

Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future
Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary

Shavuot To-Go

5768

For Families



Featuring

Pirkei Avot Scavenger Hunt

Environmentalism in Jewish Law and Thought

The Jew's Role in the World

Dear YU Families,

As the school year comes to an end, and we are on the cusp of entering a summer of fun and excitement in the outdoors, Shavuot can serve as the culmination of a year of family Torah learning. While these packets can be used year-round, the tradition of learning Torah throughout the night of Shavuot need not be lost on sons and daughters whose bedtimes are generally well before 12:00 (and probably much earlier). Find time over this holiday to learn with your children, and show them the relevance of Torah to their lives.

The Gemara in Pesachim (68b) records a dispute between two Rabbis as to the nature of Yom Tov celebrations. They agree that there are two categories of activities that need to be considered: there is eating and drinking which is considered a human joy (simcha lachem), and there is learning Torah which is considered a divine joy (simcha l'hashem). What is not agreed upon is how a person should choose which way to celebrate.

Rabbi Eliezer's opinion is that people should choose one of the options (either lachem or l'hashem), and dedicate their entire Yom Tov to that style of simcha. Rabbi Yehoshua counters and teaches that people should make the effort to split the holiday between the two styles, and try to spend equal time on both. There is a lot that can be said about how the opinions of these two Rabbis were developed, but the most relevant piece to Shavuot is yet to come.

Rabbi Eliezer continues his statement with the following: "everyone agrees that on Shavuot you need to also have lachem." What's the reasoning he gives? "Because that was the day the Torah was given." Rabbi Eliezer, whose opinion it was that people could celebrate Yom Tov just by learning Torah, now says that the exception to that ruling would be Shavuot. He says that because Shavuot is the day that we received the Torah, we must make sure to have an element of human celebration in addition to Torah study.

This is quite perplexing and counterintuitive. It would seem that of all the Jewish holidays on the calendar, Shavuot would be the best candidate for 100% dedication to Torah study. It is the day we received the Torah, and it is the day we celebrate the Torah's central role as the symbol for the covenant between God and the Jewish People. Shouldn't we spend the day immersed in our holy text?

In order to get a better understanding of Rabbi Eliezer's position, another Gemara must be consulted. The Gemara in Shabbat (88b-89a) depicts an exchange between God, Moshe and the angels when Moshe is about to receive the Torah at Mount Sinai. The angels protest to God that Man does not deserve the Torah. They feel that as angels they are better suited to receive the Torah, and that their pristine existence in Heaven has prepared them to preserve the Torah better.

God's only response to this argument is to ask Moshe to give the angels a good reason for why man deserves the Torah. "Hold onto the Throne of Glory, and return them an answer."

Moshe does not falter at this task. Grasping, as it were, to the throne of God, Moshe makes a very convincing argument: the Torah refers to the fact that God took the Jewish People out of Israel – were the angels ever taken out of Egypt? The Torah requires us to keep Shabbat and rest on the 7th day – do angels have work that they must rest from on the 7th day? It says that we shall not commit murder, and shall not commit adultery. Do angels get jealous or have an evil inclination that they would commit such sins? At this point, the angels concede to Moshe that the Jewish people deserve the Torah.

Moshe's argument was based on the corporeality of the Jewish people. Their existence in a world with ups and downs, good and evil, sins and mitzvot was what made the case. The Torah was created for people living in a world that was challenging, engaging, and dynamic. The Torah was not meant for angels whose role is to fulfill the bidding of God, and do not have the free choice to deviate from God's commands.

On Shavuot we celebrate the receiving of the Torah that guides our existence in this world. Rabbi Eliezer understood the lesson of the Gemara in Shabbat. In our celebration of the Torah, we must rejoice with food and drink. Only an angel would spend an entire day learning Torah – a person understands that the spirituality of Torah needs to be combined with the physicality of food and drink. We are not just appreciating a divine text that God gave us, but the fact that we are able to fuse the Torah with our lives in a modern world.

As you celebrate this holiday with your families, take the time to bring lessons of Torah into your everyday life. You will find in this packet sources that you can learn with your children on Shavuot night, or any time during the year. Learn the sources at a good pace, and make sure you let your children take the lead whenever possible. Through this exploration of Torah sources, I hope that you will be able to have a more meaningful Shavuot, and share your Torah learning with the entire family.

Chag Sameach,

Aaron Steinberg

ajsteinb@yu.edu

Director, Eimatai Project

The Center for the Jewish Future

Yeshiva University

500 West 185th Street Suite 440

New York, NY 10033

Pirkei Avot Scavenger Hunt

There is a tradition to study the entire Pirkei Avot between Passover and Shavuot. Pirkei Avot, sometimes referred to as the Ethics of our Fathers, is the section of the Mishna that focuses not on strict and formalized halachot, but rather on moral and ethical values. It is a handbook for how to lead a good life, and its lessons are indispensable to someone who desires to lead a full Jewish life.

The following Mishnayot have been chosen to give you and your children a potpourri of lessons and ideas to think about together. Find and learn the Mishna together, and try answering some of the questions that are connected to each one.

Sometimes there are discrepancies in the breakup of mishnayot, specifically for pirkei avot. If your copy does not match up to what is written below, check the mishnayot before or after in your edition.

Perek 1 Mishna 12

- Why do you think Hillel says that you should love peace *and* chase peace?
- What is the difference between chasing peace and loving peace?
- Can you think of any examples of things that Aaron did that made Hillel mention him in this Mishna?

Perek 4 Mishna 3

- What does it mean “there is no person who doesn’t have an hour, or anything that doesn’t have a place”?
- What does this Mishna tell us about the value of every person in the world?
- Do we always follow that value in our lives?

Perek 2 Mishna 17

- Focus on the first phrase of this Mishna:
- What does it mean that you should treat your friend’s property as if it’s your own?

- How would you act differently if you always considered other people's things as if they were your own?

Perek 5 Mishna 13

- Why does the Mishna say that someone who considers "what's mine is yours and what's yours is mine" an ignoramus? What is an ignoramus?
- Which is the best type of person according to this Mishna? Why?
- Are there situations in your life that you can think of when this Mishna would apply?

Perek 2 Mishna 20

- Who are the "workers" in this Mishna?
- What is the work that the employer is asking to be done? Who is the employer?
- Why is the work so hard? Why is the reward so wonderful?

Perek 1 Mishna 2

- What makes these three things so important that they support the entire world?
- Are there other things that are very important to us that might also help support the world?
- Why do you think Chessed and loving kindness are on the same level as learning Torah and serving God?

Perek 4 Mishna 8

- What is the connection between the honor of Torah and the honor of a person?
- Which of these two is more important?
- Is it OK to learn Torah in order to gain respect from others?

Perek 1 Mishna 6

- Why do you think the Mishna puts finding a teacher and acquiring a friend on the same level?
- Why do you think friends are so important? Can you think of ways that your friends help you?

- How is someone supposed to judge anyone favorably? What does giving someone the benefit of the doubt mean? Can you think of a time when you didn't give someone else the benefit of the doubt, but should have?

Perek 1 Mishna 15

- Why does the Mishna say that *doing* something is better than *saying* something?
- What does it mean to receive every person with a kind face? How do you do that?
- Can you think of an instance where it was hard to be nice to someone, but you did it anyway because it was the right thing to do?

Perek 2 Mishna 5

- Why should someone set himself apart from the community?
- What does it mean that you shouldn't judge another person until you have been in their position?
- How do you get in another person's position?
- The Mishna writes that you should never think that something you say won't be heard by others. Do you agree with that? What does this make you think about secrets?
- Do you think the Mishna is right about procrastinating with learning Torah? Are there ever things that you procrastinate about that you never end up doing?

Environmentalism in Jewish Law and Thought

Study Guide

Responsibility to Take Care of the World

Rabbi Shimon said, one who is walking along the road and is studying [Torah], and then interrupts his studies and says, 'How beautiful is this tree! How beautiful is this plowed field!', the Scripture considers it as if he bears the guilt for his own soul.

Pirkei Avot 3:7

רבי שמעון אומר המהלך בדרך ושונה ומפסיק ממשנתו ואומר מה נאה אילן זה ומה נאה ניר זה מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו מתחייב בנפשו:

אבות ג:ז

G-d took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden to work it and watch it.

Genesis 2:15

ויקח ה' אלהים את האדם וינחהו בגן עדן לעבדה ולשמרה:

בראשית ב:טו

"Consider the work of G-d; for who can make that straight, which He hath made crooked?" When G-d created Adam, He showed him all of the trees of the Garden of Eden, and said to him 'See how nice and praiseworthy my creations are. Everything that I created, I created for you. Be careful not to defile or destroy my world. For if you destroy it, there's nobody who will be able to fix it after you.

This is a parable to a pregnant woman who was locked up in prison, gave birth to a son there, and died in prison. After some time, the king passed by the entrance to the prison.

When the king passed by, the woman's son cried, 'My Master the King, here I was born and here I grew up. For what sin I am stuck here, I do not know.' The King said to him, 'With the sin of your mother.'

Midrash Kohellet Rabbah 7:13

ראה את מעשה האלהים כי מי יוכל לתקן את אשר עותו, בשעה שברא הקב"ה את אדם הראשון נטלו והחזירו על כל אילני גן עדן ואמר לו ראה מעשי כמה נאים ומשובחין הן וכל מה שבראתי בשבילך בראתי, תן דעתך שלא תקלקל ותחריב את עולמי, שאם קלקלת אין מי שיתקן אחריך, ולא עוד שאת גורם מיתה לאותו צדיק, משל משה רבינו למה"ד, לאשה עוברה שהיתה חבושה בבית האסורים, ילדה שם בן גדלה שם ומתה שם, לימים עבר המלך על פתח האסורים כשהמלך עובר התחיל אותו הבן צווח, ואומר אדני המלך כאן נולדתי כאן גדלתי באיזה חטא אני נתון כאן איני יודע, אמר לו בחטא של אמך קהלת רבה פרשה ז

- Why would the mishna say that a person who stops learning to look at a tree bears the guilt of his soul? Why does it specifically talk about a tree as opposed to any other kind of “distraction”?
- Is it possible that the sin was caused by the person thinking that he had to stop learning to appreciate the tree?
- What is the difference between working the land, and watching over it? Why did Adam need both commandments?
- In the Kohelet Rabah story, the point is made that if the world is ruined, it can never be fixed. Is it a fair deal for people to have to suffer for the sins of the people who came before them? Does this change the way you think about taking care of the planet?

The Prohibition of Waste

When you lay siege to a city and wage war against it a long time to capture it, you must not destroy its trees, wielding an ax against any food producing tree. Do not cut down a tree in the field, unless it is being used by the men who confront you in the siege.

Deuteronomy 20:19

כי תצור אל עיר ימים רבים להלחם עליה לתפשה לא תשחית את עצה לנדה עליו גרזן כי ממנו תאכל ואתו לא תכרת כי האדם עץ השדה לבא מפניך במצור:

דברים כ:יט

Rav Zutra said: Anyone who covers an oil lamp, or uncovers a Naphtha lamp infringes the prohibition of wasteful destruction.

Shabbat 67b

אמר רב זוטרא: האי מאן דמיכסי שרגא דמשחא ומגלי נפטא - קעבר משום בל תשחית.

שבת דף סז:

Who covers an oil lamp: That makes a cover for it that speeds up the burning process.

Rashi Ibid.

דמכסי שרגא דמשחא - שעושה לו כיסוי למעלה ממנה לידלק.

רש"י שם

...and this is the way of the righteous, and the way of those who love peace and are happy with the well-being of all people, and are bringing them to Torah. They never waste even a single mustard seed; the sight of a destruction or loss of anything is woeful to them; and if they can save anything, they will use all of their strength to save it. And not so are their evil destructive brothers who are happy with the destruction of anything, even as they themselves become destroyed.

Sefer HaChinuch Mitzvah 529

וזהו דרך החסידים ואנשי מעשה אוהבים שלום ושמחים בטוב הבריות ומקרבים אותן לתורה, ולא יאבדו אפילו גרגר של חרדל בעולם, ויצר עליהם בכל אבדון והשחחה שיראו, ואם יוכלו להציל יצילו כל דבר מהשחית בכל כחם, ולא כן הרשעים אחיהם של מזיקין שמחים בהשחחת עולם והמה משחיתים

ספר החינוך מצוה תקכט

- Why does the Torah use an example of war to teach the lesson of not wasting?
- Wouldn't the priority of saving Jewish lives seem to supersede any value there may be in saving trees?
- Does ba'al tashchit apply only to food, or to all things that people use?

- What sort of ideal does the Sefer HaChinuch set for people to strive for?
- Is it possible to fulfill the Chinuch's standard while living in the modern world?

Preventing possible harm

When you build a new house, you must place a guard-rail around your roof. Do not allow a dangerous situation to remain in your house, since someone can fall from [an unenclosed roof].

Deuteronomy 22:8

כי תבנה בית חדש ועשית מעקה
לגגך ולא תשים דמים בביתך כי יפל
הנפל ממנו:
דברים כב:ח

- Does it make sense that there is a halacha that requires us to take action just in case something bad might happen?
- Does this halacha make the Jewish people responsible to help prevent global climate change if it puts the world at risk?

Tips To go Green at School

- When you leave a classroom, make sure to **turn the lights off**. Schools can save up to \$1000 a month on electric bills by turning off lights in unused rooms.
- Conduct a **recycling contest** in your school between the different grades. Educate about which items are recyclable and which are not.
- Use **both sides of paper** in your notebooks, and use recycled paper when possible.
- Hang signs (with permission) by the photo copiers in school to remind people to make **double-sided copies**, and not make too many extra copies.

Tips To go Green at Home

- **Unplug** phone chargers, televisions, computers and televisions when not in use. It can be annoying, but in the average home, 40% of all electricity is used to power appliances that are turned off. Make it a family tradition to unplug appliances before Shabbat, and plug them back in after *havdalah*.
- Make sure to **turn off the faucet** when you are brushing your teeth. Try to only turn on the shower when you're about to get in; it will warm up pretty quickly. Try taking a **shorter shower** - even a few minutes shorter can help. The average shower flow is 5 gallons per minute.
- **Get timers** for your lights over Shabbat. If you're not using the lights anyway, why not have them turn off?
- If it's safe, **ride your bike or walk** to your friend's house instead of driving. **Try carpooling** to school if possible.

- Buy a couple of **Compact Fluorescent Lights (CFL)** to replace some incandescent light bulbs. If every family in America changed one incandescent bulb to a CFL, it would be as energy efficient as taking 1.3 million cars off the road.
- On a sunny day, **open the window shades** instead of turning on the lights.
- When you aren't **using real dishes**, use reusable and recyclable plates and cups, such as paper, not styrofoam.
- Find out what fruits and vegetables are **grown locally**, and try to eat more of those when they're in season than produce that has to be shipped in from across the world.
- When you go shopping, try to **bring your own bag** with you so you don't have to get a plastic shopping bag. If you are going to a lot of stores, try to only take a bag if what you buy doesn't fit in the bag you got from the last store.
- Get snacks from the refrigerator like a surgeon - get in and out as quickly as will get the job done. The longer you keep that door open, the more energy it will take to re-cool the fridge when you **close the door**.

It would be naive to believe that one person taking one less plastic bag from the store, or taking a shorter shower will make a difference that could save the environment. The tips on this page are about choosing a lifestyle that minimizes waste, emphasizes conservation of resources and preserves our environment. The high school student who unplugs her cell phone charger when not in use may some day be the CEO who makes a dozen factories more energy efficient, or the politician who promotes environmentally conscious legislation.

The Jew's Role in the World

Study Guide

8 And the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah, saying: 9 'Thus hath the LORD of hosts spoken, saying: **Execute true judgment**, and show mercy and compassion every man to his brother; 10 and oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you devise evil against his brother in your heart.

Zechararia Chapter 7

(ח) ויהי דבר ה' אל זכריה לאמר:
(ט) כה אמר ה' צבאות לאמר משפט אמת שפטו וחסד ורחמים עשו איש את אחיו: (י) ואלמנה ויתום גר ועני אל תעשקו ורעת איש אחיו אל תחשבו בלבבכם:

זכריה פרק ז

- What does it mean to execute true judgment? Is that only mercy and compassion?

"There is another explanation, "as fish in the sea," the larger one swallows the smaller, so also is it with men, since if not for the fear for government the stronger would swallow the weaker. And this is what a Mishna states: "Pray for the peace of the government..."

Avodah Zara 4a

דבר אחר: מה דגים שבים - כל הגדול מחבירו בולע את חבירו, אף בני אדם - אלמלא מוראה של מלכות, כל הגדול מחבירו בולע את חבירו. והיינו דתנן, רבי חנינא סגן הכהנים אומר: הוי מתפלל בשלומה של מלכות **עבודה זרה דף ד.**

B. R. Haninah, the Segan of the high-priest, said: "Pray always for the welfare of the government; were it not for the fear of it, men would swallow each other alive."

Avot 3:2

רבי חנינא סגן הכהנים אומר הוי מתפלל בשלומה של מלכות שאלמלא מוראה איש את רעהו חיים בלעו

אבות ג:ב

- Is it always true that a bigger fish will try to swallow up a smaller fish?
- Is having a government to protect people the only thing that keeps us from being animals?

5 Thus says God the LORD, He that created the heavens, and stretched them forth, He that spread forth the earth and that which comes out of it, He that gives breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein: 6 I the LORD have called you in righteousness, and have taken hold of your hand, and kept you, and set you for a covenant of the people, for a light of the nations; 7 To

(ה) כה אמר האל ה' בורא השמים ונוטיהם רקע הארץ וצאצאיה נתן נשמה לעם עליה ורוח להלכים בה: (ו) אני ה' קראתיך בצדק ואחזק בידך ואצרך ואתנך לברית עם לאור גוים: (ז) לפקח עינים עורות

open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house. 8 I am the LORD, that is My name; and My glory will I not give to another, neither My praise to graven images. 9 Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them.

Yeshayahu Chapter 42

להוציא ממסגר אסיר מבית כלא
ישבי חשך: (ח) אני ה' הוא שמי
וכבודי לאחר לא אתן ותהלתי
לפסילים: (ט) הראשנות הנה
באו והחדשות אני מגיד בטרם
תצמחנה אשמיע אתכם:
ישעיהו פרק מב

- What does it mean that we should be a light unto the nations?
- How do you open blind eyes?
- Is it only Jewish prisoners that must be saved, or anyone who is oppressed?

5 And now says the LORD that formed me from the womb to be His servant, to bring Jacob back to Him, and that Israel be gathered unto Him--for I am honorable in the eyes of the LORD, and my God is become my strength-- 6 Yea, He says: 'It is too light a thing that you should be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the offspring of Israel; I will also give you for a light of the nations, that My salvation may be unto the end of the earth.'

Yeshayahu Chapter 49

(ה) ועתה אמר ה' יצרי מבטן לעבד
לו לשובב יעקב אליו וישראל [לא]
לו יאסף ואכבד בעיני ה' ואלהי היה
עזי: (ו) ויאמר נקל מהיותך לי עבד
להקים את שבטי יעקב [ונצירי]
ונצורי ישראל להשיב ונתתיך לאור
גוים להיות ישועתי עד קצה הארץ
ישעיהו פרק מב

- Is it really too small of a task for Isaiah to just work on saving the Jewish people?
- What is the end goal of being a light unto the nations?

Therefore we put our hope in You, Hashem our God, that we may soon see Your mighty splendor, to remove detestable idolatry from the earth, and false gods will be utterly cut off, to perfect the universe through the Almighty's sovereignty. The all humanity will call upon Your name, to turn all the earth's wicked toward You.

Aleinu

ועל כן נקוה לך ה' אלהינו לראות
מהרה בתפארת עזך להעביר גלולים
מן הארץ והאלילים כרות יכרתון
לתקן עולם במלכות שדי וכל בני
בשר יקראו בשמך להפנות אליך כל
רשעי ארץ
עלינו

- Is fixing the world through the Almighty's sovereignty different than just plain fixing it?
- What does the term Tikkun Olam mean?

In former times, a man was allowed to bring together a beit din wherever he was, and cancel the get. Rabban Gamliel the Elder, however, laid down a rule that this should not be done, so as to prevent abuses.

Gittin 32a

בראשונה היה עושה ב"ד ממקום
אחר ומבטלו, התקין רבן גמליאל
הזקן שלא יהו עושין כן, מפני תיקון
העולם.
גיטין דף לב.

Repairing the World: What is referred to? R. Johanan said: To prevent illegitimacy. Resh Lakish said: To prevent wife-desertion. 'R. Johanan said to prevent illegitimacy,' for he held with R.

מאי מפני תיקון העולם? ר' יוחנן
אמר: מפני תקנת ממזרים, ריש
לקיש אמר: מפני תקנת עגונות. ר'
יוחנן אמר מפני תקנת ממזרים, סבר

Nahman who said [that the Get could be cancelled] before [a Beth din of] two: [the proceedings] of two are not generally known, so she, not having heard and not knowing [that the Get is cancelled] might go and marry again, and bear illegitimate children.

Gittin 33a

לה כרב נחמן, דאמר: בפני שנים,
ובי תרי לית להו קלא, והיא לא
שמעה ולא ידעה ואזלה ומינסבא,
ואיכא ממזרים
גיטין דף לג.

- What sorts of rules were put in place to protect women from being divorced without their knowledge?
- Is there a difference between this and the commandment to help those imprisoned?