

"And their children who do not know, they shall hear and they shall learn to fear Hashem (31:13)

The *Torah* implies that all Jews are able to learn *Torah*, no matter what their background, talents, and skills are. The *Steipler Rav z.l.* writes that if one just applies himself diligently to learn *Torah*, he will succeed and achieve scholarship even if he is not intellectually astute.

A young man once came to the *Steipler* and, in a voice full of chagrin, complained that even though he had been studying diligently in a *yeshiva* for five years, he still could not master the elementary level of erudition of *Talmud* and the basic commentaries. The *Steipler* responded, "Nonetheless, you must continue even if fifty years go by and you still have not become erudite in *Torah* literature. One who studies in *Olam Ha'zeh*, this world, will understand in *Olam Ha'bah*, the next world; one who doesn't study in *Olam Ha'zeh*, on the other hand, will have nothing to understand in *Olam Ha'bah*!"

Many people fail to achieve their potential. A number of factors can account for this failure. Some individuals are lazy and complacent; they lack the internal drive to persevere in *Torah* study. Others are discouraged by competitive or arrogant peers. In yet other cases, teacher and parents inadvertently place unreasonable demands upon their students and children in misguided attempts to "inspire" them to success. There are also those who are blessed with amazing aptitude, but remain unaware of these talents. This truly represents a waste.

A famous story concerning the *Netziv* is quite inspirational. The *Netziv* was one of the greatest *gaonim*, scholars, of the nineteenth century. At a *siyum* commemorating the completion of his magnum opus, the *Haamek She'elah*, he related the following story. As a young child, he did not stand out as the most attentive and assiduous student. He was rather playful and resistant to demands placed upon him in regard to *Torah* study.

He was once playing at home, when, by chance, he heard his father crying. His father, unaware of the presence of his young son, was lamenting to his wife about the child's lack of responsiveness to efforts to motivate him. "It was always my dream to raise a son who would be a great *talmid chacham*, *Torah* scholar," his father said, "but, alas, I will have to train him to be a craftsman."

When the *Netziv* heard these words coming from his father, he was dumbfounded. He never realized he was capable of achieving success. He immediately ran to his parents, promising them that he would devote his life to *Torah* study. The *Netziv* continued, "Imagine if I had not heard my father, I would have ended up as a craftsman. True, I would have earned an honest living and supported my family. I would even have set up daily *shiurim*, classes in which I would have studied *Torah*, but I never would have accomplished so much in my life. The *seforim* which I authored and the students which I have inspired and taught would never reached their potential. All this is because I heard my father cry bitterly."

The tears washed away the layers of unconcern and indolence. They soaked his heart with sensitivity, inspiring his remarkable growth to the point that he became one of the greatest *Torah* scholars of his generation.

We may add one more thought. At times parents should demonstrate the esteem in which they hold their child's education. When children are aware of the premium their parents place on *Torah* study, they will show a propensity to expend greater effort in its study. When *Torah* erudition is cast to a distant second place behind "everything else," it is no wonder that the child becomes disinclined to study and "grow" in the field of *Torah*.

Horav Yehoshua Frankel z.l., the *Rav* of *Komarna*, once overheard a group of Jews relating in *shul* how they had spent all of their money to ransom a number of young men/boys from being drafted into the Polish army. Once a Jewish boy fell into that degenerate environment, it was not long before he forgot his *yiddishkeit*. Alas, the money ran out and one boy was left unransomed. When the *Rav* heard this, *he* shuddered and asked them, "How could you allow one Jewish boy to be assimilated among the gentiles?" They responded that he was not the "learning type." Besides, there just was no more money available because it had all been spent on those boys who were inclined to study *Torah*.

When the *Rav* heard these words, he immediately ran over to the *Aron Ha'kodesh*, and opened it. Facing the *Sefer Torah* bedecked in its silver crown and breastplate, he exclaimed, "Our *Torah*, the pride of our people, you do not have to be adorned with silver. I will take the silver and use it to ransom a Jewish boy who is about to become lost forever!"

After the boy was spared from spiritual extinction, the *Rav* spoke to him in the following words, "My child, see what I have done for you. I have removed the silver crown and breastplate from the *Torah*. How shameful it would be for you to grow up without becoming proficient in *Torah* knowledge! You must realize how important you are and how valuable is your achievement." The *Rav's* words struck home, and the boy became a true *talmid chacham*.