

Facing Each Other and Torah Anew



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On Shavuot we celebrate receiving the Torah anew and renewing our own commitment to Torah learning. We share these divrei Torah to lift up Torah's own insights about the spiritual and ethical potential of the act of learning itself, particularly when we learn with others. How do we face one another in learning and life? What can we learn about drawing forth *kedusha*, or holiness, by balancing our own voices and that of Torah? How can we think about how our human relationships affect Torah and vice versa? And ultimately, how can we attend to our own growth and joy through learning as an expansive act? We hope these divrei Torah will give you inspiration for your learning and for how you bring Torah to life in your learning and deeds.

These divrei Torah grew out of the teaching and learning principles of the Pedagogy of Partnership (PoP), which works to support educators in bringing Torah to the next generation. We dedicate these words of Torah in honor of the many teachers who have continued to teach Torah day in and day out to young and old, throughout this time of social and physical distancing. We thank you for your work in bringing your students and Torah together over every technology to nurture those relationships we celebrate on this *Hag Matan Torateinu* (Festival of the Giving of our Torah).

Hag Sameah,
Orit, Allison, and Devin

CONTENTS

What We Can Learn from God about Zoom: The Torah of Smiling	3
<i>Dr. Orit Kent and Allison Cook</i>	
Do We Face Each Other or God? The Model of the Cherubim	6
<i>Rabbi Elie Kaunfer</i>	
Expanding Torah through the Power of Havruta	8
<i>Rabbi Miriam-Simma Walfish</i>	
Growth, PoP, and Building New Worlds	11
<i>Rabbi Devin Maimon Villarreal</i>	

Pedagogy of Partnership is a comprehensive Jewish educational model that supports educators to bring Torah to the next generation. Rooted in Jewish values and practices, PoP enables learners of all ages to develop the habits of wonder, empathy, and responsibility toward others and Torah. PoP conducts professional development workshops, coaching, a fellowship program for a growing network of schools, and provides ready-to-use materials for educators and leaders. In this time of physical distance, the PoP approach restores relationship building to its central place in education and promotes connectivity.



What We Can Learn from God about Zoom: The Torah of Smiling



Dr. Orit Kent



Allison Cook

During the pandemic we are missing (even aching for) the presence and intimacy of being *panim el panim*—face to face—with one another. At the same time we find ourselves face to face over technologies such as Zoom in a strange and mediated way. The camera frame places a heightened emphasis on our faces and suddenly we find ourselves in a virtual universe in which our expressions take on more urgent and exaggerated significance. Our new collective experience of trying to achieve *panim el panim* at a time when we remain distant gives us reason to look to our sources that place such value on countenance as a source of *hesed* (loving-kindness). One of the fundamental tenets of Pedagogy of Partnership¹

¹ The Pedagogy of Partnership (PoP) is an innovative research-based pedagogy for the design of relationship-centered education, led by Dr. Orit Kent and Allison Cook.

is that to be a good learning partner we must become present to our fellow learners and invite them to become present to us. What can we learn about the importance of simply showing up with a facial expression to communicate greeting and connection with others?

Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers), has a well known statement about just this:

משנה אבות א:טו
שְׁמַאי אוֹמֵר... וְהוּא מְקַבֵּל אֶת כָּל
הָאָדָם בְּסִבָּר פָּנִים יְפוֹת.

Mishnah Avot 1:15
Shammai said, "...and receive each and every person with a *sever panim yafot* (a friendly countenance)."

The term, *sever panim yafot*, does not in and of itself give us a full picture of this *mishnah's* intention for the kind of facial expression we might wear and what we

should hope to affect with it. The word *sever* can have a connotation of "showing brightness" or "favor" and the term *yafot* indicates something beautiful, often resulting in the translation of a "pleasant countenance" or a "friendly countenance." But what does that really mean?

One explanation by the Bartenura (15th century Italian commentator) paints a specific scene to help us imagine what is important about this term:

הרב מברטנורא על אבות א:טו
כְּשֶׁאַתָּה מְכַנִּיס אוֹרְחִים לְבֵיתְךָ לֹא תִתֵּן לָהֶם וּפְנִיָּךְ כְּבוֹשׁוֹת בְּקַרְקַע, שְׂכָל הַנוֹתֵן וּפְנִיָּו כְּבוֹשׁוֹת בְּקַרְקַע אֲפִלוּ נָתַן כָּל מִתְנוּת שֶׁבְעוֹלָם מֵעַלְיוֹ עָלָיו כְּאִלוּ לֹא נָתַן כְּלוּם.

Bartenura's comments to Avot 1:15
When you bring guests into your home, don't give them [things] while your face is



buried in the ground, for anyone who gives and his face is buried in the ground—even if he gives all the gifts in the world—it’s counted as if he gave nothing.

He describes the situation where a guest comes into your house and “your face is buried in the ground.” In such a situation, “even if the [host] gives them all the gifts in the world,” but has not looked at them with *sever panim yafot*, “it’s counted as if he gave nothing.” Clearly, then, looking at someone with *sever panim yafot* indicates a certain attention, where you are not looking away either literally or metaphorically but looking towards and welcoming in. It is a certain quality of presence that is valued beyond any gifts and, without which, other gifts are worthless.

Rabbeinu Yonah (13th century Spanish commentator) adds additional subtlety to our understanding. He explains that *sever panim yafot* means:

רבינו יונה על אבות א:טו

שיראה להם פנים של שמחה שתהא רוח הבריות נוחה הימינו

Rabbeinu Yonah’s comments to Avot 1:15

That a person should show a joyful face so that the human spirit can get satisfaction (*no-hah*) from them.

In his words, Rabbeinu Yonah highlights the fact that the joyful face has a real impact on the one whom we face and brings the other person a sense of satisfaction. Furthermore, the root of *no-hah* can connote rest or ease, in addition to satisfaction. One can imagine the kind of joyful face that creates a sense of ease for the other and one can also imagine the opposite kind of face that puts others on edge.

According to Avot DeRabbi Natan (Version A) 7, Abraham himself was blessed by God with *nahat ruah*, or satisfaction, for the immense acts of kindness he performed. This same sense of satisfaction and ease is what we should aim to produce in others when we look upon them. Thus, Rabbeinu Yonah would argue that in addition to our attention, our demeanor should provide a non-anxious and accepting presence to those we face.

Finally, R. Shmuel de Uçeda (16th century commentator in Israel and Turkey) notices that Shammai, just before teaching about receiving others with a pleasant countenance, teaches that one must strive in the areas of study and deeds. Looking at all of these teachings together, he comments:

מדרש שמואל על אבות א:טו

אף שתהיה שלם בלימוד ובמעשה... הוי מקבל את כל האדם בסבר פנים יפות כאילו אתה והם שוים

Midrash Shmuel on Avot 1:15

Even if you are very accomplished in learning and deeds...receive others with a pleasant countenance as equals.

In other words, our pleasant countenance should be towards everyone, seeing others as equals no matter who they are or who we are. And so, *sever panim yafot* requires an ability to put judgment aside and see the human being in front of us.

It is amazing to consider that our facial expression can communicate and affect these values in the world—to make the receiver feel that they have been seen, cared for, granted the benefit of the doubt, and respected. This work of receiving people in such a way is an act of *gemilut hasadim* (bestowing

loving-kindness) that the Talmud tells us we learn from God.

The Talmud relates the following explanation of Exodus 33:11 “And God would speak to Moses face to face, as one person speaks to another. And he would then return to the camp...”

תלמוד בבלי ברכות סג:

”וְדָבַר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה פְּנִים אֶל פְּנִים,” אָמַר רַבִּי יִצְחָק: אָמַר לּוֹ הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְמֹשֶׁה: מֹשֶׁה, אֲנִי וְאַתָּה נֹסְבִיר פְּנִים בְּהִלָּכָה. אֵיכָא דְאָמְרִי כֹּה אָמַר לּוֹ הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְמֹשֶׁה: כְּשֵׁם שְׂאֲנִי הַסְּבִרְתִּי לְךָ פְּנִים, כֹּה אַתָּה הַסְּבִר פְּנִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, וְהִחֲזַר הָאֵהָל לְמִקְוָמוֹ.

Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 63b

“And God spoke to Moses, face to face” (Exodus 33:11). R. Yitzhak said: The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Moses: Moses, you and I will show cheerful faces in (*nasbir panim be-*) [the study of] *halakhah* [to those who come to study]. Some say that the Holy Blessed One told Moses: Just as I showed you a cheerful face (*hisbarti lekha panim*), so too you will show Israel a cheerful face and restore the tent to its place [in the camp].

R. Yitzhak seems to suggest that the term “face to face” conveys the sense of *sever panim*, here translated as a cheerful face, and this can have a positive impact on Torah study. Others seem to suggest that the “cheerful face” that God conveys to Moses is meant to teach Moses how he should be with the Israelites. While this is a very hard passage to fully understand, the implication is that God conveys a sense of the intimacy of *sever panim* in some way to Moses. This *sever panim*—a sense of pres-



ence and closeness—is a lesson for Moshe as to how he should face the Israelites, because it is through facing them with *sever panim* that their hearts will be opened to God and Torah.²

What is the connection between these layers of meaning that we've explored: the various facets of *sever panim yafot*; God's example reflecting how important this kind of countenance is; and that this kind of countenance offers the possibility of opening the hearts of others to God and Torah? We started by saying that a fundamental tenet of the Pedagogy of Partnership is that to be a good learning partner, we must be present to our fellow learners and help them become present to us. We learn from this passage in the Talmud that studying together is an ideal way to connect and strengthen each other with our presence and incorporate the many insights of *sever panim yafot* and through doing so, we also help each other strengthen our connection to Torah and God.

As we face one another in life, work, and in learning, on Zoom and when we can be together in physical space, let us bring a special *kavanah* (intention) to our countenance as a seemingly simple but powerful act of *hesed*, particularly now. Let us give and receive smiles with fullness and intention. This is a *hesed* we all can do for one another.

² See Ben Yehoyada (R. Yosef Hayyim of Baghdad, the *Ben Ish Hai*) who explains that the God says to Moshe: "Just as I extended *sever panim* to you and through this, your heart opened to Torah, so you should do with the Israelites and if you stay outside of the camp, you will be showing them a countenance of fury that you are angry with them."

Dr. Orit Kent is the co-founder and co-director of the Pedagogy of Partnership. She is co-author of the award-winning book, A Philosophy of Havruta. A graduate of Yale University, she earned an Ed.M. in Teaching and Learning from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a doctorate in Education and Jewish Studies from Brandeis University.

Allison Cook is the co-founder and co-director of the Pedagogy of Partnership. She has published numerous scholarly and popular articles on relationship-based learning and has developed frameworks and tools for educators. Allison earned her Ed.M. in Teaching and Learning from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and M.A. in Jewish Studies from Hebrew College.



Do We Face Each Other or God? The Model of the Cherubim



Rabbi Elie Kaunfer

When we learn in relationship with Torah and other people, we can open ourselves to the possibility of experiencing a sense of kedushah (holiness).¹

In learning a holy text with another person, which voices are privileged? Must one always choose between the person and the text, or can they be balanced in the learning experience?

Hazal (the sages of the Talmud) offer a model of this tension, best expressed in the Pedagogy of Partnership (PoP) concept called the “partnership triangle”, an image of a triangle connecting three equal partners: two human peers and a text. They do this by noting conflicting texts related to the cherubim.

¹ The Pedagogy of Partnership (PoP) is an innovative research-based pedagogy for the design of relationship-centered education, led by Dr. Orit Kent and Allison Cook. A key PoP principle is seeing study relationships as ends in and of themselves, creating the opportunity for *kedushah*/holiness each time peers study text together.

The cherubim were perhaps the oldest model of the stance of facing each other. These amazing creatures were situated atop the cover of the Holy Ark and the space in between them is the place from which God spoke. And how were they oriented?

אֶל-אֲחִיו אִישׁ וּפְנֵיהֶם, they were facing each other (Exodus 25:20). God apparently speaks in the space between two beings facing each other.² But this is not the only picture of the cherubim. In fact, elsewhere in the Bible, we see that they were not facing each other, but rather: לְבַיִת וּפְנֵיהֶם, they were facing the House, the holy sanctuary (2 Chronicles 3:13)!

So which was it? Were the cherubim facing each other, or were they facing the sanctuary? Or, in PoP terms: were the *havrutas* primarily oriented toward each other, or toward the holy text?

² For more on learning partners “facing” one another, see Dr. Orit Kent’s and Allison Cook’s “What We Can Learn from God about Zoom: The Torah of Smiling”.

This is debated in the Talmud.

תלמוד בבלי בבא בתרא דף צט.
רבי יוחנן ור' אלעזר, חד אמר: פניהם איש אל אחיו, וחד אמר: פניהם לבית.
ולמאן דאמר פניהם איש אל אחיו, הא כתיב: ופניהם לבית!
לא קשיא: כאן בזמן שישראל עושין רצונו של מקום, כאן בזמן שאין ישראל עושין רצונו של מקום.

Babylonian Talmud Bava Batra 99a

R. Yoḥanan and R. Eleazar (disagreed). One said: (the cherubim) faced each other, and the other said they faced the House (holy sanctuary).

For the one who said they faced each other, but it is written (2 Chronicles 3:13) they faced the House!

This is not difficult. This (when they faced each other) is when Israel does the will of the Omnipresent, and this (when they faced the House) is when Israel does not do the will of the Omnipresent.



Here we see that R. Yohanan and R. Eleazar disagreed about the orientation of the cherubim. One opinion (it is not clear who) understood this to be a hierarchy of orientations. The ideal orientation is facing each other. When Israel is in line with God's will, the cherubim are in the ideal position: faces toward each other. Only when Israel was defying God did the cherubim turn away from each other. From this we could conclude that one side of the partnership triangle is better than the others: the one where each member of the *havruta* speaks directly to each other.

But this is not the only interpretation. The other sage has a different solution to the textual contradiction:

תלמוד בבלי בבא בתרא דף צט.
 ולמאן דאמר ופניהם לבית, הא
 כתיב: ופניהם איש אל אחיו!
 דמצדדי אצדודי.

**Babylonian Talmud Bava
 Batra 99a**

And for the one who said: they faced the House, but it is written (Exodus 25:20) "they faced each other"! They look to the side.

רשב"ם בבא בתרא דף צט.
 דמצדדי אצדודי - קצת לבית וקצת
 זה לזה כאדם שמדבר אל חבירו
 והופך ראשו קצת לצד אחר.

**Rashbam's comment (Rabbi
 Shlomo ben Meir, 11th-12th
 c. France)**

"They look to the side"—partly to the House and partly toward each other, like a person who speaks to his friend and turns his head slightly to the side.

The other opinion understands the contradiction in another way. This is not a hierarchy. No side of the triangle is privileged. Rather,

they are able to hold all sides of the partnership triangle as equal: they look to the side, and as such they are speaking, as Rashbam explains, "partly to the House and partly toward each other." The cherubim are focused on each other, but they are also able to connect to the Holy sanctuary. This, perhaps is the ideal—holding all sides of the triangle at once.

Is learning in *havruta* always at odds with taking the text seriously as a third partner? Or is there a world in which the face of one's partner and the holy text hold equal weight? Using the cherubim as a model, we can see these options being played out already in the Talmud. And perhaps this ethereal *havruta*—the holy cherubim—serves as the best model for this tension from which we can learn how to seek glimpses of *kedushah* (holiness) in our own *havruta* learning.

Rabbi Elie Kaunfer is President and CEO of the Hadar Institute. He is the author of Empowered Judaism, published by Jewish Lights in 2010. A graduate of Harvard College, he completed his doctorate in liturgy at the Jewish Theological Seminary, where he was also ordained.



Expanding Torah through the Power of Havruta



Rabbi Miriam-Simma Walfish

Exodus 32 describes a dramatic moment in the life of the early Israelites. Rather than waiting patiently for Moses to come down off the mountain, they create and worship a golden calf, angering God. In response, Moses throws the tablets of revelation off the mountain, shattering them into thousands of pieces.

The rabbis interpret the act of Moses breaking the tablets in two very different ways. In the first (Babylonian Talmud Eruvin 54a), they say that “had the tablets not been broken, Torah would not have been forgotten by the Israelites.” In this image, when the tablets break the letters fly off into the ether, causing a mass forgetting of all the Torah the Israelites have learned through their sojourn in the desert. In another interpretation (Menahot 99a-b), however, the rabbis congratulate Moses for breaking the tablets: “The Holy Blessed One said to Moses: Your strength is true (*yishar kohakha*) that you broke [them].” So this

seems to be contradictory. On the one hand, breaking the tablets brought about mass forgetfulness, while on the other hand, God congratulates Moses for it!

R. Yitzhak Hutner, a great 20th century *rosh yeshiva*, points out this contradiction and suggests a resolution (Sefer Pahad Yitzhak on Hanukkah, Maamar 3). Counterintuitively, the Israelites’ initial forgetting of Torah may have been positive. When you forget something, you ask around, you reason it out. When the Israelites went through this process, says R. Hutner, everything they generated through this trial and error process became part and parcel of Torah. Torah itself grew and was enhanced by the fact that it had been forgotten.

This insight can be applied, in a more pointed way, to what it means to study Torah with a *havruta*. Psalm 127:5 states: “Happy is she who has her quiver full of Torah arrows; she shall not be put to shame when she speaks

with her enemies at the gate.” On the surface, this is a pretty negative image for what it means to study Torah. In Pedagogy of Partnership (PoP),¹ we study as a means of connecting to one another and to Torah, but in this verse, Torah is a weapon. The purpose of studying Torah is to amass knowledge with which to put one’s enemies to shame.

The Talmud’s reading of this verse raises a similar problem. The rabbis wonder about the identity of the “enemies at the gate”. Their answer is surprising: “R. Hiyya b. Abba says: Even a father and his son, or a rabbi and his student, who are engaged in Torah together in one gate become enemies with each other but they do not leave there until they love each other” (Babylonian Talmud Kiddushin 29b). The enemies here are not litigants in a legal suit or social foes looking to shame one

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another; rather, they are people in the closest of relationships—father and son, teacher and student. While not as negative an image of Torah study as the psalm’s image of Torah arrows, this image is still not ideal. For R. Hiyya b. Abba, it seems, Torah study can lead to enmity. The image he presents is that of Torah study as an intense competition that only the strength of the pre-existing relationship can ultimately vanquish.

R. Hutner, once more, has a different reading of this source. It is not the love that parent and child or teacher and student have built outside of Torah study that ultimately breaks through the enmity it has caused. Rather, it is the Torah study itself that has fashioned and ultimately strengthened the relationship of these study partners. The reason this is true is that this love is born from the creative act of generating more Torah. Through the study of Torah, the *havruta* is a partnership of creation! In both of Rav Hutner’s analyses we see that expanding Torah in *havruta*, whether it is because of an ancient forgetting or passionate dispute, fortifies the connection between the study partners and the Torah.

R. Hutner’s teaching is highly resonant with the insights of PoP, especially the partnership triangle, an image of a triangle connecting three equal partners: two human peers and a text. Imagining ourselves as part of a balanced partnership triangle² allows us to apply R. Hutner’s insights to our own learning. Sometimes, when we consider the partnership triangle, it feels more intuitive to imagine how each human partner might change and evolve through a deep encounter with one another and with a text.

What R. Hutner allows us to see is that this encounter changes Torah as well, allowing Torah to expand and evolve through our organic and authentic encounter with one another and with it.³

³ For more on how the Torah “expands” through its study, see R. Devin Maimon Villarreal’s “Growth, PoP, and Building New Worlds”.

² For an exploration of a “balanced havruta triangle”, see R. Elie Kaunfer’s “Do We Face Each Other or God? The Model of the Cherubim”

Rabbi Miriam-Simma Walfish is a Pedagogy of Partnership coach and consultant and is completing her doctoral studies in Talmud at Harvard University. A graduate of the Pardes Educators Program, she has taught Tanakh, Talmud, and Jewish Law in numerous settings including Hadar, Harvard University, Hebrew College, Gann Academy, Heschel High School and Boston’s Teen Beit Midrash, which she directed.



TEXTS CITED

The Paradox of the Broken Tablets

<p>שמות לב:טז וְהַלַּחַת מַעֲשֵׂה אֱלֹהִים הִמָּה וְהַמְּכֻתֵב מְכֻתֵב אֱלֹהִים הוּא חֲרוּת עַל הַלַּחַת.</p>	<p>Exodus 32:16 And the tablets were the work of God and the script was the script of God engraved on the tablets.</p>
<p>תלמוד בבלי עירובין נד. 1. ואמר רבי אליעזר מאי דכתיב "חרות על הלוחות?" 2. אלמלי לא נשתברו לוחות הראשונות לא נשתכחה תורה מישראל</p>	<p>Babylonian Talmud Eruvin 54a 1. And R. Eliezer said: What is that which is written "inscribed on the tablets?" 2. Were the first tablets not shattered, Torah would not have been forgotten from Israel.</p>
<p>שמות לד:א וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה פֶּסֶל-לְךָ שְׁנֵי-לַחַת אֲבָנִים כְּרֵאשֵׁינִים וְכָתַבְתִּי עַל-הַלַּחַת אֶת-הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר הִזִּי עַל-הַלַּחַת הַרְּאשֵׁינִים אֲשֶׁר שִׁבַרְתָּ:</p>	<p>Exodus 34:1 The LORD said to Moses: "Carve two tablets of stone like the first, and I will inscribe upon the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you shattered.</p>
<p>תלמוד בבלי מנחות צט.-: 1. אמר ריש לקיש פעמים שביטולה של תורה זהו יסודה 2. דכתיב (שמות לד, א) "אשר שברת" 3. אמר לו הקב"ה למשה יישר כחך ששברת</p>	<p>Babylonian Talmud Menahot 99a-b Reish Lakish says: Sometimes the canceling of Torah is its foundation, as it is written: "...which you broke" (Exodus 34:1). The Holy Blessed One said to Moses: Your strength is true (<i>yishar kohakha</i>) that you broke [them].</p>
<p>תלמוד בבלי קידושין ל: 1. ואומר (תהלים קכז, ה) "אשרי הגבר אשר מלא את אשפתו מהם לא יבושו כי ידברו את אויבים בשער" 2. מאי "את אויבים בשער"? 3. אמר רבי חייא בר אבא אפי"ה האב ובנו הרב ותלמידו שעוסקין בתורה בשער אחד נעשים אויבים זה את זה ואינם זזים משם עד שנעשים אוהבים זה את זה 4. שנאמר (במדבר כא, יד) "את והב בסופה" 5. אל תקרי בסופה אלא בסופה</p>	<p>Babylonian Talmud Kiddushin 30b (Trans. Koren-Steinsaltz, Sefaria) 1. And it states: "Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; they shall not be put to shame when they speak with their enemies in the gate" (Psalms 127:5). 2. What does "enemies in the gate" allude to? 3. Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba says: Even a father and his son, or a rabbi and his student, who are engaged in Torah together in one gate become enemies with each other but they do not leave there until they love each other, 4. As it is stated in the verse discussing the places the Jewish people engaged in battle in the wilderness: "Therefore it is said in the book of the wars of the Lord, Vahev in Suphah [beSufa], and the valleys of Arnon" (Numbers 21:14). The word "vahev" is interpreted as related to the word for love, <i>ahavah</i>. 5. Do not read this as "in Suphah [beSufah]"; rather, read it as "at its end [besofah]."</p>



Growth, PoP, and Building New Worlds



Rabbi Devin Maimon Villarreal

Growth Mindset is likely one of the most important and influential developments in education in the last 25 years. Carol Dweck, the mother of the Growth Mindset movement, together with others, discovered through research that when students believed that their abilities could be developed, they were more excited about challenges, more open to putting in high levels of effort and ultimately, became higher achievers in school. This was in contrast to students who believed they were either “smart” or “not” in some fixed way. For those students, high level challenges were seen as threats upon or judgements of their innate status and thus, they often avoided demanding academic situations, ultimately achieving less. Dweck’s research gave rise to numerous methodologies to help students cultivate a Growth Mindset. My own third grader for example, has already been introduced to Growth Mindset concepts at his school,

with growth reflection time provided, and key phrases plastered on walls and bulletin boards in halls and classrooms. Indeed, this approach has created extraordinary opportunities for learners at all stages of life to see themselves in a more positive light, to cope with setbacks in a healthy way and to equip themselves with a habit of mind that continually pushes and uplifts them.

The Pedagogy of Partnership (PoP¹) approach to learning shares much in common with Growth Mindset. Its emphasis on goal setting and reflection helps learners see themselves as being on a constant trajectory of growth. What is even more exciting about PoP, however, is that its practices add a remarkable layer to Growth Mindset, a layer that is deeply rooted in the wisdom of classical Jewish approaches to text study, espe-

¹ The Pedagogy of Partnership (PoP) is an innovative research-based pedagogy for the design of relationship-centered education, led by Dr. Orit Kent and Allison Cook.

cially *havruta* (partnership) learning. R. Hananiah Gavriel Yehoshua Shabtai (19th-20th c. Greece and Israel) introduces his collection of responsa by discussing the nature and importance of *hiddushim* (novel insights into the Torah). In the course of this discussion he offers words which also speak to the heart of *havruta* learning and the layer that PoP adds to Growth Mindset. He writes,

ר' חנניה גבריאל יהושע שבתי,
הקדמה לשו"ת מנחת הח"ג
לא לומר אם אני לי בקנין השלמות
מה אכפת לי שלמות אחרים... ומה
מאד נאמנו דברי הגאון בעל נשמת
חיים... "לא לעצמנו נולדנו" כי
האדם מדיני ועליו להטיב חברו...
ואין שמחה להקב"ה בעולמו אלא
במה שישראל מחדשים ומגדלים
את תורתו ע"י חדושיהם...

R. Hananiah Gavriel Yehoshua Shabtai, Introduction to Responsa *Minhat HeHag*
"...one should not say 'if I achieve wholeness for myself,



what does it matter to me if others do?'...How faithful are the words of the author of Nishmat Hayyim who stated, 'we are not born only for ourselves', for humans are social beings and it is incumbent upon them to be of benefit to others...and there is no greater joy for God in the world than when the Jewish people together develop new insights into the Torah and thus make it greater through their new insights..."²

R. Shabtai then refers his readers to a portion of the introduction to the Zohar that also deals with this topic. It is worth looking at a few lines from this section to appreciate the point he is driving at by referring his readers there.

הקדמה לזוהר ד:ה

רבי שמעון פתח (ישעיה נא:טו-טז) "וְאֲשִׁים דְּבָרֵי בְּפִיךָ." כְּמָה אֵית לִיה לְבַר נֶשׁ לְאִשְׁתְּדִלָּא בְּאוּרֵייתָא יְמָמָא וְלֵילֵיא, בְּגִין דְּקוּדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא צִיִּית לְקַלְהוֹן דְּאֵנוּן דְּמִתְעַסְקֵי בְּאוּרֵייתָא, וּבְכָל מְלָה דְּאִתְחַדְשׁ בְּאוּרֵייתָא עַל יְדָא דְּהוּא דְּאִשְׁתְּדִל בְּאוּרֵייתָא, עֵבִיד רְקִיעָא חֲדָא... וְעַל דָּא כְּתִיב, (שם 10:כב) "כִּי כְּאֲשֶׁר הִשְׁמִים הַחֲדָשִׁים וְהָאֲרָץ הַחֲדָשָׁה אֲשֶׁר אָנִי עוֹשֶׂה עֹמְדִים לְפָנַי" וְגו'. עֲשִׂיתִי לֹא כְּתִיב אֱלָא עוֹשֶׂה, דְּעֵבִיד תְּדִיר מְאֹנוּן חֲדוּשִׁין וְרִזִּין דְּאוּרֵייתָא.

Introduction to the Zohar 4b-5a

R. Shimon opened a discourse on the verse, "And I have put My words in your mouth" (Isaiah 51:16). How important it is for humankind to strive in the study of the Torah day and night. This is because the Holy Blessed One listens attentively to the

voices of those who occupy themselves with the study of the Torah. And every word that receives a novel insight by a person who delves into the study of the Torah creates a new expanse in the heavens...Regarding this it is written, "For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I make, shall remain before Me..." (Isaiah 66:22). God does not say "I have made," but rather "I make". God constantly creates from the secrets and novel insights into the Torah.

It would seem that R. Shabtai understands the Zohar's focus on novel insights allowing the creation of new worlds as a statement that the process of developing novel insights should ultimately be in service of others, and that it creates new possibilities for everyone, including God. These ideas, that one can and has a responsibility to develop him or herself *in a way that benefits others in theirs*, and that sharing our insights with one another creates a possibility for new meanings that *do not exist when one studies alone*, are here identified as core to the learning experience. They are also core ideas nurtured by PoP's approach to study.³

At this moment, these notions also have particular relevance for our personal and professional lives, as we adapt to the new reality brought about by COVID-19. Holding Growth Mindset and core PoP ideas in our consciousness in

our current situation offers us some practical guidance. For example, now is an ideal time to remind ourselves that we are capable of growth, big and small, and to set goals rooted in that belief. These goals can be something like "I will learn a few *pesukim* or a chapter of Tanakh or Mishnah each week", or I will listen to one shiur a week (it can be as short or long as you like), or will sign up for a Project Zug class. We can then take these experiences into the PoP realm by finding a *havruta* partner that we can share our goals with and learn with together. This could be a friend, a family member at a distance or our children. In this way, we will support one another in our growth and provide important moments of thriving for all involved.

Many have benefited tremendously from the insights of Growth Mindset. Through PoP, we stand to benefit even more from an immersion in the Jewish principles of mutual responsibility and robust learning partnerships. Ask yourself: What are instances of my learning with others and doing with others that have brought me joy? And what step can I take to grow that joy even now?

Rabbi Devin Maimon Villarreal is a Pedagogy of Partnership coach and consultant and works as an education consultant for organizations such as the Sephardic Educational Center. He was awarded the Covenant Foundation's Pomegranate Prize for emerging Jewish educators. He received semikha (rabbinic ordination) from Yeshivat Chovevei Torah and holds a Master's degree in Teaching from the American Jewish University.

² For more on making the Torah "greater" through novel insights, see R. Miriam-Simma Walfish's "Expanding Torah through the Power of *Havruta*".

³ PoP articulates several "stance statements" connected to its approach to partnership learning. Included in these are "I have something to learn and I have something to teach" and "If all of the partners work together, we will come to learning and insights that we would not have come to on our own, in the same way, or with another set of partners."

