

Pirkei Avot Community Learning Study Resource

Chapter 1: Mishnayot 5-8

Questions to Consider

Mishna 5. How does opening your home to the poor relate to the mishna preceding this one? Culture and gender roles were very different in the third century CE. How do we relate to teachings from our sages that seem totally irrelevant or even offensive to us? Is it important to keep sharing these teachings—even if we disagree with them—to illustrate the progress on matters of equality in our communities?

Mishna 6. How are these 3 pieces of advice related? What are the qualities of a good friend? What are the qualities of an excellent teacher? Are friends also teachers? Are teachers also friends? How do they influence you? How can you tell whether your friends are good influences or not? How do you influence others?

According to the Illustrated Pirkei Avot, what is the difference between the role of a friend and the role of a teacher?

Hebrew: How would you translate **נַשְׁתָּוֹת**? – how does that change your reading of the mishna?

Mishna 7. Discuss the power of influence. Do you think it is correct for Nittai to encourage distancing oneself from bad influences instead of trying to help others who could use positive role models? How can his third piece of advice work alongside the first two? How does this relate to mishna 1:3 and the teaching of Antigonos?

Mishna 8. The mishna stresses that there are different ways to relate to people, depending on context. Can you think of relationships you are in that are determined by context?

Commentary

RAMBAM on 1:5: "Open": That you should have a gate open to the path of wayfarers, such that every wayfarer that needs something or is hungry or thirsty will enter the house immediately.

1:6: "Make for yourself a (Torah) mentor": Rambam explained, "Even though he is not fit to be your teacher, make him into your teacher and do not learn on your own." And I heard, "'Make for yourself a teacher,' [meaning] that he should take on one teacher from which always to learn – and not learn from one today and from another one tomorrow."