

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

The *Bnei Yissachar*, Horav Tzvi Elimelech Shapiro, zl, cites (*Takanos Tamchin D'Oraisa*) Chazal (*Bava Basra* 21a) who credit Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Gamla with being the innovator of universal Torah education for all children. He was concerned for orphans who had no parent to teach them Torah. He set up Torah teachers in every province and district so that all children, regardless of parents or financial ability, would be availed Torah instruction. Chazal laud him for having ensured that the Jewish People would not forget the Torah. In the *Shulchan Aruch*, *Yoreh De'ah* 245:7, it is ruled that communal monies may be used to provide Torah instruction for all children, to the point that members of the community may be taxed to fulfill this responsibility.

The *Bnei Yissachar* observes that while one fulfills the Biblical injunction of *V'limadetem osam es bneichem* by teaching Torah to one's own child, he does not execute the Rabbinic command unless he provides for the instruction of all children – rich or poor. He adds that once Rabbi Yehoshua enacted his decree concerning universal Torah education, it underscored the Biblical *mitzvah* to the point that unless one provides Torah education for all children, he does not fulfill his personal Biblical *mitzvah* of *V'limadetem osam es bneichem*. Torah education that does not reach all aspects of the Jewish community is deficient in fulfilling the *mitzvah*.

This idea is based upon a ruling made by the *Pri Megadim* in his *pesichah*, preface, to *Orach Chaim* (3:78) where he states that if Chazal have added *chumros*, stringencies – which they feel enhances the *mitzvah* – one is not *yotzei*, does not fulfill his Biblical obligation unless he follows the Rabbinic enhancements. By adding their Rabbinic stringencies to the Biblical commandment, Chazal have altered the criteria from Biblical fulfillment, since the Torah commands us to follow Rabbinic interpretation. Therefore, since Rabbi Yehoshua ben Gamla entered his innovation into the *mitzvah's* criteria, one must see to it that all children study Torah. Otherwise, he has not fulfilled the Biblical command of *V'limadetem*.

Horav Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal, zl, concurs that the *mitzvah* of *V'limadetem* demands universal education in order to fulfill (even) the Biblical command, but for a different reason. He quotes Ramban in his commentary in *Devarim* 33:14 concerning the *pasuk*, *Torah tzivah lanu Moshe, morashah Kehillas Yaakov*, "The Torah that Moshe commanded us is the heritage of the Congregation of Yaakov." Ramban observes the Torah choice of the word *kehillas*, congregation, over *bais*, house (*bais Yaakov*), or *zera*, seed/children (of Yaakov). He suggests this alludes to the Torah's inclusion of not merely those born to Jewish parents, but all Jews, every Jew who joins the Jewish nation, accepting its *mitzvos* and living according to its traditions. Torah is the inheritance of all those who enter under the *halachic* rubric of Judaism. Torah for the *kahal*, congregation, includes converts.

With this in mind, Rav Teichtal posits that if Torah is the possession of the congregation, it should

be the responsibility of each and every Jew to see to it that every member of the Jewish *kahal* have access to it, even if he has no father to teach him. How is this achieved? How do we see to it that every member of the *kehillah* receives a Jewish education? We follow Rabbi Yehoshua *ben* Gamla's precedent. He showed us the way by providing Torah teachers in every Jewish community. It is insufficient to reach out only to individuals, since the Torah is a "group" inheritance, not an individual bequest. Thus, it behooves us to think outside of our self-proclaimed "box", and view all Jewish children as being part of our extended family, because – when all is said and done – they are.