

Chapter 9 – Learning Guide

I-In-Class Discussion Questions

1-1-The statement from *Pirkei Avot* with which the chapter begins reads as follows. “Make for yourself a friend and judge everyone charitably.” (Avot: Chapter 1, Mishna 6) How does the author of the chapter interpret this *mishnah*? How is it connected to Jon’s story? How else can this statement be interpreted?

2-What is the difference between respect and care?

3-The author writes that “From a Jewish perspective, it would be an impossible morality that always expected everyone to like everyone else (respect is usually hard enough).” Does this statement contradict the Torah’s commandment to “love your neighbor as you love yourself?”

4-Why do you think that Mohamed asked his co-workers to call him Alan?

5-Why do you think that Jon started to feel guilty about how he was treating Alan? Was this an appropriate emotional reaction?

6-Define piety. Define civility. Do you believe that it is possible to be both pious and civil?

7-“For the activist Jews of my generation, our movement represented the exact opposite of what our parents had gone through when they were young. But we saw what had happened to their dreams, and we understood that the path to liberation could not be found in denying our own roots while pursuing universal goals. *On the contrary: we had to deepen our commitment, because only he who understands his own identity and has already become a free person can work effectively for the human rights of others* (p. xxii, emphasis added, **Fear No Evil**, New York: Random House, 1988).” How does this quote from Natan Sharansky help us understand Jon’s dilemma?

8-Jon thinks that the business world is one of the best places to create *Kiddush Hashem*. What do you think he means by this?

9-Do you think that Jon and Alan’s friendship can survive? What will it depend upon?

10-The author concludes the chapter by noting that Jon became friends with Alan not by betraying his tradition, but by more fully understanding what it means to be Jewish. Explain.

II-Essay Questions

- 1-Give an example of how it might be possible for a person to overcome unjustified prejudices towards someone new?
- 2-Do you believe that Jon really has some sort of ethical or moral obligation to go out of his way to be nice to Alan? Or is Jon being overly moralistic here?
- 3-Does the fact that Alan is a deeply religious Muslim make it more or less likely that Jon will come to like him?

III-Connections

A-The following statement appeared on the The Inner Dimension web-site, presented by Gal Einai Institute:

The customary translation of *vehavta l'reyacha kamocho*--"you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18)--seems to imply that all "neighbors," regardless of creed, are to be loved equally. This implication, based upon the inadequate translation of *reyacha*, is not accurate.

First let us observe the context in which the above phrase appears in the Torah: "You shall not hate *your brother* in your heart. You shall not take revenge or feel resentment against *the children of your people*, you shall love *your companion* [*reyacha*] as yourself." From this it is clear that "your companion" refers to the same category as "your brother" and "the children of your people," all explicitly referring to one's fellow Jew.

Thus we see that in the Torah, the Hebrew word *reyacha* explicitly means "your fellow Jew." It does not refer to anyone outside the Jewish faith. "Neighbor" is not an accurate translation for the word *reyacha*.

The Jew is commanded to respect all human beings. The Torah prohibits any negative behavior toward a non-Jew, so long as he is not an enemy. He is instructed, however, not to become too close a companion to him. Thus the above verse, *vehavta l'reyacha kamocho*, "You shall love your neighbor as your self", does not imply a universal neighbor.

Questions: Does this statement accurately reflect the "Jewish view?" Are there other interpretations of this commandment?

B-Consider the following midrash:

Now when that great calamity came upon Job, he said unto the Holy One, blessed be He: "Master of the Universe, did I not feed the hungry and give the thirsty to drink? And did I not clothe the naked?"

Nevertheless the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Job: "Job, thou has not yet reached half the measure of Abraham. Thou sittest and tarriest within thy house and the wayfarers

come in to thee. To him who is accustomed to eat wheat bread, thou givest wheat bread to eat; to him who is accustomed to eat meat, thou givest meat to eat; to him who is accustomed to drink wine, thou givest wine to drink. But Abraham did not act in this way. Instead he would go forth and make the rounds everywhere, and when he found wayfarers *he brought them into his house*. To him who was unaccustomed to eat wheat bread, he gave wheat bread to eat; to him who was unaccustomed to eat meat, he gave them meat to eat; to him who was unaccustomed to drink wine, he gave wine to drink. Moreover he arose and built stately mansions on the highways and left there food and drink, and every passerby ate and drank and blessed Heaven. (Emphasis added, Abot de R. Natan, 7 as translated by J. Goldin).

In the dictionary, to respect someone is “to avoid harming” or “interfering” with him or her. To care for someone is “to like him or her” or “to feel affection.” One way of understanding this midrash is to suggest that Job respects, but Abraham cares! Comment.

IV-Personal Journal

- 1-What would you have done in Jon’s situation?
- 2-Describe a situation where you met someone who you initially disliked but later became friends with.
- 3-Do you have any Christian friends? Do you have any Muslim friends? If not, why do you think this is the case.

V-Group Project

Describe the five most important characteristics of a good friend.