



Study Like a Child

Sicha Summary

Chelek 19 | Vaeschanan | Sichah 1

The Law:

There is a *mitzvah* to study Torah and there is a *mitzvah* to teach Torah to one's children. *Rambam* and the Alter Rebbe's *Shulchan Aruch* begin the section dealing with the laws of Torah study with the command to teach one's children. Why not open with the primary command for adults to study Torah? This is because the law commanding adults to study Torah is derived from the verse, "you shall teach it to your children." (*Devarim* 6:7) (*Rambam, Sefer Hamitzvos, Positive Mitzvah* 11.)

The Questions:

- 1) Every other *mitzvah* only devolves on an adult. Why, then, is there a *mitzvah* for children to study Torah?
- 2) Why is the verse that commands adults to study Torah couched in language that refers to teaching one's children?

The Explanation:

The primary objective of a *mitzvah* is to elevate the physical world. The individual's spiritual work of submitting himself to the Divine will is of secondary importance. The primary objective of Torah study is to align one's own autonomous mind with Divine wisdom.

Thus, the internal work of submitting oneself to G-d's will and wisdom as articulated in the Torah is a prerequisite to Torah study. And even more so, the student of Torah must constantly check and subdue his ego *while* he studies.

The obligation to study Torah as a child alludes to the necessity for adults to have a “childlike” innocence and humility; this is the foundation for mature Torah study. And the fact that the command for adult Torah study is in a verse that commands us to teach our children alludes to the fact that this innocence and humility must persist even in a lifetime of adult Torah study.

Connecting the Mishnayos:

The *Mishnah* teaches: “He who studies Torah as a child, to what can he be compared? To ink written on fresh paper. He who studies Torah as an old man {*zakein*}, to what can he be compared? To ink written on paper that has been erased.” (*Avos* 4:20)

Why would the Mishnah denigrate someone who came to Torah study late in life? Rather, the Mishnah means that one who studies only with the “mature” tools of intellect and self-assuredness without “childlike” humility will not be successful in his pursuit of Divine wisdom.

A similar explanation can be given for the previous Mishnah: “Shmuel the Small would say: “When your enemy falls, do not rejoice....” (*Avos* 4:19)

The commentators interpret Shmuel’s exhortation as referring to two scholars engaging in debate — the victor in the debate should not rejoice at his opponent’s downfall. (*Machzor Vitry* ad. loc.)

But why shouldn’t the scholar rejoice? After all, the correct ruling or interpretation has been accepted, and the incorrect one has been rejected!

Yet, because this scholar perceives his interlocutor as an “enemy” that has “fallen,” clearly his joy is not pure. He does not rejoice for the truth prevailing; his joy is egotistical. If he had the humility of a child, he would not see his opponent as an enemy, but rather, as another dimension of truth, “these and these are the words of the living G-d.”