

A Light Amidst the Darkness

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Grade Level:

Upper Elementary (6-8)

Educational Goals/Objectives:

Students will internalize the concept that even within the depth and pain of גלות it is possible to connect to Hashem and to feel קדושה.

Description:

This is a profound and inspiring lesson that explores commonly asked questions about גלות. It is structured according to the seven-step lesson plan and includes beautiful stories and analogies to convey the message of גלות in a relevant manner.

Detailed Instructions – Classroom Use:

Do Now: Tell your students to write the answer to the following question: Is boiling water a good thing? Why yes or why not?

<u>Yes!</u>	<u>No!</u>
<i>You can wash laundry.</i>	<i>It can scald and burn.</i>
<i>You can smelt gold.</i>	<i>Boiling water can be fatal.</i>
<i>You can cook foods.</i>	<i>It can ruin delicate clothes.</i>
<i>Yes, boiling water is great.</i>	<i>Boiling water is terrible.</i>

The question remains is boiling water a good thing or not?

Motivation: Show your students a carrot, an egg and a coffee bean. Ask them: what happens to these foods when they are placed in boiling water?

Carrot: The carrot becomes soft and weak. Its strength and vitality evaporate when faced with adversity.

Egg: The egg becomes hardened and coarse as a result of the harsh conditions.

Coffee Bean: The coffee bean enhances its entire environment.

Galus is blood-soaked, stained with Jewish travails throughout the generations. It is boiling, scorching water. Yet, it is up to us to decide what we are going to do with the hot water. We can either get hit by the stones and wallow in self-pity. Or, we can use the boulders as stepping stones to reach greater heights.

Aim: How can we feel קרבת אלקים even within this terribly painful גלות?

We are so fortunate to be a link in the chain of עם ישראל. Our heritage is a rich tapestry of אהבת ה' and מסירת נפש spun even in adverse situations. Let's see how some of our ancestors reacted when they experienced the throes of גלות.

What did David Hamelech do amid the various hardships he encountered; when he fled Shaul Hamelech, when his own son, Avsholom, betrayed him, when he endured terrible sickness? He took the intensity of his anguish and created something beautiful: He composed the heilige sefer tehillim. David bequeathed us with a gift: the strength of character to endure and uplift. Throughout the generations, myriads of Yidden have found solace in his deep and poignant words. (Derech Tzadikim, p.19)

The name of Rabbi Akiva shines out like a beacon across the ages. During that terrible time of death and destruction, after the fall of Beitar and during the period of Hadrian's decrees, the Jewish people were completely despondent. But Rav Akiva brought them new life and learning and hope. When the Rabbis saw הר הבית in ashes and they cried, Rav Akiva laughed. "The prophets foretold the Destruction and the Redemption," he said. Now that the prophecy of the Destruction has come true, we know for sure that the prophecy of Redemption and the rebuilding of the בית המקדש will come true! (Sand and Stars)

How did these people, mere mortals, attain that level, not in spite of but because of, their challenges?

In order to understand this we have to delve into the definition of גלות.

The word גלות, translated as exile, is often portrayed as *a barefoot, bedraggled pauper with a torn bag attached to a wooden slat, slung over his bony shoulders, roaming the streets.....* In essence, גלות means that a person is stripped from his natural habitat, from his home.

Now let's visualize the following scene: A young family is banished from their apartment because they didn't pay rent. They pack up their meager belongings and they move to a new location. They have to get used to a new neighborhood, a new grocery store, a new shul etc. After living there for three weeks they are forced to move again. The father is in גלות. the mother is in גלות. Is the six month old baby in גלות? No. Why? Because as long as the child has its mother, he is in his natural habitat. It doesn't matter where he is, as long as he is ensconced in the safety and warmth of his mother's arms.

We are that baby. Yes, we face tremendous challenges. Yes, גלות is hard and long and painful. Yet, we are ensconced in the safety of our Father's arms. Hashem is guiding us and protecting us. Sometimes the magnitude of גלות, crushes us. We feel abandoned, alone. Yet we can never forget: we are in Hashem's loving embrace.

That is how David Hamelech, Rav Akiva and multitudes of Yidden were able to withstand and uphold within the pain. For they knew That Hashem, our loving Father, is there with us.

כי אשב בחשך של הצרות ה' אור לי
(מלב"ם מיכה פרק ז, פסוק ח')

In the year 1856, the Russians arrested Rabbi Avraham Yaakov Friedman, the Rabbi of Sadugura, and kept him in prison.

"I am permitted to serve Hashem undisturbed," Rabbi Avraham Yaakov told his visitors, "what difference does it make whether I am here, or anywhere else?"

His father-in-law, Rabbi Aharon Perlov of Karlin, who was allowed to stay with him for a while in his cell, asked him, "How do you feel in this awful place?"

Rabbi Avraham Yaakov replied, "Does the place make a difference? מלא כל הארץ כבודו. Hashem is everywhere. Even here, in this awful place." (Gateway to Happiness p. 247)

I. What are the ארבע גליות?

During the **בית בין הבתרים** Avraham Avinu fell into a deep sleep and dread, great darkness fell upon him, as it is written:

ויהי השמש לבוא ותרדמה נפלה על אברם והנה אימה חשכה
 גדלה נפלת עליו
 (בראשית טו לך לך יב)

The **רמב"ן** commentates that these words allude to the four גליות that כלל ישראל faced collectively as a nation.

בבל	אימה
מדי	חשכה
יון	גדולה
אדום	נופלת עליו

II. We know clearly that Hashem’s love for us is infinite. So why does Hashem put us in גלות to begin with?

Let's focus on the first bitter גלות that כלל ישראל endured: גלות מצרים.

Years: 2238-2448

- כלל ישראל dwelt in מצרים for 210. After 94 years of being the honored children and cousins of the exalted viceroy Yosef, they were enslaved by a new Pharaoh who claimed he did not know Yosef. Finally, after 30 years of servitude, Pharaoh imposed backbreaking labor upon the Jews, determined to shatter their spirit. Eighty-six years of unimaginable physical and psychological oppression culminated in the Egyptians' murder of countless Jewish children cast into the Nile by Pharaoh's soldiers.
(Dawn to Destiny)



- Why did Hashem make כלל ישראל suffer through Egyptian slavery? Because of his intense love for his nation. Hashem knew that כלל ישראל needed to be purified under Egyptian bondage in order to receive the תורה. The Sages compare גלות מצרים to an iron furnace: just as the hardest metal is forged under the most intense heat and pressure, so too did four generations of slavery and oppression forge the Jews into a strong and enduring nation.

We don't understand Hashem's ways. Yet, we must have the crystal clear knowledge that whatever Hashem does is good.

The following story illustrates this concept:

Rav Elbaz saw the light of תורה ומצוות and pursued it, leaving behind the sins of his past. His new status as a בעל תשובה, didn't earn him fame among his family. On the contrary, his family was shocked and appalled at the changes of lifestyle that their beloved son implemented. Out of their deep hurt, they refused to have any connection with him. They disowned him completely. Rabbi Elbaz was left abandoned by his own family, destitute and lonely.

One day Rabbi Elbaz received a phone call from one of his family members. The next day his father sent him some money. A little while later, his mother called for a friendly chat. Rabbi Elbaz was puzzled at the change of heart. He couldn't contain his curiosity, so he called his brother to ask him what happened.

His brother told him that one day, as the family was watching TV, they switched channels and they got to Hidabroot, an organization that has five-minute shows on TV that clears misconceptions about religious Jews. They wanted to skip the show, but then decided that maybe this demonstration will clarify why their son left their path. They were so inspired by the show that their harsh feelings softened and they wanted to reconnect with their son.

Rabbi Elbaz's eyes were moist as he heard this tale. On the spot, he decided that he wants to contribute to Hidabroot.

A couple of days later, Rabbi Elbaz received a phone call informing him that he won the Hidabroot penthouse that they raffled off.

Now Rabbi Elbaz truly had everything: a beautiful life of תורה, good connection with his family, a house and the clear knowledge that whatever Hashem does is for our ultimate good.

Let's analyze the story. Rabbi Elbaz was abandoned by his family because he became more religious. It seems terrible, unfair. Yet his hardships are what directly led to his salvation!

How can we feel קרבת אלקים even within this terribly painful גלות?

When we know clearly that Hashem is with us and that whatever he does is for our ultimate good.

Additionally, it is interesting to note, that many times we encounter pesukim like -

"כל העוסק בתורת חטאת כאילו הקריב חטאת".

Challenge your students to find other instances where we see the word כאילו.

Some examples are:

- כל המלמד את בן חבירו תורה כאילו ילדו (רמב"ן במדבר פרק ג')
- כל המגדל יתום ויתומה בתוך ביתו מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו ילדו (תלמוד בבלי מסכת מגילה דף יג)
- שלשה שאכלו על שלחן אחד ואמרו עליו דברי תורה כאילו אכלו משלחנו של מקום ברוך הוא (משנה מסכת אבות:ג)
- כל הכועס כאילו עובד עבודה זרה (זוהר – פרשת קרח)
- כל הלומד תורה כאילו הקריב כל הקרבנות (מנחות קי א)

What does כאילו mean? It either happened or it didn't happen?

It's like saying "your cake is like your mother's!" – It is so good, I feel like I'm actually eating your mother's cake!

Similarly, when a person learns about the קרבן חטאת he is actually bringing a חטאת.

This proves to us that even in גלות we can reach the level of קרבת אלקים that we reached during the times of the בית המקדש.

May Hashem illuminate the world with His presence and May the day come when the earth will be filled with the knowledge of Hashem as water covering the sea! בב"א

"כי מלאה הארץ דעה את ה' כמים לים מכסים" (ישעיה-יא – ט)

Application:

1. Students can write instances in their lives where they thought the situation was terrible and in the end it turned out to be to their advantage.
2. Students can write on scratch-off stickers things that appear bad. Underneath the sticker, they can write something good that came out of it. For example: My best friend betrayed me (on the sticker) I got to know another girl that is a very good influence on me. (On the paper

under the scratch off sticker.) This is a very practical and exciting way of showing them that even if the situation seems bleak, there is always something positive beneath the surface.

Some more examples are:

- Someone that you know is very sick.
- You just lost an expensive ring.
- You studied for a test for hours and you failed.
- You broke your foot.
- Someone embarrassed you in front of the entire class.

Summary: How is גלות compared to boiling water?

Sefarim / Books used for preparation:

- ר' שמשון פינקוס גלות ונחמה
- Dawn to Destiny – Rabbi Yonason Goldson
- Gateway to Happiness – Rabbi Zelig Pliskin
- Sand and Stars – Yaffa Gancz
- ל. הרשקוביץ – נצוצות