

Discipleship—Part 2

Becoming and Making Disciples of the Master

Raise up many disciples... —Avot 1:1

Therefore go and make disciples... —Matthew 28:19-20

What is Discipleship?

“Everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.” (Luke 6:40)

The goal for the disciple is to be like his teacher. The teacher is like a fruit-producing tree. He produces fruit, which can, in turn, become a fruit-producing tree which will then produce more fruit in order to become fruit-producing trees. It is a cycle that is unending. This is why it is important to produce “many” disciples. If we produce just one or two disciples and they are either unsuccessful or depart from this life unexpectedly, there are others to continue producing fruit (and therefore fruit-producing trees).

“Give a man a fish; you have fed him for today. Teach a man to fish; and you have fed him for a lifetime” (Chinese proverb)

This is why it is so important to disciple our children, first and foremost.

Behold, children are a gift of the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one's youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; They will not be ashamed When they speak with their enemies in the gate. (Psalm 127:3-5, NASB)

Elisha ben Avuyah used to say: He who learns as a child, what is he like? He is like ink written on new paper. He who learns as an old man, what is he like? He is like ink written on blotting paper. (Avot 4:25)¹

He [Rabbi Elisha ben Abuyah] used to say: When one studies Torah as a child, the words of the Torah are absorbed by his blood and come out of his mouth distinctly. But if one studies Torah in his old age, the words of the Torah are not absorbed by his blood and do not come out of his mouth distinctly. And thus the maxim goes: “If in thy youth though didst desire them, how shalt thou acquire them in thine old age?” (Avot de Rabbi Natan 24)

Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” (Matthew 19:14)

The world only exists through the breath of schoolchildren (b. Shabbat 119b)

¹ It is better to learn from the elders who are more experienced in the wisdom of Torah. “Rabbi Yosi bar Judah of Kefar ha-Bavli said: He who learns from the young, what is he like? He is like one who eats unripe grapes and drinks wine fresh from his wine press. But he who learns from the aged, what is he like? He is like one who eats ripe grapes and drinks old wine.” (Avot 4:26)

You shall not remove your hand from your son or your daughter, but from their youth teach them the fear of God (Didache 4:9).

Two hinderances of discipleship we must overcome:

1) **Others are not prepared to be disciplined.** In most cases of disciplining others, unfortunately, we have the odds stacked against us, since most people do not know Torah. We are having to re-invent the wheel. Whereas a rabbi teaching an educated Jewish child or adult merely has to set a match to the kindling, we are forced to “rub two sticks together” until something happens.

Our raw materials (in relationship to disciplining adults) are without refinement whatsoever. In the days of Yeshua disciples had varying degrees of scholarship. However, they nearly always had some basic knowledge of Torah & rabbinic principles as their foundation.

At five years old a person should study the Scriptures, at ten years the study of Mishnah, at fifteen the study of Talmud. (Avot 5:25)

This is an obstacle which we must overcome. However, at the same time it is an obstacle, it can also be an asset (see Avot 4:25). We must be creative in our approach to overcoming this obstacle.

2) **One empty vessel cannot fill another.** This is by far the greatest obstacle we have in disciplining others.

The hurdle we must overcome first is that of lack of discipleship in our own lives. We can use it as an excuse for not disciplining, or we can do something about it. To quote a famous movie line, “*If you build it, they will come.*”

Rabbi Meir used to say: Do not look at the flask but at what is in it; there may be a new flask that is full of old wine and an old flask that does not even have new wine in it.” (Avot 4:27)

Becoming a Disciple

We must become disciples of the Master. We can become a disciple of a living person, while ultimately being a disciple of the Master. However, one cannot be a disciple of an organization. A person and an organization are not the same. An organization can impart and share knowledge, but it cannot disciple. We can only emulate another human being.

But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called masters, for you have one master, the Messiah. He who is greatest among you shall be your servant; whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. (Matthew 23:8-12)

Four characteristics are found among students: One who is quick to learn and quick to forget—his gain is canceled by his loss; one who is slow to learn and slow to forget—his loss is canceled by his gain; one who is quick to learn and slow to forget—his is a happy lot; one who is slow to learn and quick to forget—his is a bad portion. (Avot 5:15)

There are four types among those who sit in the presence of the sages: the sponge, the funnel, the strainer, and the sieve. "The sponge," who soaks up everything. "The funnel," who takes in at this end and lets out at the other. "The strainer," who lets out the wine and retains the dregs. "The sieve," who removes the coarse meal and collects the fine flour. (Avot 5:18)

Practical steps to becoming a disciple:

1. Find a mentor if possible

Provide for yourself a teacher... (Avot 1:6)

2. Find a companion with whom you can be accountable in order to share your struggles and victories

...and get yourself a friend. (Avot 1:6)

Hence it is declared, A man should acquire a friend for himself to read Scripture with him, to study Mishnah with him, to eat with him, drink with him, and disclose his secrets to him (Sifré Deuteronomy §305:129b).

3. Study in order to impart to others

But the more Torah the more life, the more schooling the more wisdom; the more counsel the more understanding; the more righteousness the more peace. If a man has acquired a good name he has gained something which enriches himself; but if he has acquired words of the Torah he has attained afterlife. (Avot 2:8)

I may have just been born yesterday, but I read all night. Ignorance is often used as an excuse, but it should not be. Other sects of Judaism have the words of their rabbi committed to memory, and know how to dispense them with great skill. If we have been commissioned to make disciples of the Master, his words should be of utmost importance in our becoming his disciple.

- Memorize the teachings of the Master
- Memorize ethical & practical passages from rabbinic sources (Pirkei Avot is wonderful for this)
- Learn parables and stories that have practical application

4. Live out your faith

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if any one is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who observes his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But he who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts, he shall be blessed in his doing. (James 1:22-25)

Our deeds outweigh our knowledge. We will instruct more people by *how we live* than by *what we speak*.

Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa said: He in whom the fear of sin takes precedence of wisdom, his wisdom will endure; but he in whom wisdom takes precedence of his fear of sin, his wisdom will not endure. (Avot 3:11)

He [Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa] used to say: He whose works exceed his wisdom, his wisdom endures; but he whose wisdom exceeds his works, his wisdom will not endure. (Avot 3:12)

If any prophet who teaches the truth does not do what he teaches, he is a false prophet (Didache 11:9).

In every circumstance of life we should to be able to respond with either a Scripture (including the wisdom of the Master, especially), a Talmudic anecdote, or a parable (story, example, etc.). It must be in us before we can share it. I've said many, many times that **we can only transfer what we possess**.

Practical steps to aid memory:

1. Learn your lessons out loud (Everyman's Talmud, p. 177).
2. Repetition

One who repeats his lesson a hundred times is not like him who repeats it a hundred and one times (b.Chagigah 9b).

Blessed is the man who[se] delight is in the law of Adonai, and on His Torah he meditates day and night. (Psalm 1:1-2)

3. Association