

And these are the judgments that you shall place before them. (21:1)

Rashi teaches that Hashem told Moshe *Rabbeinu*, “It should not occur to you to say, ‘I shall teach them the chapter and the law two or three times, until it is set in order in their mouths according to its format (i.e. until they memorize it), but I shall not trouble myself to make them understand the reasons of the matter and its explanation.’ Therefore it says, ‘that you shall place it before them – like a table that is set and prepared to be eaten from, placed before a person.’ In other words, there is no room for error in teaching. The student must be clear, understanding the subject matter to the best of his ability. A *rebbe* may not say, ‘I have done enough.’”

In his *Igros Moshe*, **Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl**, writes a compelling charge to Torah educators. In explaining how they should teach and how far they should go in reaching out to each student, he writes: “One should know that Torah study is unlike any other form of study... A Torah teacher must explain the subject matter well until the student achieves proficiency in the lesson, to the point that he accepts the lesson as a way of life.” Torah is not a discipline which one teaches and moves on to the next lesson. If the student has not incorporated the lesson into his psyche – if, for example the student studies the laws of *tefillah*, prayer, but does not pray better, with greater *kavanah*, intention/concentration, feeling and enthusiasm- the *rebbe* has failed. Teaching Torah means infusing Torah within the hearts and minds of each and every student. It must become a part of their lives.

Rav Moshe adds that a *rebbe* should never give up on his student – regardless of his inability to grasp the lesson, or lack of commitment to the program. As long as he is not adversely affecting other students, he should be kept in the school. One never knows what inspiration a student may receive while in the spiritually positive environment of a *makom Torah*. He might be positively influenced by a *rebbe*, or even a classmate.

Horav Yehudah Tzedakah, zl, would often say that a true *marbitz Torah*, disseminator of Torah, is completely devoted to his students. Nothing else takes precedence over his students. They are his life. He felt this is alluded to by *Chazal*, who say, “If the *rav/rebbe* is likened to an angel of Hashem, seek Torah from his mouth – if not, do not seek his teachings” (*Moed Kattan* 17a). The sage explained that an angel does not perform two *shlichos*, missions, at once. He is devoted to one at a time. Thus, a *rebbe* should devote himself entirely to his students.

Once, a distinguished Torah activist came to speak with him concerning an important communal issue. The *Rav* informed the gentleman that at present he was teaching a class and thus unable to take time off and interrupt the *shiur*, lecture. The man countered that the issue at hand had ramifications that might very well be considered life and death in nature. *Rav Tzedakah* looked at the man and said, “To me, taking off time from my regular *shiur* is also life-threatening.”

A *rebbe's* relationship with his student is unique. The *rebbe* plays a dominant role in shaping that student's future. They sort of partner in the future. With this idea in mind, the *rebbe* must maintain a keen interest in the student, since his mentoring and care are an investment in the student's future. The following inspirational story intimates this idea. The scene takes place in *Yeshivas Ohr Sameach* one *Yom Kippur* night following *Kol Nidrei*. The *bais ha'medrash* was packed, standing room only, as one of the *Roshei Yeshivah*, **Horav Nachman Bulman, zl**, ascends to the lectern to address the hundreds of students, many of them only recently completing their return to Orthodoxy. *Rav* Bulman appears majestic, bedecked in his white *kittel*, *yarmulke* and *tallis*. His students were his children. He was their father – perhaps not biologically, but, in a spiritual sense – unquestionably. This was the most solemn night of the Jewish calendar year. Everyone listened with rapt attention as he began to speak.

“In many Jewish homes, prior to leaving for *shul* on *Erev Yom Kippur*, fathers and mothers take their children aside and bless them. This is a custom that dates back for centuries.” *Rav* Bulman stopped a moment and gazed deeply at his students. “This blessing is referred to as *Bircas HaBanim*, the blessing of the children. Many of you hail from homes where parents had no inkling of this blessing. Thus, for many of you, tonight is your first opportunity for *Bircas HaBanim*. As your *rebbe*, I will bless each of you – but, first, let me relate some background.

“When the revered *Ponevezher Rav*, **Horav Yosef Kahaneman, zl**, established *Yeshivas Ponovez* in Bnei Brak, he also opened an orphanage. Sadly, following World War II there were many children who fell into this category. When the *Rav* named the orphanage, *Batei Avos*, Homes of the Fathers, it raised eyebrows. The accepted name for an orphanage was *Bais Yesomim*, Home of the Orphans. He explained, ‘I want the children –and their teachers – to focus on their bright future ahead, not their dismal, sad past. The little boys will eventually become adults, fathers in *Klal Yisrael*. They will be part of our nation's future. This is why I called the orphanage *Batei Avos*, to emphasize the positive future which these children should look forward to enjoying.’”

“Tonight,” *Rav* Bulman continued, “I will do the same. I will bless you as a father blesses his child, but I will not call it *Bircas HaBanim*. Instead, I will call it *Bircas HaAvos*, to emphasize your future. You will, in due time, all become fathers in *Klal Yisrael*, ushering in a new generation which will be a pride to all of *Klal Yisrael*.”