

Pirkei Avot Community Learning Study Resource

Chapter 5

Questions to Consider

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Mishna 1. Where else in Jewish texts or rituals do we see the number ten? What do you think is so significant about it? Why do you think the mishna says the world was created in ten utterances instead of one? What can we learn about the importance of teshuvah?

Mishna 2–3. How is the number ten being used here symbolically? What do these two sets of generations teach us about how history can work? Why do you think these three “10” teachings are all in a row?

Mishna 4. Do you see these as tests or another way? What was a time you felt you were being tested? Why don't we read about all of these tests in the Torah itself and only find them in midrash?

Mishna 5. Which of the ten miracles do you think is the most impressive? Why do you think it was important to the sages to include the plagues here? Activity: Have students draw their favorite miracle from the text. Mishna

6. Do you think it is fair to sympathize with our ancestors in any of the listed instances? When do you feel disappointed at their behavior?

Mishna 7. What kind of situation at the Temple is being described here? What do you think it was like having a Temple? Living in a time where there is no Temple, how do you relate to these miracles? Do they seem miraculous to you? What do you relate to as a “Temple?” Is there still something “temple-like” in Judaism?

Mishna 8. What do you think these creations have in common, that they were created at this particular time together? Why do you think the twilight on the sixth day of creation was such a special time?

Mishna 9. Do you think the seven qualities of a wise person are very challenging? Which quality do you think is the most important? Try re-writing the mishna in the reverse: What are the qualities of a golem? What qualities would you add?

Mishna 10. These are all sins associated with mitzvot we generally do not observe today (Although some only apply to

Mishna 11. What do we learn about land ownership and other people's obligation to respond to the needs of people from their cities?

Mishna 12. With regard to Sodom: do you think that these are extreme generalizations of personality types? Do they seem fair? Do you think aspiring to be on the level of the pious is

a practical goal? Why are the Rabbis divided about the characteristic of Sodom and the “average person?”

Mishna 13. How do you control your anger? What are suggestions you have for people who fall in the category of teachings 2 and 4?

Mishna 14. How can each student (or, in this illustration, brain) reach its greatest potential? Are you good at remembering things? If not, how do you help train your brain to remember?

Mishna 15. How can you encourage others to be more giving? How would you advise each type of charity-giver to improve? Why do you think tzedakah is so important in Judaism? What kinds of relationships with others is it trying to create?

Mishna 16. Why do you think the first person is given a reward for simply attending the beit midrash? Why is the fourth person included in this mishna? How does this mishna teach us about where we can gain wisdom? What are the environments where you feel like you learn most/best? Is school that environment? What makes for a good environment for learning?

Mishna 17. How can each student succeed? What kind of utensil would best describe the type of student you are? What are its/your strengths/challenges?

Mishna 18. Love...do you think the lasting love that the mishna describes can be applied to all relationships? How can we avoid falling into dependent love?

Mishna 19. What is a machlokot lesheim shamayim that you have witnessed in today’s world? What is a machloket lesheim shamayim that you feel called to be a part of?

Mishna 20. Why do you think that being responsible for inspiring others to do good means someone won’t be on the hook for sin? What can we learn about the responsibilities of a leader from this mishna? Can you think of other examples of historical leaders who fall under both categories?

Mishna 21. What do you think is the difference of the quality of life for the students of Abraham and Balaam (see Numbers 22–24)?

Mishna 22. How can these four qualities enhance our service to the Divine? Why do you think Rabbi Yehudah uses animals as metaphors for his teaching? What other animals/qualities would you add to his list?

Mishna 23. According to Rabbi Yehudah, there are specific milestones in life with specific dates to be achieved. Even if you can’t relate to each milestone and its particular timing, what do you think we can learn about Rabbi Yehudah’s priorities and values? What are some major milestones in your life? Jewish ones?

Mishna 24. “Turn it, and turn it, for all is in it.” What do you think Ben Bag Bag means? Do you think everything is in the Torah? What “Torah” is he talking about?