

Leadership – Avot 2:5

הוא הָיָה אומר, אין בור ירא חטא, ולא עם הארץ חסיד, ולא
הביטן ללמד, ולא הקפדן מלמד, ולא כל המרבה בסחורה מחכים.
ובמקום שאין אנשים, השתדל להיות איש

He (Hillel) used to say, a brute is not sin-fearing, nor is an ignorant person pious; nor can a timid person learn, nor can an impatient person teach; nor will someone who engages too much in business become wise. In a place where there are no men, strive to be a man.

A discussion on Leadership based on Pirkei Avot 2:5

Some Textual Questions to ask Chanichim:

- Is there a connection to the previous Mishna (also by Hillel)?
- What is the connection between the first part of Mishna and the last part of the Mishna?
- Can the first part of the Mishna help us to become better leaders?
- What defines a “man” in this context?

Some General Questions to ask Chanichim:

- What do you feel are some qualities that make a good leader?
- Can leaders fail? If so, how?
- What is a leader’s best asset?

Some Personal Questions to ask Chanichim:

- When is a time you feel you have shown good leadership?
- Who is your favourite leader and why?
- What values are most important to you as a leader?
- What is your biggest strength and weakness as a leader?

Other sources and quotes to bring into discussion:

Shoftim Perek 5, Passukim 10-n

הַלֹּךְ הַלְכוּ הַעֲצִים לְמַשֵּׁם עֲלֵיהֶם מֶלֶךְ וַיֹּאמְרוּ לְזֵית מְלוּכָה [מְלִיכָה] עָלֵינוּ: טוֹיֵאמֶר לְהֵם הַזֵּית הַחֲדָלְתִּי אֶת־דְּשָׁנִי אֲשֶׁר־בִּי יִכְבְּדוּ אֱלֹהִים וְאֲנָשִׁים וְהִלְכְתִּי לְגוּעַ עַל־הַעֲצִים: וַיֹּאמְרוּ הַעֲצִים לְתַאֲגָה לְכִי־אֵת מֶלְכִי עָלֵינוּ: יֹאמְרָא לְהֵם הַתַּאֲגָה הַחֲדָלְתִּי אֶת־מַתְקִי וְאֶת־תְּנוּבַתִּי הַטּוֹבָה וְהִלְכְתִּי לְגוּעַ עַל־הַעֲצִים: יִבְיֹאמְרוּ הַעֲצִים לְגַפְן לְכִי־אֵת מְלוּכִי [מְלִיכִי] עָלֵינוּ: וַיֹּאמְרָא לְהֵם הַגֶּפֶן הַחֲדָלְתִּי אֶת־תִּירוּשֵׁי הַמִּשְׁמֶם אֱלֹהִים וְאֲנָשִׁים וְהִלְכְתִּי לְגוּעַ עַל־הַעֲצִים: יִדְוִיֹאמְרוּ כָל־הַעֲצִים אֶל־הָאֶטֶד לָךְ אַתָּה מֶלֶךְ־עָלֵינוּ: טוֹיֵאמֶר הָאֶטֶד אֶל־הַעֲצִים אִם בָּאֵמֶת אַתֶּם מְשִׁחִים אֵתִי לְמֶלֶךְ עָלֵיכֶם בְּאוֹתָם בְּצִלִּי וְאִם אֵין תִּצְאָא אֲשֶׁר מִן־הָאֶטֶד וְתֹאכְלִי אֶת־אֲרָזִי הַלְבָנוֹן:

“Once the trees went to anoint a king over themselves. They said to the olive tree, ‘Reign over us.’ But the olive tree replied, ‘Have I, through whom God and men are honored, stopped yielding my rich oil, that I should go and wave above the tree: So the trees said to the fig tree, ‘You come and reign over us.’ But the fig tree replied, ‘Have I stopped yielding my sweetness, my delicious fruit, that I should go and wave above the trees?’: So the trees said to the vine, ‘You come and reign over us.’ But the vine replied, ‘Have I stopped yielding my new wine, which gladdens God and men, that I should go and wave above the trees?’ Then all the trees said to the thornbush, ‘You come and reign over us.’ And the thornbush said to the trees, ‘If you are acting honorably in anointing me king over you, come and take shelter in my shade; but if not, may fire issue from the thornbush and consume the cedars of Lebanon!’

A Related Story:

Calev: Calev was one of the 12 meraglim (spies) who were sent into Eretz Yisrael by Moshe to spy out the land. He, along with Yehoshua, was one of the two spies who did not lie about the land. For Yehoshua, this response was expected, as the apprentice of Moshe. For Calev, the other spies had expected him to lie as well. Instead, Calev serves as the perfect example for this Mishna and chose to stand up, be a leader and be a man when there were no other men.

Martin Luther King: Martin Luther King was the most prominent leader in the American civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s until his assassination in 1968. He modelled his strategy of civil disobedience and non-violence on the successes of Mahatma Gandhi and received the Nobel Peace Prize. On October 14th 1964, he made a speech at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom that continues to inspire people to this day.

‘I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today!’

Malala Yousafzai: Malala grew up in northwest Pakistan, where the Taliban had often banned girls from attending school. She became a vocal supporter of female education when a Taliban gunman shot her three times in the head in an assassination attempt. She survived, and the attack provoked worldwide outrage, and in Pakistan, it led to ratification of the Right to Education Bill. Since her recovery, Malala became the youngest person to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, addressed the UN, met world leaders, and founded the non-profit Malala Fund. She graduated with a degree from Oxford in the summer of 2020.

Some Interactive Resources:

