

## You shall teach your children to discuss them. (11:19)

The *Sifri* underscores the words, *l'dabeir bam*, “to discuss them.” From the moment that one’s child is able to speak, his father should teach him, *Torah tzivah lanu Moshe morashah kehillas Yaakov*, “The Torah which Moshe commanded us is the heritage of the congregation of Yaakov.” A child’s first words should be Torah. His speech should be Torah-oriented. He learns this from his father. How? It should be the manner in which his father speaks. *Aviv melamdo*, “His father teaches him,” says *Sifri*. How does a father teach a young child who has just begun to speak? He does this by example. When the child sees his father learning Torah, when what the child hears are words of Torah, he will pick it up, because he will see that this is what is important. When we value something, our children will also value it. When something means very little to us, it will not mean much to our children. The father, who, after a difficult day at work, comes home, eats dinner, and then goes out to learn with a *chavrusa* or attend a *shiur* (even if he falls asleep during the *shiur*) is teaching his child a memorable lesson: Torah is important to me – as it should also be to you. It is my life – as so it should be yours. It is what I value most – as so should you. This is the meaning of *l'dabeir bam* – to discuss them. Torah should be our means of communication.

The following story is well-known, and a number of lessons may be derived from it. In the past, I have focused upon *hakoras hatov*, a son’s appreciation of his parent’s sacrifice. In context of the above, I think we should underscore the value the parents placed on Torah study. Now for the story. *Horav Yaakov David Wilovsky, zl*, was also known by an acronym of his name, *Ridvaz*. Born in Lithuania, he lived in Chicago for a short while, and he finally lived out his years in Tzfas. One day, a Jew walked into the *shul* in Tzfas and noticed the *Ridvaz* bent over, crying bitterly. “*Rebbe*, what is wrong?” the man asked. “Nothing is wrong,” answered the *Ridvaz*, “Today is my father’s *yahrzeit*, and I become very emotional thinking about him.”

The man was taken aback. The *Ridvaz* was no longer a young man. His father must have passed away over fifty years ago. Could the esteemed *Rav* still shed such bitter tears for his father after more than half a century?

“I was crying,” began the *Ridvaz*, “because I recalled the deep love that my father had for Torah.

“When I was six years old, my father hired a *rebbe* to tutor me. He was an excellent *rebbe*, and the learning was going well. The problem was that my parents were extremely poor, and the few pennies that they had saved to pay for my tutoring was gone. My father did not know how he could continue paying the *rebbe*. The thought that I would have to stop learning was crushing. On the other hand, the *rebbe* also had a family to feed. He could not tutor me for free when other options for earning money were available. My father knew this, and, as a result, was distraught [imagine the things that we worry about today].

“That night, my father was sitting in *shul*, contemplating his next move. As he sat there, he overheard a wealthy man “lament” the fact that he was building a home for his son-in-law and he

could not find bricks to build the chimney. When my father heard this he went over to the man and said, 'I can provide you with bricks for your chimney.' The man was excited and promised to reimburse my father a large sum of money for these bricks.

"Now, my father was not in the brick business. He came home and shared his idea with my mother – who agreed with him whole-heartedly. Together, they dismantled the chimney of our modest home and brought the bricks to the wealthy man. They received payment, and they immediately proceeded to the home of my *rebbe* to pay his back wages and wages for the next six months.

"I vividly remember that winter. It was a bitter, cold winter, with heavy snow and freezing winds. My entire family froze that winter. Without a chimney, we could not light a fire. My whole family suffered, but my father and mother felt that their decision to use the bricks, so that I could learn, was justified. [The fact that his siblings did not seem to complain is obviously a tribute to them.] In fact, throughout the bitter cold, an inner joy was felt in the home, a warm glow from the knowledge that this sacrifice was for Torah.

"I sit here today, and I weep, thinking what my father gave me for my learning."

A son remembers his father's – indeed his whole family's – sacrifice. The appreciation is incredible. His expression of gratitude was his becoming a *gadol baTorah*, a giant of Torah. Each brick contributed to his greatness.

I think what we miss is how much his parents valued Torah. How many of us are willing to sacrifice for our children's learning? How many are prepared to forgo a luxury, or even a necessity, so that our sons will be able to grow in Torah? We seem to "find" the funds for vacations, but fall short of supporting our sons' Torah learning. Furthermore, the *Ridvaz* was so moved by his parent's devotion, their abiding love for Torah, that he understood the value of Torah. Can we say the same for ourselves? Are we imparting such a message to our children?