

"And Yisrael loved Yosef more than all his sons, since he was a child of his old age." (37:3)

Chazal offer a number of interpretations for the phrase, "*ben zekunim*," child of his old age. Some of the commentators define "*ben zekunim*" as "*bar chakim*," wise son, referring to Yosef's remarkable *Torah* scholarship. *Rashi* cites the *Midrash* which comments, "All that he (*Yaakov*) learned in the *yeshivah* of *Shem* and *Ever* during his fourteen years there, he transmitted to Yosef." This statement is ambiguous. Did *Yaakov* teach *Torah* only to Yosef and not to his other sons? *Yaakov* provided a *Torah* education for each of his twelve sons, emphatically raising them all to become *tzaddikim*. The *Midrash* in *Shemos Rabbah* implies however, that he imparted more *Torah* knowledge to Yosef than to all the others. Yosef was endowed with an acute analytic mind, so that he could grasp the secrets of *Torah* to which others were not privy. In this area of *Torah* knowledge, *Yaakov* and Yosef demonstrated their unique bond.

We may suggest another interpretation of the *Midrash*. *Yaakov* undoubtedly taught *Torah* to every one of his sons. He transmitted to them everything that he had absorbed in the *yeshivah* of *Shem* and *Ever*. He was a pure vehicle for transmission -- giving over each *Torah* lesson in its pristine form without additions or deletions. Essentially, he conveyed to all of his sons "everything" that he had learned in the *yeshivah*. This phenomenon was reflected most significantly in Yosef's behavior.

Yosef had been removed from the protective environment of his home at a young age and cast into a country that was infamous for its degeneracy. He was compelled to live with the dregs of society and relegated to performing menial and degrading tasks. Yet, he maintained his belief in Hashem; his commitment to the *Torah* and its *mitzvos* was unwavering. Why? What gave him the resolution to withstand temptation, the fortitude to triumph over depression and loneliness? It was the *Torah* which his father had taught him. Yosef had been taught the *Torah* in its entirety, not select segments which would be adaptable to his current lifestyle. His father was the medium for transmitting the *Torah* of *Shem* and *Ever* to the next generation. He did not "cut and paste" those *mitzvos* with which he was comfortable, while ignoring those which might seem antiquated or cumbersome. He had taught his sons "everything".

There is an important lesson to be learned from this concept. In order to be properly influenced by a school/*yeshivah* environment, one must maintain the attitude that he is there to absorb **everything** -- the *Torah* knowledge and its values. When we begin to discriminate against those values with which we are not comfortable, when we dissect every *mitzvah* to discern its pertinence, we undermine the purpose of the educational experience. We neutralize its effect on our children. *Yaakov Avinu* communicated the *Torah* in its entirety; everything that he himself had learned. Similarly, we should encourage our children to absorb all that they can, so that they will be inspired by the total educational experience.