



"FUNDAMENTALS IN EDUCATION"

6 Tishrei, 5744-1983

When educating a child, every educator instills in the child two opposites: First and foremost the child is given fundamentals, principles that are not open to change. Regardless of the time or place wherever the child may find himself, he'll need these foundations in life: Justice, fairness, etc.

And for Jews, belief in one G-d, behavior in accordance to His Torah and Mitzvot, and belief that the Torah is unchangeable, even to the point of self-sacrifice.

Jewish children are taught, right at the beginning of their education that "this is our life and length of days." The child hears it repeated constantly at the beginning of his education, and later, in the middle years and even at the end of his education.

The greatest effort is invested that he be an honest person, that he behave justly and morally.

Even if he'll need to give up his own wills, desires or benefits, He is told, "Now you may have a certain will, desire, or certain ability; but there are basics which cannot change."

At the same time, however, education also includes an apparent opposite: We tell a child, "You must grow continuously!" We offer as proof, if one wishes proof: Just as his body grows, how much more so his inner essence must grow, – or in the child's words; his actions, his intellect and understanding must grow. And this is constantly reiterated: After a single achievement, we do not say, "he's on the path now, let's relax" rather, it's emphasized daily.

This is common behavior, of ordinary people, in all matters: As the child returns from school, Cheder or Yeshiva, any good father or mother immediately asks: What did you learn today? Or, in the Talmud's words: "What new thought evolved today in the study hall?" This was asked of the greatest sages.

How much more so do we tell a child: You must grow! You cannot advance just once a week, and the rest of the week remain on that level, but you must grow every single day. We ask him questions, we test him, give prizes or show disappointment if he has not progressed. And if it's done properly, it is such that "even when he will age, he will not depart from it." Throughout his entire life, even when he has aged and acquired wisdom, we tell him: There is still room to grow.

We see, therefore, that when the Jews went into exile, when "among the nations you will have no repose, no rest for the soles of your feet," as Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya explained, the exile made it increasingly difficult to concentrate on matters of wisdom.



פרשת בהעלותך

Yet, the Mishna relates – and every story in the Talmud contains deep meaning and surely in the Mishna, which is written concisely – that Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai delegated – although they were headed into exile, or, because they were going into exile – to ensure that there be two schools of students: One group “A cemented reservoir that does not lose a drop,” and another group to be “An ever-increasing spring.”

Certainly, even the student who Rabbi Yochanan referred to as “a cemented reservoir,” innovated many Torah insights; for he’s Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai’s student! The difference, however, was his primary focus.

His main quality, which permeated everything else about him, was “a cemented reservoir that doesn’t lose a drop.” The same is true of Rabbi Eliezer ben Arach, who “was an ever-increasing spring.” Surely, since he is called “Rabbi,” he was ordained – and not the ordinary ordination called “Rav;” the advanced level, with the added yud.

To receive ordination, one must have wide knowledge. One cannot receive ordination, even now, and surely to be ordained by Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, without being “a cemented reservoir” of knowledge. Nevertheless, he is referred to as “an ever-increasing spring,” for this emphasizes his main quality.

In any event, with regard to our topic: We see that the education of every child – and parents want this for their children because they feel that this is how it ought to be – includes these two opposites: We instill in him that there are matters which cannot change.

No matter when or where, he must continue to review these things, to “not lose a drop” of the basics.

At the same time, it is a fundamental principle of education to inspire the same child to continuously change! He must continually grow.

