



## The Beginning

Submitted by Lana Bernhardt

**Subject Area:** Hebrew & Religious

**Target Age Group(s):** all

**Lesson Objective(s):**

To provide transitional /contemplative time before starting a religious school or Hebrew school lesson.

In every afternoon school or Sunday school setting, there is always the question of how to start a meaningful lesson that will initiate an environment of Jewish studies. We don't have to re-invent any wheels: the story of Abraham & G-d tells it all. When asked by G-d if he was 'present', Abraham answered "Hineni" (He nay nee). Abraham's response to G-d was an all inclusive way, in one word, to say that he was ready for G-d's presence, ready to obey G-d's word, and prepared to take on whatever G-d asked him to, etc. This one word response is so characteristic of our heritage. Our ancestors' language of communication with G-d was succinct and all encompassing.

As teachers of Judaic studies, we look for ways to help our students make transitions from daily school to Hebrew school, from week end activities to Sunday school. I suggest that we use the "Hineni" story and response as a



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commencing activity when taking attendance. I have used this story for my first lesson in Hebrew schools & Sunday schools (for the past 25 years). I explain to the students that after this first lesson, when- ever we start our classes, I will begin taking attendance by calling their names; they in turn, will take a few moments time to contemplate their response. If it is “Hineni”, then we can assume that they have made the transition and are ready and willing to be totally present for the class, i.e participate to their fullest ability...if they decide they can't make the transition, they will be asked to spend time contemplating their response in another office in the school (in an office where an adult is present). This is not a punishment, but a way to acknowledge that they need more time to make the transition to the class frame- work. By allowing them to have a different space to spend more time thinking about their response is an honest way to give them the time to think quietly. (As of today, I haven't had a student opt for the extended thinking time☺)

We can learn a lot from our ancient teachings and how they profoundly connect the ancient to modernity. This suggestion to begin each class by incorporating an ancient teaching is a way to have consistency in the class, a re-occurring meaningful activity and responsible student participation. The students are asked to be responsible for their presence... as students, as people, as the continued learners of the Jewish people.



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