

## Supplementary Materials for “Learning”

### Discussion Questions

1. “‘Who is wise?’ ask our sages in Ethics of the Fathers. ‘He who learns from every person.’ And, Conservative Judaism adds, from every culture, every religion, every corner of ancient or modern human knowledge and experience.” [p. 11]
  - a. Can you share examples of learning from unexpected people in your own life?
  - b. What sources or ideas from Jewish history or other cultures have helped you understand more about Torah and Judaism?
2. “We are no less worthy than the ancestors by virtue of membership in our century rather than theirs. Our task now as ever, our privilege now as ever, is to study the sages of old so as to emulate them: to render Judaism compelling for this revolutionary age, as our learned ancestors did for theirs.” [p. 11]
  - a. A significant Jewish archetype is that of the “perfectly pious ancestors.” What images, ideas, or questions does this expression evoke for you?
  - b. Is the idea that those in the past had a perfect Jewish life an obstacle or an inspiration when it comes to taking ownership of our Judaism today?
  - c. How does Chancellor Eisen weigh in on the complicated issue of the past being seemingly more worthy than the present?
3. “Community is the prerequisite of Jewish learning. The setting for Conservative Jewish learning should be a community in the strong, face-to-face sense of the word.” [p. 12]
  - a. How does Chancellor Eisen see the impact of community in learning?
  - b. What can you do as an adult member of the community to participate in Jewish learning with the children and teens of your community?

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4. “Judaism has always stressed the need for learning that leads to action . . .” [p. 13]
  - a. How does Chancellor Eisen see the impact of community on the practice of Judaism?
  - b. In what ways has your community shaped your practice of Judaism, and in what ways has it had little impact?
  - c. There are two ways of learning to do mitzvot: mimetic (repeating what you see done by others) or indirect (learning from books.) What are some pros and cons of each?
  - d. Do you recall any “leaps of action” that you took in the form of mitzvot, and how did your understanding of those particular mitzvot grow with time?
  
5. “CJL [Conservative Jewish Learning] is passionate, from the heart and touching the soul, partaking of deep emotion that bespeaks love for Torah, love for the Jewish people, love for life itself, and—at its best—love for God.” [p. 14]
  - a. What does it mean, in practice, to learn as an act of love?
  - b. Can you recall a moment of learning, Jewish or otherwise, when this was true for you?
  
6. Read carefully the 10 principles for Jewish learning outlined by Chancellor Eisen on pages 13 through 15.
  - a. How do those principles reflect the embrace of both continuity and change?
  - b. Which principles do you engage with most, and why? Conversely, which do you engage with less, and why?
  - c. Pick one item on your second list to explore. What are the barriers to engaging in this kind of Jewish learning, and how might you overcome them?