

Simchat Torah Texts

The very last word in the Torah, in the book of Deuteronomy/*Devarim*, is *Yisrael* (ישראל). The first word of the Torah, in the book of Genesis, is *Beresheet* (בראשית). If you combine the last letter of the Torah *lamed* (ל) - from *YisraeL* - and the first letter of the Torah, *bet* (ב) - from *Beresheet*, it spells the word *lev* (לב) in Hebrew. *Lev* means “heart”. The midrash tells us that the Torah is the *lev* – the heart – of the Jewish people.

1. Why do you think the Torah would be considered the heart of the Jewish people? Why not another part of your body?
2. What types of things could you do that would show you are putting your heart, and your passion, into the Torah?
3. Where is your heart located in your body?
 - a. Is the Torah the center of the Jewish people?
 - b. What other things are at the center of the Jewish people?

There is a famous story in the Talmud about a man who approached the great Rabbi Hillel and says he will become a Jew if Rabbi Hillel can teach him the entire Torah while standing on one foot. Rabbi Hillel accepts the challenge and says: “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah. All the rest is commentary. Go and learn it” (*Babylonian Talmud*, Tractate Shabbat 31a).

1. Have you ever tried to stand on one foot? Do you think you could teach someone something that was long and complicated while standing on one foot? Why might that be hard to do?
2. Were you surprised the man thought Rabbi Hillel could teach the whole Torah while standing on one foot? Why or why not?
3. What do you think it mean when Rabbi Hillel teaches us “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor?”
 - a. Are there other people we consider our “neighbors?”
4. What are some things you don't like? Have you ever done any of these things to someone else?
5. How can “what is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor” be equal to the whole Torah? What is Rabbi Hillel really teaching us?