

A Lesson In Relationships. Where You Are Matters

When you first start to learn Pirkei Avos, questions arise about its location. It's in the order of Nezikin after tractate Sanhedrin, in the middle of the Mishnah.

The first Mishnah of Pirkei Avos begins with the transmission of the oral tradition, which is the basis of the Mishnah, "Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and gave it over to Yehoshua, Yehoshua to the Elders, the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets gave it over to the Men of the Great Assembly."

If it's trying to prove that the oral tradition is from Sinai, then shouldn't it be at the beginning of the Mishnah? Why is it at the beginning of Pirkei Avos, in the middle of the Mishnah?

The entire Mishnah with the exception of Pirkei Avos deals with the details of mitzvos, so we don't have a question if they are from Sinai, because they are mitzvos.

When it comes to Pirkei Avos there are no laws, no mitzvos, it's ethics and virtues of piety, and being that there are many books on ethics from non Jewish sources, one can think that these ethics are just some thoughts from the Rabbis, and not from Hashem, because it isn't laws. Therefore the first Mishnah of Pirkei Avos establishes that these ethics are also from Sinai, from Hashem, and not just the Rabbi's thoughts.

Why is it after tractate Sanhedrin?

Because Sanhedrin is the laws that pertain to judges and Pirkei Avos tells us how judges should act, and how we should treat judges. So it is apropos that Pirkei Avos is right after Sanhedrin.

This brings us to the fourth and fifth rule of Pirkei Avos.

Rule #4: The order of things matter in Pirkei Avos.

Therefore questions like, "Why is this Mishnah before or after this one?" and "Why are these two sages included in one Mishnah, while usually each sage gets their own Mishnah?" are perfectly valid.

Rule #5 : Everything is up for question, every word, every phrase, and even the order of things is up for question.

This is true in all of the Mishnah as well, as the Talmud picks apart every Mishnah. But there is no Talmud on Pirkei Avos, so it is up to us to do the asking. Many of the questions have been answered by the classic commentaries, some of them have been answered by our great sages throughout our history, and there are some waiting for you to find answers to.

What can we learn from this that the order of things matter?

We all are busy with the responsibilities and hardships of life. But every so often, we have to ask ourselves: Where are we holding in life, in our service to Hashem, and in our relationships? This has to be done often in order that you shouldn't fall behind, especially in your relationship with your spouse and your children, because who is more important than them in your life. And if you put it off, you could be causing the ones you love unnecessary suffering and it will be hard to put the broken pieces back together. And this will cause you untold amount of suffering and you will feel alone, just as your loved ones felt when you were there, but absent.

It is easier to repair your relationship with Hashem than with your spouse or your children. So please don't let it get to that point and if it has gotten there already, do everything in your power to get your relationships back to loving and I believe that it's possible to make it even better than it ever was.

May your relationships be void of hurt and suffering. Having a good relationship with your spouse and children is a prerequisite for having a good relationship with Hashem. Because the pain and hurt will be too much for you to concentrate on

your relationship with Hashem, and if you are the cause of their pain, I don't know if Hashem wants to have a relationship with you. At the same time, it's your, your spouse's and your children's relationship with Hashem that will help you rebuild the relationship.

So take the time every day to think about where you are at and work on your relationships with your spouse, your children and Hashem. What can be better than that.