

Eikev 2016

### Fathers need to learn themselves

1.

“You shall teach them to your children to discuss them, while you sit in your home, while you walk on the way, when you retire and when you arise.” (11, 19)

"ולמדתם אתם את בניכם לדבר בם בשבתך בביתך ובלכתך בדרך ובשכבך ובקומך."

The word אתם is spelled אותם, but we read it אתם. This pasuk refers to parents teaching their children. Why is it written differently, אתם?

The Chofetz Chaim (al HaTorah pages 253-554) says **parents cannot just rely on the Torah that their children learn; rather they themselves need to additionally learn Torah.** (בל נסמך רק על תורת הבנים, רק האבות בעצמם צריכים ללמוד.) Nowadays, many children learn in Yeshiva, while their parents unfortunately don't learn at all. The Mishna in Avos (perek alef) quotes Hillel who used to say: if I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am for myself, what am I? And if not now, when? (מה לי? וכשאני לעצמי, מה? ) This Refers to the fact that if I will not get serious regarding serving Hashem by learning, davening and performing mitzvos, then no one else will do this for me. Parents need to be involved with learning themselves. Maaseh L'melech (footnote 5) relates a story that every day there was a man who while alive learned a perek of Mishnayos lieluy nishmas himself. He explained that he couldn't just rely on his children who will learn in his zechus (merit). Rather he needed to bring nachas ruach (comfort) to his neshama in the next world. He needed to prepare provisions for his long journey in the next world.

The Gemara in Kidushin (29b) relates a case where a father and a son both want to learn Torah, but one needs to work. Who learns and who works? The Rambam (hilchos Talmud Torah 1, 4) says that the father precedes. However, if the son has a great mind, then his son will precede. Now, even though the son precedes, nevertheless the father still needs to learn because **just as there is a mitzvah for a father to teach his son Torah, so too there is a mitzvah for every father to learn Torah himself.** (היה הוא רוצה ללמוד תורה ויש לו בן ללמוד ) היה הוא קודם לבנו, ואם היה בנו נכון ומשכיל להבין מה שילמוד יותר ממנו בנו קודם, ואף על פי שבנו קודם תורה הוא קודם לבנו, (לא יבטל הוא, שכשם שמצוה עליו ללמד את בנו כך הוא מצווה ללמד עצמו.) The Kesef Mishna explains that a father shouldn't say since I'm supporting my son, I am exempt from learning. They are two independent mitzvos; supporting ones son, thereby enabling him to learn. Another independent mitzvah is him learning himself. (וכתב רבינו ואף על פי שבנו קודם לא יבטל הוא כי היכי ) (דלא נימא הרי עוסק לפרנס בנו הלומד וליפטר איהו מת"ת לגמרי קמ"ל דלא כיון דתרי מצוות נינהו.)

Similarly, Rav Shlomo Luria (Yam Shel Shlomo (Kidushin perk aleph siman 56) quotes the Tur (yora daya siman 245) who says that even though the son precedes, nevertheless the father needs to learn himself.

As a side point, Rashi (Brachos (14b)) points out that if you yourself didn't learn, how will you teach your children? **You can only teach if you've learned. The learning a person does himself is a prerequisite to teaching his son.** (אם לא למד תחלה היאך ילמד את בניו?)

2.

Are 'minor' mitzvos less important than 'major' mitzvos?

"This shall be the reward when you hearken to these ordinances, and you observe and perform them; Hashem your God, will safeguard for you the covenant and the kindness that he swore to your forefathers." (7, 12)

"והיה עקב תשמעון את המשפטים האלה ושמרתם ועשיתם אתם ושמר ה' אלהיך לך את הברית ואת החסד אשר נשבע לאבותיך."

Many mefarshim (commentators) discuss what the definition of Eikev is. Rashi quotes the Medrash Tanchuma that says Hashem gave the Torah to the Jewish people. The Torah consists of 613 mitzvos which includes 'minor' and 'major' mitzvos. Sometimes there are small mitzvos that people don't pay attention to and throw them under their heel. That's why Dovid Hamelech said I'm afraid of the day of judgment. He said I'm not worried about the serious mitzvos, but I'm worried maybe I didn't perform the light mitzvos properly. The Rabbeinu B'chaya explains by quoting the Gemara in Avoda Zora (18a) that the punishment for belittling these light mitzvos and stepping on them with their heels in this world, will last and be remembered on the day of judgment.

The Mishna in Avos (perek beis) states **'be as scrupulous in performing a 'minor' mitzvah as in a 'major' one, for you do not know the reward given for mitzvos.'** (הוי זהיר במצוה קלה כבבמורה שאין אתה יודע מתן שכרן של מצוות.) Hashem didn't inform us of the reward for all the mitzvos, in order that we will perform all of the mitzvos equally. We need to view all mitzvos equally. If we knew the reward of the mitzvos we would only focus on the major mitzvos and ignore the minor ones. Rashi relates a mashal (parable) of a king who had an orchard. He instructed his workers to plant. He didn't reveal the reward that would be granted for each specific sapling. Reward would only be granted for specific plants, not all of them. If the king would have revealed the reward for the plants then everyone would only plant those specific plants. Many plants would be missing. The same applies to the reward granted for the performance of mitzvos; if Hashem would inform us the reward for mitzvos, then people would only perform the mitzvos that reap the greatest reward. Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai says that there are two mitzvos for which the Torah reveals to us the reward; the lightest of the light, sheluach hakan (sending away the mother bird) and the most serious of the serious, kivud av v'eim (respecting parents). The reward for the performance of these mitzvos is longevity. The lesson of this is that **sometimes there are mitzvos that appear insignificant, but their reward is in fact great.**

**A quintessential example of a minor mitzvah is putting on and tying shoes properly. Who cares which way you tie your shoes? Hashem does. This is an explicit Halacha. There is a specific way to put on, tie and remove ones shoes as stated in the Gemara in Shabbos (61a) and the Shulchan Aruch (siman beis). Rav Shimshon Pincus (Tiferes Shimshon pages 123-124) says that many times unfortunately people aren't careful to perform the minor mitzvos properly. This is incredibly incorrect because **the light mitzvos truly determine where a person is holding regarding loving Hashem.** Does Hashem really care about how a person puts on his shoes? Does Hashem really care how we take three steps back when we finish shemonah esray? Of course! These Mitzvos reveal how**

much a person really loves Hashem! Someone who properly performs the light mitzvos demonstrates how much he loves Hashem! Someone who accustoms himself to performing mitzvos properly, his proper mitzvah performance will become second nature to him. If one is not used to it, it might be hard for him to change his nature, but it is for sure worth it. If we showed one who doesn't perform minor mitzvos the Jewish neshama (soul) that will be wounded and the severe negative impact caused by his lack of performance of these minor mitzvos, he would certainly perform the minor mitzvos properly. Some might say it's not so important, but that is false; it is crucial. Don't look at the mitzvah you are doing, but rather look at who commanded you do it.

In reality, there are many things that appear small, but really they are huge! We say in the morning Hashem provides us with all our needs (שעשה לי כל צרכי). This beracha refers to shoes. Why specifically shoes? Are our mere and simple shoes really considered all our needs? Let's relate a story of a person who was on a bus. He wanted to get comfortable so he removed his shoes. A wicked person on the bus wanted to cause trouble, so he took one of his shoes without him noticing. He then took the shoe and threw it out the window. When they reached their destination, the person started looking frantically for his other shoe. Many people began looking for his shoe as well, but to no avail. He eventually got off the bus with only one shoe on. Wherever he went he was barefoot, in a lot of pain and very embarrassed. We clearly see the importance of shoes. They aren't such a small matter after all. When it comes to the minor mitzvos, for example, shoes, how much is being asked from us? Hashem is merely asking us to remember Him. We should surely comply. The pasuk in Yeshayahu (1, 6) "from the sole of the foot to the head, nothing in him is whole etc." The small mitzvos remind us and connect us to Hashem.

The Meom Loez (409) says that some explain that **the minor mitzvos that people step on, are the fences that chazal enacted. He relates an example of wearing tzitzis and not allowing them to drag on the floor! We must be careful that our tzitzis do not drag on the floor. Similarly, we need to make sure that the tefillin resuos (straps) don't touch the floor.** Additionally, Rav Aharon Kutler (Mishnas Rav Aharon page 305) says many important aspects of our religion aren't officially in the category of minor, however they are sometimes overlooked. In reality they are very chashuv (important). One example is derech erez (common etiquette). It's more than a minor mitzvah! A person can't even learn without derech erez! Why aren't middos (good characteristics) amongst the 613 mitzvos? For example, why isn't anger or arrogance listed amongst the 613 mitzvos? Rabbi Chaim Vital (Shari Kedusha chalek alef shar beis) answers that middos are a prerequisite to the Torah as stated in the Vayikra Raba (9, 3); proper etiquette precedes the Torah (דרך ארץ קדמה לתורה). To a certain extent proper middos are common sense.

**Many people look for all sorts of additional stringencies; when the truth is that there are basic fundamental halachos they don't even keep. Instead of looking for all these stringencies, let them perform the actual required halachos! For example, a person is forbidden to walk in front of someone who is davening shemonah esray as stated in mesechas Berachos (27) and the Shulchan Aruch (siman 102). We must additionally be careful when reciting berachos. When we recite berachos we need to be careful to enunciate the words clearly and slowly. We must make sure we are not doing anything**

else when we recite berachos. We must be careful not to walk or motion to someone else while we recite berachos. The Pele Yoetz (erech brachos) writes that many people think they make berachos properly. But when they will get judged at the end of their lives and eagerly expect receiving reward for saying 100 brachos daily, they will be told that they never said even one bracha their entire life. All of the berachos are invalid! Not only don't they get credit, but they additionally said many berachos levatalos (in vain)! They are also eating, drinking and performing other mitzvos without reciting berachos over them. A useful tactic, which will easily enable one to say berachos properly, is saying the beracha out loud. Praiseworthy is the person who says berachos out loud which will lead him to saying it clearly, b'simcha (with happiness) and slowly.

There is a story of an individual who died and heard a voice. The voice said hagahagashjhas. He said please repeat. The voice yet again said hagahagashjhas. He said please repeat because I can't understand what you just said. The voice then clearly said that is what you sounded like when you prayed and recited berachos, we couldn't understand you either. **The unfortunate reality is many times berachos are recited so fast that they aren't even halachically considered a beracha. This is true regarding any type of beracha. Whether it is a beracha on food or berchas hashachar, we must be careful to pronounce the words of the beracha properly.**

**Another example of a minor mitzvah that is explicitly stated in the Shulchan Aruch (siman 123) is, when one finishes shemonah esray and took his three steps back, he needs to remain standing with his feet together preferably until the Chazzan recites kedusha or minimally when he starts chazaras hashas (the repetition).** Stop looking for all types of stringencies, when basic "minor" halachos aren't even being done properly! Yes we really need to focus on the small mitzvos because it is Hashem who commanded us to keep them!

Thank you Yair Moshe Ausubel for typing this up.