

Chapter 5 – Learning Guide

I-In-Class Discussion Questions

1-The statement from *Pirkei Avot* with which the chapter begins reads as follows. “The more flesh, the more worms.” (Avot: Chapter 2, Mishnah 8) How does the author of the chapter interpret this *mishnah*? How is it connected to three vignettes? How else can this statement be interpreted?

2-In your opinion what are the most important needs?

3-Is it really possible to distinguish between “legitimate human needs and illegitimate desires?”

4-Describe Reuven’s dilemma. The author claims that “from an ethical point of view, his dilemma would not have been any different had he been selling sport coats or sneakers.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

5-Describe Shimon’s dilemma. What do you think is motivating Shimon to flee the scene of an automobile accident?

6-Describe Levi’s dilemma. In the end, why does Levi go to the Rabbi?

7-What is self-efficacy? Why does the author believe that it “is a foundation for ethical behavior.”

8-In what way is patience important to ethical decision making?

9-According to the author, “Reuven and Shimon seem like they’re acting in a free and uncoerced way. But, to the extent that neither one of them really thought about what they were doing, they are just reacting to their environments rather than creating them. I see them more like prisoners to their own instincts than truly free agents.” Does this mean that Reuven and Shimon don’t have free will?

10-Maslow believe that it was impossible for “higher level” needs to emerge before “lower level” needs were satisfied. Do you agree or disagree?

II-Essay Questions

1-Explain how Natan Shransky's prayer helped him deal with what must have seemed like an intolerable situation to him.

2-The ability to choose is like the ability to read or to write. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain.

3-The best way for the Jewish community to deal with the problems of teenage drinking and drug use is to.....

4-Instead of leaving the scene of his car accident, Shimon should have....

5-What are the five human needs that Abraham Maslow identified? (Hint: You may have to go to the internet to find out the answer to this question.)

III-Connections

The following story appeared in a Jewish Newspaper:

For Eric, the Bar Mitzvah circuit was more than a chance to celebrate life-cycle events with friends and family. It was also an opportunity to gain access to alcohol. "Drinking got me out of myself. It made me feel bigger, stronger and cooler," Eric recalled in an interview recently. "I'd be drinking every weekend at the Bar Mitzvahs that were happening. I would steal bottles from the Bar Mitzvahs and bring them home."

Now 19, Eric is a college student at a Long Island university near where he grew up, but back when he was 13 years old, he was the boy sneaking a few drinks as his peers danced and played party games.

"I think at the time I didn't care," he explained. "I just looked at it as a way to get free liquor. The fact the people's families were there and I looked like an idiot didn't mean much to me."

The former Jewish day-school student would have to sink low before he realized that he had a problem. Through middle school, he experimented with all kinds of drugs -- heroin, cocaine, angel dust -- even selling for a while to support his habit.

Eric sobered up two month before he turned 16, when his school and his parents intervened and placed him in a treatment center. The spiritual guidance he needed to remain sober, however, came a few months later, at another school, when he met a speaker from Jewish Alcoholics, Chemically Dependent Persons and Significant Others, a support group for Jewish addicts, which he still remains affiliated with.

"It never occurred to me that most normal people have a drink and then go dance and

then have another drink. That wasn't what it was about for me."

Eric's experience is an extreme case, but it's a reminder that Jewish kids -- like their non-Jewish counterparts across the country -- are gaining access to and experimenting with alcohol and drugs at an earlier and earlier age.

More proof of this came in February 2002, when the National Center of Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University made headlines with its report "Teen Tipplers: America's Underage Drinking Epidemic," much of which focused on the fact that girls were catching up with boys in the amount of alcohol they were consuming.

But another significant point that appeared in the report was that while 27 percent of high school graduates in 1975 reported using alcohol in the eighth grade or earlier, approximately 36 percent of the class of 1999 had done so. And most of these kids were not just sneaking a sip. Some 24.1 percent of ninth-graders were reporting that they had participated in binge drinking -- five or more drinks within a few hours of each other -- once in the past 30 days.

The trend has addiction counselors and community activists more than concerned. (Excerpt from "It All Starts with a Drink: Youth behavior gets riskier and riskier at younger and younger ages," by Brian Mono, **Jewish Exponent**, Philadelphia, June 27, 2002, Vol. 211, Iss. 26, p. 1.)

Question: Are drinking and the use of illegal drugs really a problem among Jewish teenagers? If so, can anything be done about it?

IV-Personal Journal

1-A-I believe that drinking too much is not only a medical problem but it is also an ethical problem. B-I believe that drinking too much is a medical problem only. Pick A or B and explain your thinking.

2-I personally know someone who is addicted to alcohol or drugs. I believe my responsibilities to this person include:

3-Do you think you would ever leave the scene of an automobile accident that you had caused like Reuven did?

V-Group Project

Develop a short list of rules for your synagogue's youth group with regard to the issue of teenage drinking and drug use. Make sure your list includes directions about what to do if you are aware of abusive drinking and drug use.

VI-Vignette

Mindy Isaacs was four and a half minutes older than her sister Esther, and not a single day went by that Mindy did not remind Esther of this fact. They were twins, but hardly identical. Mindy and Esther were now in 11th grade—both students at the Girls High School of Queens, one of the best modern orthodox high schools in the country.

Mindy was taller and bigger than her younger sister. She was talkative, funny, and sociable. In fact, it came as no surprise to anyone when Mindy was elected class president this past September. Esther was petite, shy, and bookish. She was pretty, but not particularly popular at school. Esther was more concerned about her grades and getting into a good college than anything else. She was extremely intelligent and knew that she had a good chance at getting into a top Ivy League school. Her grades were good and her SAT scores were great.

Mindy was much less concerned about college, not that she wasn't smart, but she knew she would be happy where ever she went.

Both girls felt that they a good shot at winning the prestigious *Baruch Cohen Israel Award*, and both girls really wanted the free summer trip to Israel that the winner would get. The award had been established 10 years before and was given to the 11th grader who wrote the best essay. The topic of the essay was – Defining Moment: What Being Jewish Means to Me. Both Mindy and Esther worked long and hard on their essays and were anxious as Chanukah was approaching because on the first night of Chanukah the winner would be announced at the school-wide party.

Although Esther was four and a half minutes younger than Mindy, Esther's essay placed first and Mindy's second. Mr. and Mrs. Isaacs were proud of both of their children that night and happy that they both could articulate so clearly what being Jewish meant to them.

Esther had written about how in 8th grade she had learned that honesty was the best policy. Her teacher had given her a higher score than she had really earned on a chumash test. Esther had to decide whether or not to tell the teacher. Not telling felt like lying to her, but telling would cost her a full grade on her report card. In the end, after much soul-searching, Esther decided that as an observant Jew she had to tell her teacher.

Although secretly Esther had hoped that her teacher would not penalize her for being honest, in fact, her teacher did give her the lower grade. After this incident, though, Esther go to know her Israeli Chumash teacher better. They developed a real and lasting friendship and that is how Esther first came to love Israel and Israeli society. That's why the trip to Israel was so important to her.

In announcing the winner, the judges stated that Esther's essay was well-written and obviously, deeply personal. It *was* well-written, and it *was* deeply personal. The only problem was that this had all happened to Mindy and not to Esther!

When Mindy read the essay she felt betrayed and hurt. "This was my story and not hers." While her father seemed to take her side, Mindy's mother favored Esther. "Well, dear, she wrote the

story and not you.”

That night, Mindy resolved to go to the principal and discuss the matter further but by the next morning she didn't know whether or not she could do this to her sister.