

CORNERSTONE 2019 RESOURCE

You don't need to be a Dead Rabbi to have a Jewish Opinion *Elective*

AUTHOR(S):	Meir Balofsky, Dan Libenson
SUMMARY:	An experience in accessing and learning Torah and the ability to teach it If you have ever felt that "I don't know enough about Judaism to teach it" then this is the session for you! In this session we will embark on a journey to learn ancient Jewish texts, and try our own hand at authentically understanding them in 2019. The lens of this program will be facilitated through two cornerstone faculty – one secular – one observant. Judaism has survived as an unbroken chain of teaching, learning and tradition. Be the teacher, be the student, be the next link in the chain! No prior formal Jewish education needed. – <i>Submitted by Meir Balofsky and Dan Libenson</i>
TOPIC(S):	Chain of Tradition. Empowering teachers of today while maintaining authenticity to the teachings of yesterday.
LEARNING OBJECTIVE:	Participants will emerge as more confident Jewish educators with material to learn from and teach from.
AUDIENCE:	20-25 participants
TIMING:	90 minutes
APPENDICES:	Pirkei Avot Books or texts
MATERIALS NEEDED:	Flip chart paper
SET-UP DETAILS:	Enclosed room space with chairs

SESSION TIMELINE & OUTLINE:

- Write down a quote that has had or does have an impact on your life.
- The quote should be at least 1 generation old.
- Write down the quote. Write the answer- How do you apply it to your life?
 - In pairs – Share the quote you chose **without** explaining why you chose it or how it applies to your life
 - Then the partner responds on what that quote would mean to them.
 - THEN – share what you wrote on how it applies to your life and how you came to understand what the phrase meant.
 - Note how the same quote can have similarities and differences depending on who hears it.
 - Consider and share: Are there differences, and if so what are they, between the circumstances and context of the person who originally said the quote and what it means to you in your own life.

There is a balance between the authenticity of the original message and how we apply those messages to our lives today that needs to be considered.

(Have the following written on a flip chart paper)

Moses received the Torah from Sinai and gave it over to Joshua. Joshua gave it over to the Elders, the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets gave it over to the Great Assembly (2nd Temple era – 400 BCE) -

Introduction to Pirkei Avot
The Mishna of Ethics

PICTURE FOLD GAME:

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Everyone is to receive a paper with a line drawn horizontally about 1/8 of the way down. They will have 30 seconds to draw anything they want in the top part of the page over the line. Emphasize that in this case quantity trumps quality. So draw as much of a picture as possible as opposed to spending the whole time on the intricacies of a rose petal.

After they complete the picture, they are to pass the paper to the person on their left. Under the line, that person must caption the drawing on that paper. They then fold over the paper so that the original picture is no longer visible, but only the caption is visible, and then pass it again to the left. The new owner of the paper must now draw a line under the caption and then draw the picture that suits the caption. This is repeated twice more until there is a 4th caption.

Then everyone shuffles their position around the circle so it's no longer clear who has who's original. Everyone then takes a turn reading out their final caption and everyone needs to try and guess in their minds who has their original.

Then everyone has to actually seek out their original and share what happened to their original with a partner.

Take a couple of volunteers to share out loud with everyone what happened to their original.

If the message gets completely changed, then at what point is the “authenticity” completely gone? It’s one thing to have your “generation” have its own take and input, but it may be another to completely abandon the original content.

Short history of the traditional story of the “Oral Torah”:

- There are many areas of Jewish law that for generations were intentionally never written down. It was passed down orally, and this way each generation would be able to apply the law to their needs and circumstances.
- This system worked as long as the Jewish people lived together in a Jewish society and under a Jewish court of law. It’s easier to not lose the tradition when you live it every day.
- When the Second Temple was destroyed in 70 CE, not only did a lot of Jewish law pertaining to the temple become obsolete, but Jewish communities were starting to disperse. These two factors led to a fear that the oral law and tradition would be lost.
- As a result, there was a call by Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi – the leader of the Jews in that era, to have Rabbis of all communities send in teachings of the Oral law which he would then redact into a six volume compendium called the MISHNA.
- Mishna Volumes – Agriculture / Times (holidays) / Damages (tort law) / Women / Holiness (Temple-related) / Purity. Each with many sub-volumes called tractates.

The Tractate of AVOT –“Ethics of our Elders” is a collection of teachings about Jewish morality. These are the ethics that Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi elected to include. (Are these HIS favourite quotes?!)

Look through some of these quotes with your partner (Chevruta) and decide on one to delve into with the following questions as a starting point:

- What do you think this quote might have meant in the year 200 CE?
- What does it mean to you as you read it today? How could this quote apply in today’s world?
- How might you have understood this quote if you read it when you were 14 years old compared to how old you are now?
- Would an 80 year old read it differently? If so, how?
- How can this idea be presented to our campers / peers?

1:4

Yossei the son of Yoezer of Tzreidah, and Yossei the son of Yochanan of Jerusalem, received the tradition from them. Yossei the son of Yoezer of Tzreidah would say: “Let your home be a meeting place for the wise; dust yourself in the soil of their feet, and drink thirstily of their words.”

1:13

He (Hillel) would also say: “One who advances his name, destroys his name. One who does not increase, diminishes. One who does not learn is deserving of death. And one who makes personal use of the crown of Torah shall perish.”

1:17

His (Rabban Gamliel’s) son, Shimon, would say: “All my life I have been raised among the wise, and I have found nothing better for the body than silence. The essential thing is not study, but deed. And one who speaks excessively brings on sin.”

2:2 . Rabban Gamliel the son of Rabbi Judah HaNassi would say: “Beautiful is the study of Torah with the way of the world, for the toil of them both causes sin to be forgotten. Ultimately, all Torah study that is not accompanied with work is destined to cease and to cause sin. Those who work for the community should do so for the sake of Heaven; for then merit of their ancestors shall aid them, and their righteousness shall endure forever. And you, [says G-d,] I shall credit you with great reward as if you have achieved it.”

2:5

Hillel would say: “Do not separate yourself from the community. Do not believe in yourself until the day you die. Do not judge your fellow until you have stood in his place. Do not say something that is not readily understood in the belief that it will ultimately be understood [or: Do not say something that ought not to be heard even in the strictest confidence, for ultimately it will be heard]. And do not say ‘When I free myself of my concerns, I will study,’ for perhaps you will never free yourself.”

2:21

He would also say: “It is not incumbent upon you to finish the task, but neither are you free to absolve yourself from it. If you have learned much Torah, you will be greatly rewarded, and your employer is trustworthy to pay you the reward of your labors. And know, that the reward of the righteous is in the World to Come.”

- Invite each pairing to share a highlight from their discussion. an “aha” moment, an “I wonder” question. The how to teach it in camp idea.
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- Return to this quote: *Moses received the Torah from Sinai and gave it over to Joshua. Joshua gave it over to the Elders, the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets gave it over to the Great Assembly (2nd Temple era – 400 BCE)*
 - How could this be re-written or added to today? Who are we learning from and who are we passing it on to? What is our link in the chain going to look like?

Discuss how the methods we used today might be transferred to other kinds of Jewish texts. If time allows, go over a text from the Torah (Jethro’s visit to Moses or the Scouts) and/or a story from the Talmud (Rabban Gamliel being deposed as head of the Yavneh yeshiva, or why is the law always according to Beit Hillel). How is it similar, and how is it different, to apply this methodology to something other than a quote?

CLOSURE:

Everyone may take home their own Pirkei Avot book. You are invited to grapple with each Mishna and make it your own. Engage with the ones that seem difficult and discover connections. Go for it.