



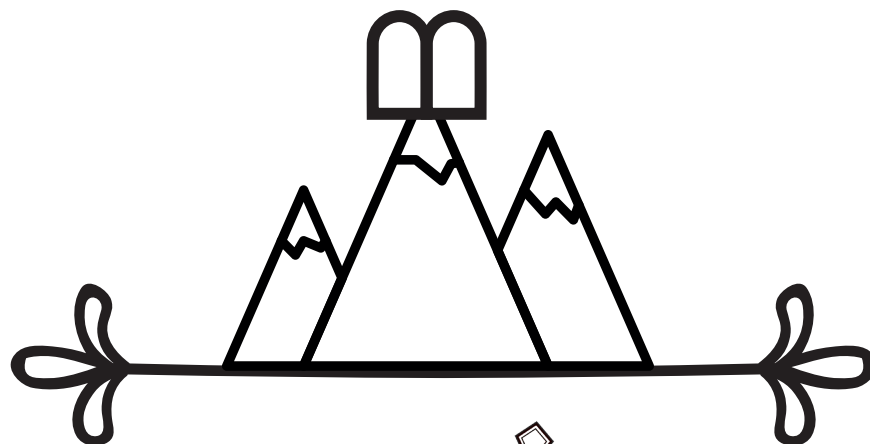
Tikkun Leil Shavuot

for Children and Families

Stay up late and learn about...learning!

Judaism has a lot to say about learning, and about learners themselves. That's one of the ways we know how important learning is for the Jewish community!

Here you'll find four different texts, along with questions, that can guide your learning this Shavuot. You might want to focus on just one, or if you're staying up late (as is the custom on erev Shavuot!), then you can spend some time on each part.



#1: Can you teach an old dog new tricks?

In this text from Pirkei Avot, Elisha ben Abuyah (a scholar from the 2nd century) explains a difference between learning something when you are young and learning something when you are older.



Avot 4:20

אֶלִישֶׁע בֶּן אֲבוּיָה אָמַר, הַלּוֹמֵד יָלֵד לְמָה הוּא
דּוֹמָה, לְדִין כְּתוּבָה עַל נֶיֶר חֲדָשׁ. וְהַלּוֹמֵד זָקֵן
לְמָה הוּא דּוֹמָה, לְדִין כְּתוּבָה עַל נֶיֶר מְחוּק.

Elisha ben Abuyah said: One who learns when a child, to what are they compared? To ink written upon a new writing sheet. And one who learns when an old person, to what are they compared? To ink written on a rubbed writing sheet.

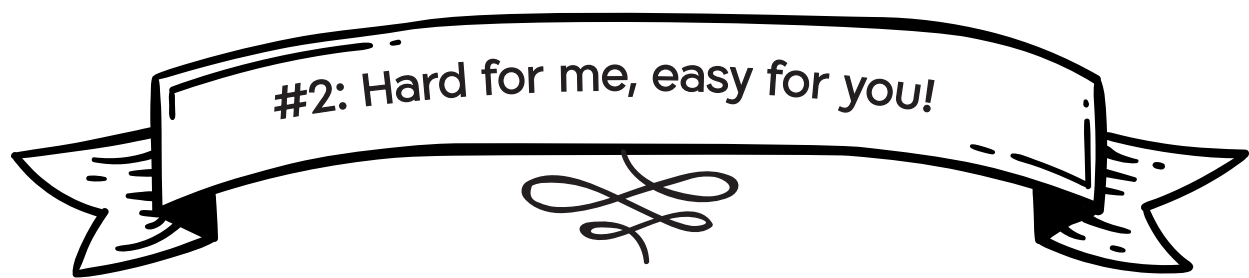
There seems to be a pretty big difference if the learner is a child or someone old!

- ★ How do you understand Elisha ben Abuya's comparisons?
- ★ Do you think that he believes one category is more positive or more valuable than the other? What do you believe? Try sharing some reasons for both.

You could also think about this text as being about a person's experience with learning, not their actual age.

- ★ When are you a new learner, and when are you an experienced learner?
- ★ What are the advantages of being like a blank slate, and what are the advantages of being like a sheet that has been written on and erased several times?





Think of a time when learning something was hard for you. What were you trying to learn? Who else was involved (maybe a teacher, a parent, a friend)? What made the learning challenging? What helped?

Here's a midrash about a time when Moshe found it really hard to learn something: how to make the menorah for the mishkan.

As you read the midrash, try to act it out! Choose a person to read the parts of God and another to read Moshe's lines. A third person can read the narrator's part.

Bemidbar Rabbah 15

רבי לוי בר רבי אומר... שֶׁאָמַר לוֹ הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ
הוא לְמִשְׁחָה: "וְעָשִׂיתָ מְנוֹרַת זָהָב טָהוֹר" (שמות
כה:לא)

אָמַר לוֹ: כִּיצַד נַעֲשֶׂה אוֹתָהּ?

אָמַר לוֹ: "מִקְשָׁה תַעֲשֶׂה הַמְּנוֹרָה" (שמות
כה:לא)

וְאָף עַל פִּי כֵן נִתְקַשָּׁה מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּרֵד וַיִּשְׁכַּח מַעֲשִׂיהָ.

עָלָה וְאָמַר: רַבּוֹנִי, כִּיצַד נַעֲשֶׂה אוֹתָהּ?

אָמַר לוֹ: "מִקְשָׁה תַעֲשֶׂה הַמְּנוֹרָה" (שמות
כה:לא)

וְאָף עַל פִּי כֵן נִתְקַשָּׁה מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּרֵד וַיִּשְׁכַּח.

עָלָה וְאָמַר: רַבּוֹנִי, שָׁכַחְתִּי.

Rabbi Levi son of Rabbi says...The Holy One said to Moshe: "You will make a menorah of pure gold" (Shemot 25:31).

Moshe responded: how will we make it?

God responded: "It will be made of hammered work" (Shemot 25:31).

But Moshe struggled and went down (from Mount Sinai) and forgot how to make it.

He went up again and said: My Master, how do we make it?

God said: "It will be made of hammered work" (Shemot 25:31).

But Moshe struggled and went down and forgot.

He went back up and said: My Master, I forgot it!

continued on the next page →

הָרָאָה לוֹ לְמֹשֶׁה וְעוֹד נִתְקַשָּׁה בָּהּ.

אָמַר לוֹ: "וְרָאָה וַעֲשֵׂה" (שמות כה:מ) עַד שֶׁנִּטַּל מְנוֹרָה שֶׁל אֵשׁ וְהָרָאָה לוֹ עֲשִׂיתָהּ.

וְאַף עַל פִּי כֵן נִתְקַשָּׁה עַל מִשָּׁה!

אָמַר לוֹ הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא: לֵךְ אֶצֶל בְּצַלְאֵל וְהוּא יַעֲשֶׂה אוֹתָהּ.

וְאָמַר לְבְּצַלְאֵל, מִיָּד עֲשֵׂאָהּ. הִתְחִיל תָּמָה וְאָמַר: אֲנִי כִּמְהָ פְעָמִים הָרָאָה לִי הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא וְנִתְקַשִּׁיתִי לַעֲשׂוֹתָהּ, וְאַתָּה שְׂלֵא רָאִיתָ עֲשִׂיתָ מִדְּעַתְךָ...

God showed Moshe, and Moshe still struggled.

God said to him: "See and create" (Shemot 25:40), and took a menorah of fire and showed him how it was made.

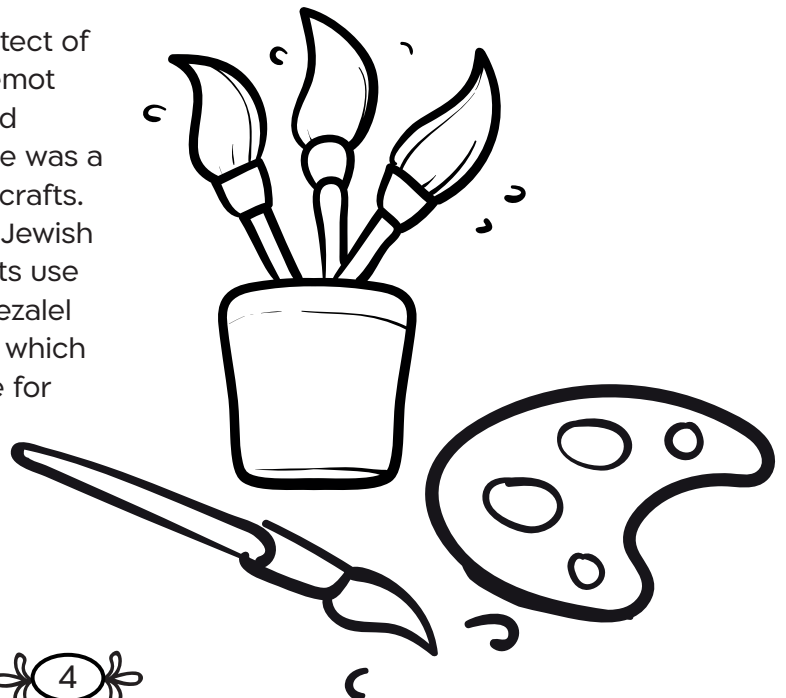
But, it was still a struggle for Moshe!

The Holy One said to Moshe: Go to Betzalel, and he will make it.

Moshe told Betzalel, and he immediately made it. Moshe was amazed and said: How many times did the Holy One show me, and I still struggled to make it! But you, who never saw it, knew how to make it by yourself!

- ★ This job was a struggle for Moshe! What are some things he does really well in the story, even though he's having trouble? What can we learn from his example for when we're having a hard time learning?
- ★ Betzalel, on the other hand, had a really easy time learning this. What is something that was easy for you to learn? How do you learn well? Has there been a time that you were able to help someone else who was struggling to learn something new?
- ★ What can this midrash teach us about learning new things?

We first meet Betzalel, the chief architect of the mishkan, in Parashat Ki Tissa (Shemot 31:2). God filled him with hokhmah and knowledge in making things, and so he was a uniquely talented artist in all kinds of crafts. Even today, he is considered the first Jewish artist in history! Lots of artistic projects use him as inspiration, for example, the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Israel, which is considered a very prestigious place for artists to study.



#3: The Gushing River and the Water Container

This text highlights two different kinds of learning. As you read, notice what Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus and Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh are compared to.



Pirkei Avot 2:8

חמשה תלמידים היו לו לרבן יוחנן בן זכאי... הוא היה מונה שבחן: רבי אליעזר בן הורקנוס, בור סוד שאינו מאבד טפה. רבי יהושע בן חנניה, אשרי יולדתו. רבי יוסי הכהן, חסיד. רבי שמעון בן נתנאל, ירא חטא. ורבי אלעזר בן עזריה מעין המתנבר.

הוא היה אומר, אם יהיו כל חכמי ישראל בכף מאזנים, ואליעזר בן הורקנוס בכף שניה, מכריע את כלם.

אבא שאול אומר משמו, אם יהיו כל חכמי ישראל בכף מאזנים ורבי אליעזר בן הורקנוס אף עמהם, ורבי אלעזר בן עזריה בכף שניה, מכריע את כלם:

Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai had five students... He [Rabbi Yohanan] used to list their outstanding virtues: **Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus is a plastered cistern (water tank) which does not lose a drop**; Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hananiah, happy is the woman that gave birth to him; Rabbi Yose, the priest, is a pious man; Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel is a person who fears sin; and **Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh is like an ever-flowing spring**.

He [Rabbi Yohanan] used to say: If all the sages of Israel were on one scale of the balance, and Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus on the other scale, Rabbi Eliezer would outweigh them all.

Abba Shaul said in his name: If all the sages of Israel were on one scale of the balance, and Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus also with them, and Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh on the other scale, Rabbi Elazar would outweigh them all.

You can learn more about this in Parashat Tzav's Devash magazine

continued on the next page →

At the time these rabbis lived, there were two centers of Torah learning, one in Eretz Yisrael and one in Bavel. In each place, a different kind of learning was valued.

In Bavel, the way you proved your intelligence was by coming up with new arguments and explanations, challenging the logic of an opposing view, and defending your own logic. As long as your arguments were sound, you could even support absurd positions. For example, the Talmud (Eruvin 13b) talks about someone who could give 150 reasons for why a bug should be kosher! (Don't worry, they're still not kosher!) Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh, who was from Bavel, is described as מַעַיִן הַמִּתְגַּבֵּר (ma'ayan ha-mitgaber, an ever-flowing spring). He was creative, quick-thinking, and had impressive logic.

The kind of intelligence that was most valued in Eretz Yisrael was the ability to remember traditions that were passed on from generation to generation. Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus is described as בּוֹר סוּד (bor sud, a plastered cistern or water tank) to show that he had a really strong memory and could retain traditions from the past.



- ★ How are a river and a water cistern similar? How are they different?
- ★ Which aspect of Torah learning do you think is more important: remembering and keeping the traditions of what was done in the past, or using new ways of understanding the Torah to figure out what we should be doing? Can you make an argument for both sides?
- ★ Which of the rabbis are you most like, Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh, or one of the other rabbis from our text?
- ★ What new image or metaphor would explain the kind of learner that you are?
- ★ What other kinds of intelligence are there and how are those valuable?



To learn more about different types of intelligence and whether wisdom comes from the brain or the heart, see the Parshanut section of Parashat Vayakhel's Devash magazine!

#4: The Unbroken Chain

This text from Masekhet Eruvin tells a story about how Torah was passed from God to Moshe, to Aharon, to Aharon's children, to the elders, to the rest of Benei Yisrael.

Bonus section
if you're staying up extra late!

As you read:

- ★ Try to visualize how many steps and stages of learning there were. (You may want to act it out as you read!)
- ★ Can you count how many times each person heard what was being taught? How many times did each person or group of people teach someone else?



תָּנּוּ רַבֵּנוּ, כִּיצַד סֵדֶר מִשְׁנָה:
מֹשֶׁה לָּמַד מִפִּי הַגְּבוּרָה. נִכְנָס
אַהֲרֹן, וְשָׁנָה לוֹ מֹשֶׁה פִּירְקוֹ,
נִסְתַּלֵּק אַהֲרֹן וַיֵּשֶׁב לְשִׁמְאֵל
מֹשֶׁה. נִכְנָסוּ בָּנָיו, וְשָׁנָה לָהֶם
מֹשֶׁה פִּירְקוֹ. נִסְתַּלְּקוּ בָּנָיו,
אֶלְעָזָר יָשֵׁב לִימִין מֹשֶׁה,
וַאֲיִתָּמָר לְשִׁמְאֵל אַהֲרֹן.

רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אוֹמֵר: לְעוֹלָם אַהֲרֹן
לִימִין מֹשֶׁה חוּצָר.

נִכְנָסוּ זְקֵנִים וְשָׁנָה לָהֶם מֹשֶׁה
פִּירְקוֹ. נִסְתַּלְּקוּ זְקֵנִים, נִכְנָסוּ כָּל
הָעָם וְשָׁנָה לָהֶם מֹשֶׁה פִּירְקוֹ.

נִמְצְאוּ בֵּיד אַהֲרֹן אַרְבָּעָה, בֵּיד
בָּנָיו שְׁלֹשָׁה, וּבֵיד הַזְּקֵנִים שְׁנָיִם,
וּבֵיד כָּל הָעָם אֶחָד.

The Sages taught: How was the Oral Torah transmitted? Moshe learned directly from God. Aharon entered and Moshe taught him his lesson (as he had learned it from God). Aharon moved aside and sat to the left of Moshe. Aharon's sons entered, and Moshe taught them their lesson (while Aharon listened). Aharon's sons moved aside; Elazar sat to the right of Moshe and Itamar sat to the left of Aharon.

Rabbi Yehuda disagreed about the seating arrangements and said: Actually, Aharon would return to sit to the right of Moshe.

The elders entered and Moshe taught them their lesson. The elders moved aside, and the entire nation entered, and Moshe taught them their lesson.

Therefore, Aharon heard the lesson four times, his sons heard it three times, the elders heard it twice, and the entire nation heard it once.

continued on the next page →

נסתלק משה וְשָׁנָה לָהֶן אַהֲרֹן
פִּירְקוֹ. נִסְתַּלֵּק אַהֲרֹן שָׁנָה לָהֶן
בָּנָיו פִּירְקוֹ. נִסְתַּלֵּקוּ בָּנָיו, שָׁנָה לָהֶן
זִקְנִים פִּירְקוֹ. נִמְצָא בְּיַד הַכֹּל
אַרְבָּעָה.

מִכָּאן אָמַר רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר: חַיִּיב
אָדָם לְשָׁנוֹת לְתַלְמִידוֹ אַרְבָּעָה
פְּעָמִים. וְקָל וְחוֹמֶר, וְמָה אַהֲרֹן
שָׁלַמְד מִפִּי מֹשֶׁה, וּמֹשֶׁה מִפִּי
הַגְּבוּרָה – כִּי, הִדְיוֹט מִפִּי הִדְיוֹט
– עַל אַחַת כְּמָה וְכְמָה.

Moshe then departed, and Aharon taught the others his lesson (as he had learned it from Moshe). Aharon then departed and his sons taught the others their lesson. His sons then departed and the elders taught the lesson to the rest of the people. So everyone heard the lesson four times.

From here Rabbi Eliezer said: A person is obligated to repeat a lesson to their student four times. If Aharon, who learned from Moshe himself, and Moshe had received the Torah directly from God, needed to learn the lesson four times—then an ordinary student learning from an ordinary teacher would definitely need to review at least four times!

- ★ When are you a student? When are you a teacher?
- ★ What could be risky about passing on the Torah from person to person? (Think about broken telephone...) How can that be controlled?
- ★ What is something that you've learned more than once? What is the value in learning something again and again? Why do you think we repeat the same cycle of Torah reading every year?

Try this at home:

- ★ Next time you are learning something new, try teaching it to someone in your family! Discuss how it feels to teach something that you are in the process of learning. Does it help you understand it better?
- ★ Get out a bunch of stuffed animals, or action figures, assign each a role (Moshe, Aharon, etc.) and act out the stages of learning and teaching described in Eruvin.
- ★ Try to learn something new—maybe memorize a mishnah or a pasuk. How many times do you need to repeat it to know it by heart?

