

Mixed Gender Societies – Avot 1:5

יוֹסֵי בֶן יוֹחָנָן אִישׁ יְרוּשָׁלַיִם אוֹמֵר, ... וְאֵל תִּרְבֶּה שְׂיִחָה עִם
הָאִשָּׁה. בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ אָמְרוּ, קֵל וְחֶמֶר בְּאִשְׁת׃ חֲבֵרוֹ. מִכָּאֵן אָמְרוּ
חֲכָמִים, כָּל זְמַן שֶׁאָדָם מִרְבֶּה שְׂיִחָה עִם הָאִשָּׁה, גּוֹרֵם רָעָה
לְעַצְמוֹ, וּבּוֹטֵל מִדְּבַרֵי תוֹרָה, וְסוֹפוֹ יוֹרֵשׁ גֵּיהֵנוֹם:

Yose ben Yochanan (a man) of Jerusalem used to say: Engage not in too much conversation with women. They said this with regard to one's own wife, how much more [does the rule apply] with regard to another man's wife. From here the Sages said: as long as a man engages in too much conversation with women, he causes evil to himself, he neglects the study of the Torah, and in the end he will inherit gehinnom.

A discussion on Mixed Gender Societies based on Avot 1:5

Some Textual Questions to ask Chanichim:

- What could the Mishna mean by don't engage too much in conversation with women?
- How does this idea of not talking to one's wife fit in with the idea of shalom bayit (A peaceful house)?
- Why does it start from "ones wife"?

Some General Questions to ask Chanichim:

- What does this mean for modern society?
- Has this outlook from the times of the Mishna changed?
- Do these ideals affect the impact feminist ideas can have in Judaism?
- What does this mean if men and women learn Torah together?
- Does this apply for women talking to men?

Some Personal Questions to ask Chanichim:

- Do you agree with the Mishna?
- Can you imagine a society that separated by gender?
- What would you define as "essential conversation" with women?

Other sources and quotes to bring into discussion:

Mesechet Succah Daf 51b

תנו רבנן בראשונה היו נשים מבפנים ואנשים מבחוץ והיו באים לידי קלות ראש התקינו שיהו נשים יושבות מבחוץ ואנשים מבפנים ועדיין היו באין לידי קלות ראש התקינו שיהו נשים יושבות מלמעלה ואנשים מלמטה

The Sages taught in the Tosefta: Initially, women would stand on the inside of the Women's Courtyard, closer to the Sanctuary to the west, **and the men were on the outside** in the courtyard and on the rampart. **And they would come to** conduct themselves with inappropriate **levity** in each other's company, as the men needed to enter closer to the altar when the offerings were being sacrificed and as a result they would mingle with the women. Therefore, the Sages **instituted that the women should sit on the outside and the men on the inside, and still they would come to** conduct themselves with inappropriate **levity**. Therefore, **they instituted** in the interest of complete separation **that the women would sit above and the men below.**

A Related Story:

An example of how the Mishna can be applied is from Shimshon in Sefer Shoftim. Shimson was a Nazir from birth, meaning his hair was never cut and this was the source for his strength. In Perek **ד**, Shimson is Betrothed to a Plishti women, who he is getting married to. He strikes a deal with the 30 Plishtim who are at the 'bachelor' party, to either solve the riddle he gave them or give him clothing. After 7 days of struggling to solve the riddle, they threaten Shimshon's wife to get the answer, or her family will die. Shimson's wife pestered him for 7 days until he finally told her. She passed the answer on to the 30 men, and her family was saved but Shimson was unhappy.

In Perek **טו**, Shimson meets Deliah. The Lords of the Philishtim command Delilah to get Shimson to tell her the secret that is the source of his strength for a reward of eleven hundred shekels of silver. Shimson deceives and lies to Deliah three times before she naggess him until he was weared to death. He then told her the secret, which led to his hair being cut off, and him losing his strength. If Shimson had taken care with his words and not spoken to either wife, he would arguably have had his strength saved and would not have died.

An example of how the Mishna does not always apply comes from the story of **Rachav and the spies** in Sefer Yehoshua. In Perek **ב**, Yehoshua commands two spies to go out to the city of Yericho. When they arrive there, they are taken into a woman called Rachav's house. Rachav hides the spies on her roof from the kings men, who are under instruction to capture them. Rachav gives the spies the information they need to attack the city of Yericho in return for a promise of her and families lives to be spared.

There is no way to know what would have happened without Rachav's help and support, but without that key conversation, then Bnei Yisrael would not necessarily have had the key information they needed to take the city.

Some Interactive Resources:

Video: Single sex versus co-ed schools <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1FjCy-D44YM&feature=youtu.be>

Video: No more boys or girls <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=la15dilSIM0&feature=youtu.be>



A boy's mind works differently
And a girl's mind also works differently
The boys mostly love to play and fight
The girls follow beauty tips and know what is wrong and right
The boys like to see their super heroes fight with power
The girls love to see the beauty of a flower
A girl's and boy's mind works differently
And in their own world they live contently.
Risha Ahmed (12 yrs)