

Social Action and Responsibility Unit - Teacher's Guide

Source 1: *Mishna Avot 1:13*

<p>Hillel taught: If I am not for myself, who will be for me? (Question 1) If I am only for myself, what am I? (Question 2) If not now, when? (Question 3)</p>	<p>הוא (הלל) הנה אומר: אם אין אני לי מי לי, וקשאני לעצמי מה אני? ואם לא עכשו אימתי?</p>
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Answer to question 1: *We are responsible for our own well being and success; we cannot rely upon others for help.*

Answer to question 2: *When I think only of myself, I will be deemed selfish and will be alone, with no one to share my success.*

Answer to question 3: *We must seize the moment; if we procrastinate, our work will not get done.*

Discussion points:

- The first question argues that we should work for ourselves (for example, work as hard as possible to win a gold medal). But the second question turns the first upside down, because if we push everyone and everything else away in pursuit of the gold medal, what is our worth and how valuable is the medal when no one else is around? Understanding the tension in this source is key to the unit. Students should come to realize that together with our desire to achieve personally, we must reach out to help others.
- There are two ways to teach the second question. The first approach is to focus on the term “what”. (The question does not read: “If I am only for myself, **who** am I?”) Rarely do we forget who we are; rather Hillel is asking us to ponder the true measurement of ourselves. “How good am I, if I am only thinking about me?” An alternative way to read this phrase is to focus on the word “I”. In Hebrew this can be translated as, “when the “I” is for my own purposes, what validity does using “I” statements have”?
- Teachers should clarify that balancing these two statements is difficult, but is one of the challenges of being human.

Source 2 - *Bereishit 18:1-8*

<p>ויראה אליו ה', באלני ממרא; והוא ישב פתח- האהל, כחם היום.</p>	<p>And GOD appeared to him by the plains of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day;</p>	1א
<p>וישא עיניו, וראה, והנה שלשה אננשים, נצבים עליו; וירא, ויגץ לקראתם מפתח האהל, וישתחו, ארצה.</p>	<p>And he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men stood over him; and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the entrance of the tent, and bowed down to the earth,</p>	2ב

<p>וַיֹּאמֶר: ה', אִם-נָא מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ-אֵל-נָא תַעֲבֹר, מֵעַל עַבְדְּךָ.</p>	<p>And said: 'God, if now I have found favour in your sight, pass not away from your servant.</p>	<p>3ג</p>
<p>יִשָּׁח- נָא מְעַט- מִיַּם, וְרַחֲצוּ רַגְלֵיכֶם; וְהִשְׁעֲנוּ, תַּתְּחִיתֵם הַהֲעֵלֵצוּ.</p>	<p>Let now a little water be fetched, and wash your feet, and recline yourselves under the tree.</p>	<p>4ד</p>
<p>וְאָקְחָה פַת-לֶחֶם וְסָעְדוּ לְבָבְכֶם, אַחַר תַּעֲבְרוּ- כִי-עַל- כֹּן עֲבַרְתֶּם, עַל- עַבְדְּכֶם; וַיֹּאמְרוּ, כֹּן תַּעֲשֶׂה כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ.</p>	<p>And I will fetch a piece of bread, and satisfy your heart; after that you shall pass on; because you have come to your servant.' And they said: 'So do, as you have said.'</p>	<p>5ה</p>
<p>וַיְמַהֵר אַבְרָהָם הָאֵהָלָה, אֶל-שָׂרָה; וַיֹּאמֶר, מְהֵרָי שְׁלֵשׁ סָאִים קָמַח סֵלֶת-לוּשִׁי, וַעֲשֵׂי עֲגוֹת.</p>	<p>And Avraham hastened into the tent to Sarah and said: 'Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes.'</p>	<p>6ו</p>
<p>וְאֵל- הַבָּקָר, רָץ אַבְרָהָם; וַיִּשָּׁח כֹּן-בָּקָר בָּד וְטוֹב, וַיִּתֵּן אֶל-הַנָּעַר, וַיְמַהֵר, לַעֲשׂוֹת אֹתוֹ.</p>	<p>And Avraham ran to the herd, and fetched a calf tender and good, and gave it to the servant; and he hastened to prepare it.</p>	<p>7ז</p>
<p>וַיִּשָּׁח חֹמְצָה וְחֵלֵב, וַיְכֹן-הַבָּקָר אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה, וַיִּתֵּן, לַפְּגִיחָם; וְהוּא-עֹמֵד עֲלֵיהֶם תַּחַת הָעֵץ, וַיֹּאכְלוּ.</p>	<p>And he took curd, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they ate.</p>	<p>8ח</p>

1. Look at the first 3 *pesukim*. Identify three events that took place. *God appears to Avraham, Avraham sees three men, Avraham runs to get them water and food.*
2. What causes Avraham to interrupt his mediation/prayer with God? *The sight of travellers coming out of the desert slowly and anticipating that they would need a drink and rest.*
3. According to Rashi, we can learn from 18:1 the great mitzvah of visiting the sick. God visits Avraham three days after his circumcision at the age of ninety-nine. Despite the greatness of receiving the divine presence, Avraham puts God on hold while the strangers approach. Was this right or wrong? Why? *Certainly worthwhile to open this up for discussion. Points to be mentioned may include: (a) it was right because he saw people in need, (b) if it was wrong, would God not have told him soon afterwards?*
4. Our Rabbis have said, "גדולה הכנסת אורחים מהקבלת פני השכינה" "Greater is the mitzvah of welcoming guests than hosting the presence of God". Which Mitzvah is more important/better in your opinion, receiving God's message or welcoming guests in from the desert? Why? *Helping another human being is very significant and in this case takes precedence over connecting to God.*
5. Describe Avraham's movements to satisfy the needs of his guests. What do we learn from his example? *He hurries and runs to get them service. He gives them what they need, in this case water and shade for a traveller. One can point out key words in the text – and he ran, and he hurried - וירץ and וימהר - which appear in the text in a variety of forms. We too should go out of our ways to help others and to do so with enthusiasm.*

Source 3: Shulchan Aruch - Yoreh Deah 335 (Optional)

1. It is a religious duty to visit the sick. Relatives and close friends should enter at once, others after three days. If the illness is serious, both groups can visit the person at once.
2. Even a distinguished person should visit a humble one. The more one visits the more praiseworthy it is, provided only that the visits do not become a burden on the patient...
3. One who visits the sick should not sit upon a bed or chair or on a stool but should sit in front of the patient, for the divine presence rests above a sick person...
4. One should not visit the sick during the first three hours of the day, for every patient's illness is alleviated in the morning, and consequently visitors will not trouble themselves to pray for the sick; and not during the last three hours of the day, for then the illness grows worse and one then will give up hope of praying for the sick.

1. Who has priority, according to the *Shulchan Aruch*, in visiting the sick?
Relatives and close friends first.
2. What do you think the law would be, if the patient only wanted to see the close friend and not the person's parents? *Discussion points: on the one hand, one needs to think of the wishes of the sick person; on the other hand, the parents brought the child into the world. Most opinions would say that one needs to try and persuade the patient to allow parents to visit.*
3. According to the *Shulchan Aruch*, could a person fulfil the duty of visiting the sick by sending a "text message" or email? *According to most opinions it is more important to come personally as this shows greater effort and concern on behalf of the visitor. But when a personal visit is impossible, other ways of communication are also good.*

Source 4: JL Peretz story retold by the British Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Every Friday morning before dawn, the Rebbe of Nemirov would disappear. He could be found in none of the town's synagogues or houses of study. The doors of his house were open but he was not there. Once a Lithuanian scholar came to Nemirov. Puzzled by the Rebbe's disappearance he asked his followers. 'Where is he?', 'Where is the Rebbe?' they replied. 'Where else but in heaven? The people of the town need peace, sustenance, health. The Rebbe is a holy man and therefore he is surely in heaven, pleading our cause.'

The Lithuanian, amused by the credulity, determined to find out for himself. One Thursday night he hid himself in the Rebbe's house. The next morning before dawn he heard the Rebbe weep and sigh. Then he saw him go to the cupboard, take out a parcel of clothes and begin to put them on. They were the clothes, not of a holy man, but of a peasant. The Rebbe then reached into a drawer, pulled out an axe, and went out into the still dark night. Stealthily, the Lithuanian followed him as he walked through the town and beyond, into the forest. There he began chopping down a tree, hewing it into logs, and splitting it into firewood. These he gathered into a bundle and walked back into the town.

In one of the back streets, he stopped outside a run-down cottage and knocked on the door. An old woman, poor and ill, opened the door. 'Who are you?' she said. 'I am Vassily', the Rebbe replied. 'I have wood to sell, very cheap, next to nothing.' 'I have no money', replied the woman. 'I will give it to you on credit', he said. 'How will I be able to pay you?' she said. 'I trust you – and do you not trust God He will find a way of seeing that I am repaid.' 'But who will light the fire? I am too ill.' 'I will light the fire', the Rebbe replied, and he did so, reciting under his breath the morning prayers. Then he returned home. The Lithuanian scholar, seeing this, stayed on in the town and became one of the Rebbe's disciples. After that day, when he heard the people of the town tell visitors that the Rebbe ascended to heaven, he no longer laughed, but added: 'And maybe even higher.'

1. Where did the Lithuanian scholar think the Rabbi was? *He thought he was in synagogue or the Beit Midrash/study hall praying.*

2. Read the following *Mishna* from *Peah* 1:1 and identify one connection to this story.

אלו דברים שאין להם שיעור-- הפאה, והביכורים, והריאיון, וגמילות חסדים, ותלמוד תורה.

"These are the things that do not have a measure: the corners of the fields, the first fruits for offering in the Temple, appearance in Jerusalem, acts of kindness and the study of Torah."

We can see from this Mishna that acts of kindness are on the same level of holiness as studying Torah and have a great power. Further, it could be argued that the Rebbe continued to do acts of chesed every Friday to help the needy in his community even at a time when others are busy with their own Shabbat preparations– this mitzvah is one that has no limit in its need to be performed and its reward for the doer.

3. What does the Lithuanian scholar mean by phrase "And maybe even higher"? *Even*

Higher can mean that he is going to a higher level of holiness than someone who prays or studies Torah (question 1). This questions hints at the goal of spirituality – to transcend to a higher level of connection to God. What is so wonderful about Chesed is that your interactions with others can bring you to the higher spiritual levels by doing a kind deed.