

Leadership- A Two Part Discussion

While the experience of being a teenager is different everywhere across the world, and often even different amongst different populations in the same country, however, opportunities for teen leadership and the need for them exist in all societies. The following texts, aimed for joint study between Jewish teenagers in Israel and the Diaspora, explore questions such as what values should inspire us to get involved, what are the qualities of a good leader and what are the qualities of a good follower. The texts, which are from the 3rd century *Pirkei Avot*, should lead to a personal conversation amongst the participants about how these values play out in their lives today.

Part 1: Who am I?

The first set of texts focuses on the question of character -- what are the basic guidelines by which a person should live in order to contribute to the good of the world? Choose **one or two** of the following texts. In *hevruta*, discuss the meaning of the text (it's not always clear!) and the following guiding questions. (If possible skype or WhatsApp in *Havruta*)

Guiding Questions: Which text do I agree with the most? What are the characteristics that define a leader? What are the values that I hold as important that I want to contribute to my community and my society? Can I make a difference as a high school student? What can I do to make a difference?

2: 13

He (Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai) posed this question to his students:

Look about you and tell me, which is the way in life to which one should cleave?

Rabbi Eliezer said:

a generous eye;

Rabbi Yehoshua said:

a good colleague;

Rabbi Yose said:

a good neighbor;

Rabbi Shimon said:

foresight;

Rabbi Elazar said:

a generous heart.

Said he (Ben Zakkai) to them:

I prefer the answer of Elazar ben Arakh, for his view includes all of yours.

ב: יג

אמר להם (ר' יוחנן בן זכאי): צאו וראו איזוהי דרך ישרה שידבק בה האדם.

רבי אליעזר אומר:

עין טובה.

רבי יהושע אומר:

חבר טוב.

רבי יוסי אומר:

שכן טוב.

רבי שמעון אומר:

הרואה את הנולד*.

רבי אלעזר אומר:

לב טוב.

אמר להם:

רואה אני את דברי אלעזר בן ערך

מדבריכם, שבכלל דבריו דבריכם.

*הרואה את הנולד = חוזה את העתיד, דהיינו

מבין את ההשלכות של מעשיו

Q - What about these traits helps a person lead a proper life? With which statement do you agree the most? How would I describe an ideal character trait in only a few words?

2:15

Rabbi Eliezer taught:
Cherish your colleague's honor as your own;
Be not easily provoked to anger;
Repent one day before your death.

ב: טו

רבי אליעזר אומר:
יהי כבוד חברך חביב עליך כשלך,
ואל תהי נוח לכעוס.
ושוב יום אחד לפני מיתתך.

Q -How does one ensure that they treat others' dignity as they treat their own? Is there a relationship between the dignity of the first statement and the refraining from anger of the last statement?
How does one repent the day before they die?

3:22

This was a favorite of teaching of his (Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah):

When a person's wisdom exceeds his good deeds, to what may he be compared? To a tree with many branches but few roots. A wind blows, uproots it and topples it over...

However, when a person's good deeds exceed his wisdom, to what may he be compared? To a tree with few branches but with many roots. All the winds of the world may blow against it, yet they cannot move it from its place...

ג:כב

הוא (ר' אלעזר בן עזריה) היה אומר:

כל שחכמתו מרבה ממעשיו, למה הוא דומה, לאילן שענפיו מרובין ושרשיו מעטין, והרוח באה ועוקרתו והופכתו על פניו... אבל כל שמעשיו מרובין מחכמתו, למה הוא דומה, לאילן שענפיו מעטין ושרשיו מרובין, שאפילו כל הרוחות שבעולם באות ונושבות בו אין מזיזין אותו ממקומו.

Q - Do you agree with this statement? What should be the basis for a person's life, study or action? How does this teaching conform to the emphasis that Judaism puts on study?

4:20

Rabbi Mattia ben Harash taught:
Be the first to extend greetings to every human being.
Be a tail to lions rather than a head to foxes.

ד: כ

רבי מתיא בן חרש אומר:
הוי מקדים בשלום כל אדם.
והוי זנב לאריות, ואל תהי ראש לשועלים.

Q - What does Rabbi Mattia's statement say about leadership? In what contexts is it better to be a follower, and in what contexts is it better to be a leader? What is the relationship between the two statements?

Part 2: When Must We Speak Out

These texts, which discuss different aspects of activism, should be studied amongst the entire group. First, read the texts in Hebrew and in English, and ask what they mean, allowing free discussions about the texts. There are also discussion questions about each text following the texts themselves.

After discussing the texts, start a general conversation about activism in the lives of the students: When do we decide to get involved? What issues matter to us the most today? What can teenagers in Israel and the Diaspora do to support one another's causes?

א: יד

הוא (הלל) היה אומר: אם אין אני לי – מי לי?
וכשאני לעצמי – מה אני?
ואם לא עכשיו – אימתי?

1:14

He (Hillel) would teach:
If I am not for me, who will be?
If I am for myself alone, what am I?
And if not now, when?

Q - Do you agree with Hillel? How do you balance being for yourself without being only for yourself? When do you know it is the right time to get involved?

א: יח

רבן שמעון בן גמליאל אומר:
על שלשה דברים העולם עומד –
על האמת ועל הדין ועל השלום,
שנאמר: "אמת ומשפט ושלום שפטו בשעריכם" (זכריה ח:טז).

1:18

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel taught:
The world rests on three things:
On Justice, on Truth, on Peace,
as it is written, "With truth, justice, and peace shall you judge in your gates"
(Zechariah 8:16).

Q - These three values -- truth, law, and peace -- can often be in conflict with one another? Which of these values is the most important? How do we go about promoting them in today's society?