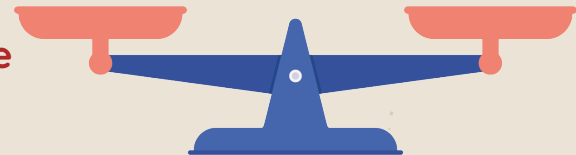
## HOW DO I FIND TEXTS THAT ARE RIPE FOR COMPARISON?

**COMPARISON WAS ONE OF NECHAMA'S MOST COMMON PRACTICES. WHEN YOU START TO LOOK FOR TEXTS TO COMPARE, YOU WILL FIND THAT THEY ABOUND. HERE ARE A FEW CATEGORIES FOR WHICH TO LOOK:**

- **Similar Events**  
(e.g. the interventions of Moshe in three arguments after he leaves the palace)
- **Similar laws, or Laws that are Repeated**  
(e.g. Ten Commandments in Shemot and Devarim)
- **Recapitulations**  
(e.g. Pharoah retells his dream to Yosef after it was described previously)
- **A Command and its Implementation**  
(e.g. Moshe's orders to the spies and their report)

**Of course, it is almost always possible to compare different commentaries on the same verse.**

**Note:** In comparisons, the focus should be on the differences, such as changes in wording or in details surrounding an event or law, changes in order, additions or deletions of words or phrases, etc.



# ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

## IF I DON'T ASK FACTUAL QUESTIONS, WHAT KIND OF QUESTIONS SHOULD I ASK?

Here are examples of active learning questions for textual study that promote higher order thinking skills (and are not boring for the students!!):

### Breishit 4: 13-14

(with commentaries of Rashi, Ramban, and Sforno)

- Does Sforno agree with either Rashi or Ramban, or does he suggest a third interpretation?  
(comparison)
- What motivated Rashi to read “gadol avoni mineso” as a question?  
(causation; literary analysis)
- Which of the three commentaries is most convincing to you? Support your response.  
(evaluation)
- Read “gadol avoni mineso” with what you consider to be the proper inflection.  
(empathy)

**Note:** All of the above questions require processing and do not ask the students to recall information that they have learned. Nevertheless, research indicates that students retain more facts overtime from such activities than by rote recall.

### Breishit 28:10

When Yaacov left Beer Sheva to go to Harran, in what direction did he travel?  
(apply)

### Bamidbar 13:17-33

Did the spies follow Moshe’s directives or not? If not, how and when did they diverge?

(compare)

What part of the spies’ report was factual, and what was opinion?

(categorize)



# **BIOGRAPHY: NECHAMA LEIBOWITZ, 1905-1997**

## **IN BRIEF**



For more info

Nechama Leibowitz, born in Latvia in 1905, was a passionate educator, Zionist, and scholar. After immigrating to Israel in 1930, Leibowitz vigorously taught students in and outside of the classroom, eventually winning the prestigious Israel Prize in the Field of Education in 1956. Through her teaching, Leibowitz brought numerous people, including non-Jews, to a new conception of Torah study. She refused to acknowledge that she was a revolutionary in any way, but ultimately her unique achievements changed Orthodox society's perception of a woman's capabilities and undoubtedly opened doors for the female Torah scholars who followed. Leibowitz died in 1997, and to this day is still "teaching" Torah to new generations, through her books, methods, and students, many of whom are prominent teachers and rabbis.

