

Responsibility of the Educator

And now, write for yourselves this song, and teach it to the Children of Israel. Place it into their mouths, in order that this song will be for Me as a witness for the children of Israel. (Devarim 31:19)

Rabbi Akiva in Mesechet Eruvin 54b learns from the phrase "Place it into their mouths" in this week's *parsha* that the obligation of an educator is not complete until the student has reached such a clear and deep understanding that it is as if the knowledge was placed directly into their mouths and minds. Therefore, the job of the Torah teacher is to package the teaching for the students in the clearest and most accessible way possible, so that the lesson is made ready and understanding is easily achieved.

This *pasuk* also describes the Torah as a "*shira*" - a song. We as educators know that to truly instill the lesson in the mouths, hearts, and minds of our students, it needs to be inspiring. It needs to move the students and catch their interest, awakening within them the desire to learn more and further explore. They must hear the music in their Talmud, the poetry in their *tefilla*, and the spirituality in their daily *halachik* practice. We must provide our Maimonides students with both the *sima* – clearly delivered content – and the *shira* – love for their learning.

Responsibility of the parent

Assemble the people, the men women and children... In order that they hear, and in order that they learn and fear Hashem, your G-d and they observe all the words of the Torah (Devarim 31:12)

After the the end of each seven years' *shemittah* cycle (where we find ourselves now), we are commanded to do the *mitzvah* of *hakhel* on Sukkot, the gathering of the entire nation to hear the recitation of parts of the Torah. The Rambam tells us that this is a reenactment of Matan Torah at Har Sinai. This national reaffirmation of commitment to the Torah includes everyone. The *mitzvah* is to bring our children so that they learn, and experience, this as we transfer the Torah and tradition to them. We must even bring children who are too young to understand and appreciate the experience so that, as the Gemara in Chaggai tells us, we as the parents can receive a reward for taking them there. The responsibility is ours to bring our kids to a *makom Torah*, to expose them as they grow to as many Matan Torah-like experiences as we can – whether it is sending our children to day school, to spend their formative years in a *makom Torah*; learning with them; or sharing *divrei Torah* at the table. As in the *mitzvah* of *hakhel*, we as parents bear the responsibility to bring our children to Torah - to make them feel, experience, and relive the revelation of Har Sinai.

Responsibility of the Student

Returning to the theme of ownership we have been emphasizing this year, the final *mitzvah* in the Torah is at the end of this *parsha*: The *mitzvah* incumbent on individuals to write a *sefer Torah*. While some Rishonim explain the intent of this *mitzvah* as being to increase the availability of *seforim*, the Ksav Sofer explains that this *mitzvah* teaches us the importance of learning our own Torah, of taking what our teachers have taught us and building on that foundation with our own unique insight and creativity. It is not enough to sit in class and take in the Torah. The students must make it their own. The Torah's instruction that their teachers "place it into their mouths" does not remain stagnant within the student, but must be channeled through the funnel of their own individual personalities, shaped by their unique perspectives and experience. While the input is that of the teachers, the output is unique to them.

It seems that one of Moshe Rabbeinu's messages at the very end of his life is that it takes a community to raise the next generation in our *mesorah*. *B'ezrat Hashem* we will succeed in bringing our kids to Torah, and packaging it so that it is clear and exciting, enabling our students to stamp it with their own unique signature.

Discussion for the Shabbos Table

- 1, What was your takeaway from the *d'var Torah* this morning?
2. How does this idea of *sima befi hem* interplay with last week's idea of *beficha uvilvavcha*?
3. In what ways do we provide *hakhel* experiences for our children and students?