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Vishinantam L'vanecha

"You Are To Repeat Them With Your Children"

An Education Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For Masters of Arts in Religious Education

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion,
School of Education, New York, New York

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There are arguably no more important statements in Judaism than the Sh'ma and the V'ahavta. Their words, calling us to hear, to listen, and to actively love and honor God and our tradition have been the fundamental expression of our faith and beliefs as a Jewish people. It is therefore not the least bit insignificant that the commandment to teach, the obligation to educate one's children is found within the verses of this sacred text: "*vishinantam l'vanecha*" – "and you should teach them to your sons." Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi in Bavli Shabbat קי"ט ב said, " אין עולם עומד אלא על הבל פ'הם של ת'נוקות של ב'ת רבן " The world exists only because of the prattle of children studying" The Talmud, in Kiddushin 29a offers a list of the obligations of the father toward the son. The Talmud calls upon the father "to circumcise his son, to redeem him, to teach him Torah, to have him wed, and to teach him a trade. Some also say to teach him to swim." Originally, the home was the classroom in which parents educated their children. Fathers taught their sons the ways of the Torah and tradition, and mothers taught their daughters to prepare them for their role as Jewish wives, mothers, and keepers of the home.

Eventually, as the demands of life became overwhelming, or parents did not have the skills necessary to educate their children, a school system was developed. This began as early as 100 BCE when Rabbi Shimon ben Shetach decreed the first compulsory school law.[1] In the middle ages, a *melammed* or Jewish studies teacher was entrusted with the elementary part of the child's education. He was compensated by the parents directly, and by Talmud Torah

[1] Wolfson, Dr. Ron "Shall You Teach Them Diligently?" The University of Judaism, 1983 p.2

societies in case of the parents' inability. The schools were attended by the children of the rich and poor alike. The higher branches of study were in the charge of a rabbi. There was a *bet ha-midrash* for pupils above fourteen. The sessions for elementary instruction were held in a room ("*heder*") in the house of the *melammed*; but the *bet ha-midrash* was a public building usually adjoining and sometimes a part of the synagogue. The aim was to impart versatility together with keenness in disputation. The discourses of the teachers were compiled and circulated. Various rules for teachers and pupils were laid down; *e.g.*: Each teacher should be as considerate of the pupils of a colleague as he is of his own. He should allow his pupils to attend the lectures of another teacher. The teacher should strive to awaken piety in his pupils. Pupils who advance rapidly should be removed into another class, so that they may not place the less advanced pupils at a disadvantage, and that they themselves may not be held back. Pupils should be allowed to share in a discussion out of scholarly interest, but not in a spirit of domination. Books must be treated with care, and it is meritorious to copy them extensively. School utensils are sacred—pens, the penknife, and such—and may not be misused.

Some of the pedagogic maxims in the "Sefer Hasidim" read as follows:

> Boys and girls shall not play together. If you raise orphans and observe they do improper things, do not hesitate (because of their being orphans) to rebuke them; otherwise you will sacrifice for the evil the good you intend. Punish them as you punish your own children, but not in anger. Children usually become what their parents are. If parents are dishonest as regards measures, weights, and money, the children, too, will be similarly dishonest. Assign to your children no tasks that are too difficult for them. Do not give your

children too much money, not even for good purposes. The parent is obliged to teach the maintenance of the faith to his daughters also.[2]

Apart from the Talmudic laws, the congregations of Spain, Italy, and Germany formulated regulations and so contributed toward the organization of Jewish educational work. Some of these regulations contained the following provisions: A congregation of fifteen families was required to maintain a teacher. Besides board and clothing, this teacher was to be paid a stipulated salary; and if the income from the contributions was inadequate, the congregation had to appropriate from its funds an amount sufficient to maintain him in a manner appropriate to his station. A community of forty families was required to maintain a teacher of Talmud, who lectured also on Halakha and Aggadah.

In Eastern Europe in the 19th century, the *heder* was established as the model to teach the details of Jewish life, law, and observance. As waves of Jews immigrated to the United States, they realized that the path to success and 'Americanization' lay in the public schools and mostly abandoned the educational model of the *heder* that they had brought with them. To make up for the lack in religious education, a series of communal supplementary schools were established, and parents looked to these new institutions to provide their children with the Jewish education that they were no longer willing/able to provide.
As parents discharged their responsibility to "teach them to your sons" to the religious schools and the synagogues, the home often became devoid of ritual

[2]http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=140&letter=P&search=medieval%20jewish%20education#532

observance and religious activity, and the messages that the children received in their supplemental schools were often incongruent with the lessons they were witnessing at home. Abraham Joshua Heschel, at a conference on the Jewish family in 1972 said, "A Jewish home is where Judaism is at home."[3] Our supplemental schools may allow our children to be educated jewishly, but as Heschel put it best,

> The biblical injunction does not say that we are to appoint a teacher to train our children. The biblical injunction is that parent be the teacher...thou shalt teach them diligently, not vicariously.[4]

There have been significant innovations in the field of Jewish education, but also significant problems. Too many studies have shown that our supplementary schools are not succeeding at providing their students with lasting Jewish knowledge, or at times even with basic skills. Educators have long been struggling to figure out how to resolve the problems inherent in the supplementary schools system.

My path to writing this thesis has been long and winding. When I first entered the MARE program, I was convinced that I wanted to be a day school educator. As the product of a day school education and the parent of a day school student, I really believe that day school is the best choice for the most comprehensive Jewish education. The fact remains however that most Jewish children are not enrolled in Jewish day schools. Instead, they receive the majority if not all of their

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[3] Wolfson, Dr. Ron "Shall You Teach Them Diligently?" The University of Judaism, 1983 p.2

[4] Ibid, p.9

Jewish education in some sort of supplementary school system. After my first semester at HUC-JIR, I quickly recognized that I was not really interested in working within the day school system. After facilitating a series of adult education workshops and classes, I realized that I really enjoyed the challenges and rewards of working with adults. When I was asked by Dr. Lisa Grant to craft a philosophy of Jewish education, I wrote a proposal that advocated for the teaching of a 'Judaism lite' type program geared to adult learners. As I began working on this thesis and started examining the biblical commandment to parents to educate their children, I eventually came to the conclusion that we must educate parents along with and alongside their children. It is not enough to have jewishly educated parents and/or Jewishly educated children, we must have both. We, as educators have a distinct responsibility to provide parents and children with a common language that they can use together to guide their behaviors and shape their lives.

This thesis will examine the biblical commandment to educate one's children and its implications for parents and the religious school system. I will consider how the medieval commentators on the Pentateuch interpreted this verse in Deuteronomy, how some of our modern interpreters of the Bible have translated it, and the problems and questions this injunction raises in light of our modern and reformed theories of education. We will take a brief look at the history of Jewish education in America, and the different models of supplementary school programs and experiences that have been tried over the years. We will look at

the current models of family education programs, and I will examine what works and what is woefully lacking. Finally, I will present a model of a program of Jewish parent and child education that I believe can reconcile the discrepancies that lie at the heart of this problem.

In Deuteronomy 6:7, we are enjoined with the commandment to educate our children (specifically our sons). The language that the Bible uses to elucidate this commandment is one that begs commentary and explanation. Why do the authors of the Bible use the word "*vishinantam*" and not the more oft used "*ulimaditem*" which is typically used by the text when referring to matters of teaching? The medieval commentators included in the *Mikraot Gedolot* ask this same question. Their answers vary in detail although follow closely on a similar theme of the ways in which one is obligated to educate the next generation. Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki (1040-1105), Rashi, is perhaps the most widely known and most often quoted of the medieval commentators. Rashi studied at the academies of Worms and Mainz where his main teachers were R. Jacob ben Yakar and R. Isaac ben Judah at Mainz, and R. Isaac ben Eleazar at Worms. Rashi maintained a close relationship with his teachers and often returned to study with them at the academies whenever he was confronted with unclear or troubling texts. Rashi founded a school c. 1070 that attracted many pupils, among them his own grandchildren who went on to be the founders of the school of *Tosefot*. Rashi derived much help with his commentaries from *Targum Onkelos*.

Rashi translates the word *vishinantam* as to teach them but using 'a language of sharpness.' Rashi does not mean that the parent/teacher should speak to his students sharply, but that the words of the lesson, the words of Torah will be ready at the teeth of the students. If one were asked a question, he should be able to answer it 'sharply', without hesitation and without stuttering. Rashi is also

the only one of the medieval commentators to comment on the word "*l'vanecha*"- "to your sons" and to clarify exactly to whom the text refers. Rashi expands the definition of "sons" to students so the phrase can be translated as "teach them diligently to your sons, or if one is teaching others in addition to his own children, he is fulfilling the commandment by "teaching them diligently to your students."

Rashbam, R. Shmuel b. Meir, also translates the word "*vishinantam*" as using "language of sharpness". Rashbam explains that when one is teaching, one should teach in a way that the answers to whatever questions are posed to the students should be at the tips of their tongues; there should be absolutely no hesitation when they are asked to answer a Torah question. Also incumbent in this requirement according to Rashbam is that the teacher should talk words of Torah to his students at length. He should not just give them the basics or the short answers, but expound on words of Torah to ensure that the students learn their lessons well.

Rabbi Saadiah Gaon also comments on the use of the word "*vishinantam.*" He explains that the word simply means, "and you should tell them." One can surmise from Rabbi Saadiah Gaon's basic translation, that he believes that the commandment to teach one's sons is fulfilled by the basic transfer of knowledge from teacher to student; it is enough to simply tell them. As far as we can surmise, whether or not the student can make meaning for himself or internalize the lessons learned stands outside of the biblical obligation to teach.

Rabbi Saadiah Gaon (882-942)[5] is known to be the greatest scholar and author of the Gaonic period. While functioning as the major leader of Babylonian Jewry, Saadiah Gaon translated the Bible into Arabic. He did this in two ways: he prepared a translation complete with extensive commentary for the learned reader, and also prepared another that served as both translation and commentary so that it would be more accessible to the average reader. R. Saadiah Gaon's translations of the Bible were not literal translations; he translated freely often ignoring syntax and paraphrasing entire chapters. As a means of popular religious enlightenment, Rabbi Saadiah Gaon's translation presented the Scriptures even to the unlearned in a rational form, which aimed at the greatest possible degree of clearness and consistency. His system of hermeneutics, furthermore, was not limited to the exegesis of individual passages, but treated also each book of the Bible as a whole, and showed the connection of its various portions with one another. He also used the Arabic alphabet when writing his books as opposed to the Hebrew alphabet more commonly used by scholars of his era. Rabbi Saadiah Gaon was obviously motivated to bring the Bible and the sacred writings to the level of the 'everyman'. It is therefore wholly unsurprising that Rabbi Saadiah Gaon would advocate for the basic transmission of Jewish knowledge from parent to child. It is clear that the Gaon was keenly aware that not all men were scholars, and one can surmise that it was keenly important to him that the material be communicated at least on a basic level, if not fully absorbed and integrated.

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[5] Encyclopedia Judaica

Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra translated *vishinantam* as using a language of sharpening as opposed to the language of sharpness. Ibn Ezra said, just like one sharpens an arrow by going up and down and from side to side over the arrow with the sharpening tool, when one teaches Torah one should review the lessons over and over from all angles so one can be sure that the students have learned the lesson well.

Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089 – 1164) began his exegetical activity in Rome in 1140[6]. Ibn Ezra followed the literal meanings of the text, but drew on his observations of life and the experiences he gained in travel to help him in his interpretations. Ibn Ezra's commentaries were second in popularity only to Rashi's because of "their encyclopedic character"[7] and because of their terse, concise, and enigmatic style. Ibn Ezra's commentaries were also critical, thought provoking, and contained elements of both wit and satire.

Rabbi Obadiah ben Jacob Sforno, commonly referred to as Sforno, translated *vishinantam* as to teach students using a sharpness of language coupled with wondrous intellectualism. Sforno (c. 1470-c. 1550), was an Italian biblical commentator and also a physician. Sforno generally limited himself to literal exegesis on Biblical text. Instead of dealing with individual difficulties separately within a text, Sforno preferred to incorporate the solution in a brief running commentary on the passage as a whole. Through his commentaries, Sforno aimed at inculcating a love for mankind in general and not strictly love and

[6] Encyclopedia Judaica
[7] ibid, p. 1167

respect aimed at fellow Jews. This is reflected throughout his commentaries through his frequent references to humanistic ideas.

Because Sforno was a scientist as well as a scholar it is easy to imagine his love for science and the intellect as well as his love for humankind. In his translation of the injunction to teach one's children, Sforno advocates using sharp language to teach, but also not 'dumbing down' material. Sforno speaks of "wondrous intellectualism", instilling in students the wonders of the material that they are learning and using a language that conveys both the seriousness and the grandness of the lessons.

While the medieval commentators differ in the nuances of their translations of the word *vishinantam*, their translations all follow the same theme. We are not only commanded to teach our children, we are commanded to teach them well, to ensure that they actually are absorbing the material and can answer questions quickly and confidently when they are asked. The commentators are concerned with the content; they want to make it clear that the information needs to be transmitted, that the teacher/parent is the instructor and the students are the vessels into which knowledge is to be poured. The commentators of the *Mikraot Gedolot* were not concerned that our students have a meaningful educational experience or that the material 'speaks to them'. Obviously it is easy to presume that the commentators believe it to be of key importance that the child and parents lead a Torah life. We are told time and again through their various commentaries how we are to act and how we are to believe as proper Jews.

Regarding the biblical commandment to teach however, the commentators make it clear to us through their translations that the essence of this commandment is that the students learn the material thoroughly so they will be able to recite it and eventually be able themselves to pass it on to further generations.

There are not many modern commentaries that deal specifically with the words *vishinantam l'vanecha* found in Deuteronomy 6:7. As I have already explored in some depth how the commentators of the medieval period dealt with this phrase, I choose now to look at various editions of the Tanakh and examine how those translators chose to deal with these words. As with the translations of the medieval commentators, here too I found a general theme of agreement among the various translations with slight nuances of difference often contained in the commentary notes printed on the sides or bottom of the page.
In the Schocken Bible, Everett Fox translates *vishinantam l'vanecha* as, "You are to repeat them with your children."[8] It is interesting and quite striking to see that with the word **with**, Fox has transformed this commandment and has changed the model for teaching from one where the parent holds all the knowledge and transmits it to his children, to one where the parent must also be actively engaged in the learning experience **together** with his children. We will return to this model at a later point in this thesis.

Dr. Fox received a B.A., M.A., and Ph.D from Brandeis University in 1968, 1972, and 1975, respectively. Dr. Fox's main scholarly focus is the rhetoric and internal

[8] The Five Books of Moses – The Schocken Bible v.1 p. 881

coherence of the Hebrew Bible, and how they may be brought out in translation. In 1995, Everett published The Five Books of Moses, which tries to echo characteristics of the Hebrew text; in November of 1999, Give Us a King! Samuel, Saul, and David, a translation of the book of Samuel along similar lines, appeared. He is also interested in how the Bible has been transformed at each stage by generations of Israelites, Jews, and Christians. Fox is perhaps best known for his translation into English of the Torah. His translation is heavily influenced by the principles of Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig who in 1962 completed their translation of the Old Testament into German. The main guiding principle of the work is that the sound of the Hebrew text should be translated as closely as possible. Instances of word play, puns, word repetition, alliteration, and other literary devices of sound are reproduced in English.[9]

Samson Raphael Hirsch in his translation of the Pentateuch the T'rumath Tzvi, offers as his translation, "...and impress them sharply upon your sons."[10] In his translation of this word, Hirsch incorporates the literal meaning as commentary well as the translation provided by many of the medieval commentators. Hirsch's book also includes supplementary commentary:

> The renewal of our awareness of God's unity (the Sh'ma) and unity of our life's task (the V'ahavta) that is at its logical outgrowth; the subordination of all our thoughts and desires to these basic truths of our mission and to the resultant laws revealed by God in His law, and hence our task to educate our children and ourselves by teaching them, and studying these basic laws and truths.[11]

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[9] http://www.clarku.edu/academiccatalog/facultybio.cfm?id=365
[10] T'rumath Tzvi – The Pentateuch with a Translation by Samson Raphael Hirsch, p 682
[11] ibid

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) was chief rabbi of several German and Austrian districts. He was the founder of "Neo-Orthodoxy"[12], the revival of Orthodox Judaism into a somewhat modernized form. Hirsch published many books among them a text-book on Judaism for educated Jewish youth, and a polemical essay against the reforms in Judaism that were being proposed at the time. Hirsch's understanding of modern Judaism became known as "Torah *im Derekh Eretz*"[13]. Hirsch explained this as full engagement with western culture while maintaining adherence to Jewish law. He argued that "Jews have a divinely ordained role to play in the world, which requires both Jewish education and a role in the modern world."[14]

The JPS Tanakh translates the phrase as "impress them upon your children".[15] The commentary on this verse states,

> Essential to Deuteronomy's aim of disseminating knowledge of God's laws widely among the citizenry is that parents teach them to their children and speak of them constantly among themselves.[16]

The JPS Tanakh is an entirely original translation of the sacred writings into contemporary English, based on the *Masoretic* (the traditional Hebrew) text. It is the culmination of three decades of collaboration by academic scholars and rabbis, representing the three largest branches of organized Judaism in the United States. The translators made use of the entire range of biblical

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[12] Jewish Encyclopedia.com
[13] Jewish Virtual Library.org
[14] ibid
[15] The JPS Torah Commentary, Deuteronomy. p.78
[16] ibid

interpretation, ancient and modern, Jewish and non-Jewish. They drew upon the latest findings in linguistics and archaeology, as well as the work of early rabbinic and medieval commentators and grammarians.[17]

The Etz Hayim (based on the JPS translation), also translates this verse to mean "impress them upon your children."[18] The commentary goes on to specify who is required to teach and who is required to be taught. "*L'vanecha*" literally means "your sons" but here a quote from Sifrei is included to expand the definition, "not only your biologic children but anyone whose impression of Judaism is likely to be shaped by their contact with you."[19] The commentary also quotes BT Kiddushin 30a, which includes grandparents in the obligation to teach these things to their grandchildren.[20]

The Plaut translation of the Torah (which bases its translations on the JPS translation as well), uses the words "impress upon..." as well. Plaut commentary explains the use of the word *vishinantam* with two different verb roots. The first one is the root שנן – to sharpen or to make an incision, not unlike the translations of the medieval commentators who spoke of "a language of sharpness." The second root word is שנה – to repeat, that the lessons should be repeated many times over to ensure that the students learn the lessons well.[21]

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[17] http://www.jewishpub.org
[18] Etz Hayim Torah and Commentary, p.1026
[19] ibid
[20] ibid
[21] The Torah- A Modern Commentary, Ed. Gunther Plaut, p. 1366

In the UAHC Press's book, A Torah Commentary For Our Times, Harvey Fields quotes the Jerusalem Post's "Torah Today" section,

> Pinchas Peli agrees with Plaut's emphasis on doing Mitzvot as the primary expression of our love for God. He maintains, however, that while the love of God results "from the awareness of the oneness of God," it is proven in the way it influences us to set an example for others. Peli calls attention to Moses' command to..."teach them diligently to your children..." He explains that the teaching with which we are concerned here is not done by passing on information or by parenting or issuing orders but by personal example, which by its sheer sincerity and passion should be qualified to impress our children or students...Peli writes, "your children will be taught by the fact that you yourself practice your religion...action and thought must go together in the life of the truly religious person."[22]

It is clear from the words of the Bible itself and the various commentaries and sources I have quoted, that we are required to teach our children and students words of Torah. It is also clear that incumbent in this requirement to teach is the responsibility to ensure that the students learn the lessons well and can recite the information when asked. As a Jewish educator schooled in modern education theory, I question whether teaching children "sharply" so that they are "able to answer questions without hesitating "is really the best way to enculturate our students with a love of Judaism and an understanding of our tradition and the Torah. Jonathan Sarna maintained, "Jewish education serves as the vehicle through which we can train successive generations of Jews to negotiate their own way as Jews in the American arena."[23] Obviously, we want our students and children to learn the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, the customs of our holidays,

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[22] A Torah Commentary For Our Times, v. 3 Harvey J. Fields, p. 113-15

[23] Jonathan D. Sarna, "American Jewish Education in Historical Perspective". Journal of Jewish Education 64:8 – 21.

and to have at least basic knowledge of their religion. We should also strive to instill in them a love for Judaism, one that informs their behaviors and the way they live their lives. As Samuel Heilman said in his report titled "Inside the Jewish School",

> Nevertheless, while we are interested in whether or not our students go through the traditional texts and cover the lesson plans, we are also concerned about the extent to which these texts and all they signify manage to get through to them, to penetrate their consciousness and character, their environment and culture.[24]

When talking about education, there have generally been two ideas on how best to educate; child centered education and subject centered education. 'Traditional' educators have long been proponents of subject centered education, while their 'progressive' opponents have been arguing for the need for a child centered educational system and experience. For the purposes of this thesis, I will henceforth refer to the subject centered view as the "mimetic" tradition, and its child centered opponent as the "transformative" tradition.[25] The mimetic tradition is one in which knowledge is passed from teacher to learner through an essentially imitative process. In this tradition, one person holds the knowledge and passes it on to the next person so that by the end of the cycle both people hold the same knowledge. As Phillip Jackson says in "The Practice of Teaching,"

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[24] Samuel Heilman, "Inside the Jewish School" What We Know About Jewish Education, ed, Stuart Kelman (Los Angeles: Torah Aura, 1992) p.303

[25] Phillip W. Jackson, The Practice of Teaching, (New York: Teachers College Columbia University,) p.117h

"What the teacher (or textbook or computer) knows, that shall the student come to know."[26] Mimetic knowledge is essentially a process consisting of five steps:

1. **Test**. The student is challenged to see what knowledge he might already posses.
2. **Present**. If the student is shown to be lacking knowledge, the teacher "presents" to him the material.
3. **Perform/Evaluate**. The student is then requested to repeat back to the teacher the information that he has just been given.
4. **Reward/Fix**. If the student has shown proficiency in mastering the lessons (i.e. "without stuttering"), the student is praised or rewarded. If in fact the student does not have the answers "ready at his teeth", remediation may be suggested and the process would begin again.
5. **Advance**. One the student has shown that he has mastered the required set of skills; he is allowed to move on to the next level of prescribed steps.[27]

The transformative tradition describes, "A transformation of one kind or another in the person being taught - a qualitative change often of dramatic proportion, a metamorphosis, so to speak."[28] According to O' Sullivan,

> Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and irreversibly alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans

[26] ibid
[27] ibid, p. 119-20
[28] ibid. p. 120-21

> and the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender, our body awareness, our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy.[29]

A transformative educational experience is harder to assess. It can not be measured with a swift response to a question, nor can it be judged by a correct answer on an exam. The transformative tradition does not disregard the importance of the learner acquiring skills and a larger knowledge base, however unlike the mimetic tradition it does not view those goals as the ultimate objective of an educational experience. If we wish to educate our children so that they will be able to take their lessons to heart and in turn educate their children, it must be a transformative educational experience; they must be changed as a result of what they have learned. Samson Raphael Hirsch said (when speaking of the flawed religious school system in his time), "What, in truth, can these religious extracts, printed, copied and learned by heart, achieve?"[30] There must be a better way for us to fulfill the commandment of *vishinantam l'vanecha* and effect changes in our own lives and the lives of our children/students. W. B. Yeats said, "Education is not the filling of a bucket, but the lighting of a fire."[31]

Even though Rashi, in his commentary on the word *l'vanecha* in Deuteronomy 6:7 expands the definition of sons to include students, it must not be understood by parents as their 'get out of jail free' card to excuse them from participating in

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[29] E. O'Sullivan, "Bringing a perspective of Transformative Learning to Globalized Consumption", International Journal of Consumer Studies, 27.4 (2003): 326-330
[30] S.R. Hirsch, Judaism Eternal, Vol. 1, p. 178
[31] http://en.thinkexist.com/quotes/william_butler_yeats/2.html

their children's Jewish education. Mordecai Kaplan, founder of the Reconstructionist movement said,

> The home is undoubtedly the most determining influence in the formation of character. Scarcely any phase of the problem of Judaism could be more urgent than that of getting the Jewish home to instill into the child Jewish ideals and religion. It is necessary to devise some way of reaching the home and enlisting its cooperation with Jewish educational endeavor conceived as an all-comprehensive communal undertaking. [32]

We are taught in Proverbs 1:8 "Hear my son the instruction of your father and do not forsake the teachings of your mother," however if parents do not have the skills or the knowledge necessary to educate their children themselves, they are required to hire a teacher for themselves and their children so that they may fulfill the commandment of *vishinantam l'vanecha* as we are told in *Pirkei Avot* – Ethics of the Fathers, "Joshua the son of Perachia would say: Assume for yourself a master..."[33] Mordecai Kaplan was once asked, "What kind of Jewish education can a parent, who has never received one himself, give his child?" Kaplan answered, "NONE AT ALL: therefore the parent has an obligation to educate himself along with his children."[34] A commitment to Jewish education needs to include a fundamental change in the way Jewish parents think about Jewish education. The home needs to be a place where Jewish learning is respected

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[32] M. Kaplan, Judaism as a Civilization, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1994) pp.38-44

[33] Ethics of the Fathers, Chapter 1:6

[34] M. Kaplan, Questions Jews Ask, (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1956) p. 351

and practiced, and where parents are as Jewishly educated as their children, if not more so.[35]

In addition to the biblical commandment we are given in Deuteronomy 6:7, the Bible again repeats its directive to educate ones children Jewishly. In Deuteronomy 11:19, we are once again enjoined to ולמדתם אתם את בנכם לדבר בם "You shall teach them to your children to discuss them..." In fact, the study of Torah was so valued for its own sake and for ensuring the continuity of the Jewish people, that the Talmud says, "Studying Torah is greater than sacrificing regular burnt offerings." (Eruvin 63b)

When the Talmud Torahs were first established c. 100 BCE, they were not set up as replacements for parental involvement in their children's education, "And you yourselves shall teach words of Torah to your children; a parent must teach his child. Since many children were not receiving an education, the sages set up a school system." (BT Baba Batra 21a) Instead, the Talmud Torah did little for what was then considered the properly religious teaching and training of the student; that was left to the parents. The main objective of these early schools was to instruct the student in the laws and in the rabbinical writings, more from a literary standpoint than one of practical necessity. In later times, reading of the prayers was added as well as teaching the principles of Jewish faith and belief. [36] Eventually, the Talmud Torah became the main arena for educating Jewish

[35] http://www.jewishworldreview.com/cols/tobin061298.html
[36] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talmud_Torah

children and in the Sephardic schools in particular, strict curriculums were created to ensure generations of properly educated, knowledgeable Jews.

In Israel/Palestine as well as in Eastern Europe, the Heder (colloquial name for old fashioned Jewish elementary school,) school system was widely spread and most often used by parents wishing to provide a Jewish education for their children. Lessons frequently took place at the teacher's home and boys of differing ages were taught together in one room. The children entered the school typically at five years of age, and there they studied the rudiments of Judaism as well the Tanakh and the Talmud. The main techniques of learning were generally memorization and reading the lessons aloud. Often, the teachers were not qualified and many times students were advanced to the next level because advanced students paid more in tuition fees.[37]

Once many of these Eastern European Jews immigrated to America, they tried to bring the Heder model with them. When they reached American soil, the heder was transformed from an all day 'day school' to the supplementary school model. These schools were often no more successful or well run in America than they had been in the Shtetls of Eastern Europe. In fact, the ill tempered rabbi and disinterested student often became the fodder for literary works of fiction. Henry Roth published Call It Sleep in 1934. The novel details a few years in the life of David Schearl, the son of a doting mother and borderline abusive father. David is plagued by questions of belonging, of a childhood and family struggling to find an identity as immigrants in America. In one poignant scene, young David is taken by his mother to the Talmud Torah to meet the rabbi, Reb Yidel.

[37] ibid

> The boy fumbled on. As far as David could tell, he seemed to be making the same error over and over again, for the rabbi kept repeating the same sound. At last, the rabbi's patience gave out. He dropped the pointer; the boy ducked, but not soon enough. The speeding plane of the rabbi's palm rang against his ear like the clapper on a gong. "You plaster dunce!" he roared, "when will you learn a byse is a byse and not a vyse. Head of filth, where are your eyes?" ..."May a demon fly off with your father's father! Won't blows help you? A byse, Esau, pig! A byse! Remember, a byse, even though you die of convulsions!"[38]

In 1959, Phillip Roth published Goodbye Columbus, which included the short story "The Conversion of the Jews". The story depicts a scene in an afternoon, supplemental school taught by an elderly rabbi.

> When it was Ozzie's turn to read aloud from the Hebrew book the rabbi asked him petulantly why he didn't read more rapidly. He was showing no progress. Ozzie said he could read faster but that if he did he was sure not to understand what he was reading. Nevertheless, at the rabbi's repeated suggestion Ozzie tried, and showed a great deal of talent, but in the midst of a long passage he stopped short and said that he didn't understand a word he was reading, and started in again at a drag-footed pace. Then came the soul-battering.[39]

For the Jews who had been living in America during the 1800's and the Jews who came from Germany and other cities in Western Europe, the road to establishing religious supplementary schools was more winding. Initially, these schools were modeled after the Christian Sunday schools and even at times adapted Christian Sunday school textbooks by blotting out or pasting over objectionable material, for use in the Jewish Sunday school. In the late 19th century, concerned about assimilation, intermarriage, the growth of Ethical Culture, and a rise in anti-Semitism, there was a rush by America's young Jews

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[38] H. Roth Call It Sleep (Canada: HarperCollinsCanadaLtd, 1962) p.215
[39] P. Roth, Goodbye Columbus (New York: Random House, 1959) p.145

to revitalize Judaism and Jewish education. [40]At first this surge for revitalization was manifested as a Hebraist movement, in which proponents believed that, "the Hebrew language...would promote Jewish group loyalty, prevent assimilation, and bring on a new world."[41] Later in 1910, after being confronted by a report prepared by Mordecai Kaplan and Bernard Cronson that demonstrated in a scientific way that between 75-80% of New York's Jews were receiving no formal Jewish education, there was once again a push to revitalize and reinvent formal Jewish education. Samson Benderly, a brilliant educator and innovator, sought to apply new educational thoughts and theories to Jewish religious training. As the head of the Baltimore Hebrew Free School, he used his school to run his experiments in the field of education. Under Benderly's guidance, a program of informal teacher training was instituted. He believed that the supplementary school system needed to be revamped and revitalized so that it would be "so interesting and stimulating as to get the response of even tired children."[42] Benderly believed that Jews in America were,

> under an obligation to demonstrate that the principles (of Judaism) ...are perfectly compatible with and essential to the fundamental principles upon which the American nation is building a wonderful structure of human liberty and happiness...as the great public school system is the rock bottom upon which this country is rearing its institutions, so we Jews must evolve here a system of Jewish education that shall be complementary to and harmonious with the public school system.[43]

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[40] Jonathan D. Sarna, "American Jewish Education in Historical Perspective". Journal of Jewish Education 64:8 – 21.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Arthur A. Goren, New York Jews and the Quest for Community (New York & London: Columbia University Press) 1970, p. 97

[43] Ibid

American Jewish education became focused on a program of *ivrit be-ivrit*- a curriculum based on Hebrew language mastery. The *ivrit be ivrit* program did not suffer from lack of longevity. Quite the contrary, this controversial curriculum lasted into the 1970's. Notwithstanding its endurance, despite their best intentions the designers of this program led by Samson Benderly, failed to achieve their intended goals. The *ivrit be-ivrit* program did not and could not provide its students with the necessary tools to negotiate comfortably between their two worlds and their two identities as Americans and as Jews.[44] Once again, educators and clergy were challenged to come with programs and theories that would not only allow Jews to integrate their many identities comfortably, but could also ensure the continuity of a Jewishly educated class of Jews.

After World War Two and the destruction of European Jewry in the Holocaust, the number of Jews in the United States who were synagogue members exploded. Along with this rapid rise in dues paying Jews, there was also an increase in the number of Jewish children enrolled in some sort of Jewish supplementary school. [45] Even though there were large numbers of children enrolled in these afternoon schools, the schools were not without their problems. The Ackerman article written in 1969, describes the problems with the supplemental religious schools at their most basic level,

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[44] Ibid
[45] Walter I. Ackerman, "Jewish Education – For What?" American Jewish Yearbook 70, 1969 p.5

> When judged by even the least demanding standard of what it means to be an educated Jew, it is hard to avoid the feeling that the academic aspirations of the one-day-a-week school are either a colossal joke or an act of cynical pretentiousness. The plethora of subject matter of its curriculum is certainly beyond serious treatment in the available time, and even the most serious and able student cannot hope to acquire more than a hopeless hodgepodge of information...the three-days-a-week school characteristic of the Conservative movement cannot claim happier results. A recent study shows that even when pupils complete the requirements established by the curriculum they have no recognizable fluency in Hebrew and cannot understand more than carefully edited texts based on limited vocabulary.[46]

Further studies conducted in 1977 led to similar conclusions,

> Most Jewish schools produce graduates who are functionally illiterate in Judaism and not clearly positive in their attitudinal identification...Graduates look back without joy on their educational experience.[47]

And again, from a study in 1989 of thirty nine supplementary schools in the New York area conducted the Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York,

> Schools do a very poor job in increasing Jewish knowledge in all subject areas; they show no success in guiding children toward increased Jewish involvement; and they demonstrate an inability to influence positive growth in Jewish attitudes.[48]

In spite of these very large and crucial problems in the religious school system, no one could argue that there was not a vital need for Jewish education; instead, what was needed was an overhaul of the education system as it stood. As Jan Katzew, Director, UAHC Department of Lifelong Learning said, "Jewish education is not a luxury of convenience, but a necessity of conviction."[49] Educators and members of the clergy realized that everyone, parents and children needed to be

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[46] Ibid, pp. 21-2
[47] Isa Aron, A Congregation of Learners, (New York: URJ Press) 1995
[48] Ibid
[49] Jan Katzew, The 2003 Jewish Educational State of the Union. (New York: UAHC Press) 2003

engaged in Jewish learning, and that this learning needed to be stressed as a lifelong endeavor. They also realized that one of the ways to ensure Jewish continuity was the "transformation of the educational thrust of the synagogue from supplementary schooling for pupils to Jewish family education."[50] Supplemental school is just that; supplemental. As our studies suggested, too many students were and are still not receiving any instruction from their families in the home and the families were/are relying entirely on an institution that by its very nature should function as the enhancement and extension of ongoing education. Rabbi Hanan Alexander, in a article written for the Jewish Journal wrote of the crisis of education facing Jewish families,

> Statistical abstractions about assimilation and Jewish illiteracy veil the simpler reality that large sectors of the Jewish population now lead lives essentially empty of Jewish content — even in Israel. In many families, parents know almost nothing about Jewish culture, history, religion or ways of thinking and behaving. They have nothing substantive to pass on to their children. [51]

Jewish family education if done correctly, should allow parents to once again become the educators of their children. It should allow families to not only spend quality 'Jewish' time together, but to actually learn together and engage with the tradition. Family education experiences should not be designed as a showcase for children's artistic talents, or as an opportunity for a recital. Family education must arouse curiosity and interest in all participants, and it must instill and nourish the desire for greater and continued learning experiences.

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[50] Isa Aron, A Congregation of Learners, (New York: URJ Press) 1995
[51] http://www.jewishjournal.com/home/preview.php?id=11233 10/17/2003

Among the most promising innovations in Jewish education, family education aims to build a broader, more cohesive and more literate Jewish community in which the family assumes a central role in providing Jewish experience, growth and learning.

> JFE is a method for teaching Judaism, not an ideology of Judaism. By empowering the family, however, it does further the agenda of pluralism and denominational tolerance. Its aim, whether it is used in Orthodox, liberal or secular contexts, is to validate people's own approaches, to build on what they know already and, especially, to use the stories, customs and knowledge that exist within families to awaken members to the pleasures of being Jews together.[52]

Numerous models and approaches in the field of family education have emerged over the past two and a half decades. They include among them: The United Synagogue for Conservative Judaism's PEP: Parent Education Program and the PACE program created by Jo Kay. In both these programs, parents attend classes to learn the content that their children are covering in a class together with the children, and then they attend a separate, adults only class.

There are different frameworks that one can use when planning a family education program. One of these structures is the R.E.A.C. H. model outlined by Harlene Winnick Appelman and Joan S. Kaye. The R.E.A.C.H. model consists of five steps that are designed to lead families "toward the ultimate goal of Jewish family education: Jewish living."[53]

1. Recognition – families should recognize the Jewish behaviors that are already part of their lives. By seeing that they already have elements in

[52] Ibid

[53] H. W. Appelman and J.S. Kaye, "Curricularizing Jewish Family Education" First Fruit V Breaking New Ground

their family life that are Jewish, they can be encouraged to take the next steps.

2. Enhancement – encouraging families to add Jewish components to things they already do, or intensify existing behaviors.
3. Adoption – families might begin to incorporate Jewish behaviors into their everyday life, "and experience a conscious desire for Jewish living that comes from inside themselves rather than from outside expectations."[54]
4. Community – Jewish families who have been engaged in learning together can begin to create communities that gather outside of the educational experiences.
5. Hevrah – at this stage, families will find support in their communities not just for lifecycle events, but also for Jewish living. The family education programs in which these families participated, should lead to a change in practice, and specifically the formation of lifelong Jewish habits.

According to Jo Kay, there were 10 specific things that helped make the PACE program so successful. In an article written fifteen years after the program began, Kay reflects, "Successful family education programs should strive to be: affective, cognitive (provide skills), communal (democratic learning process), personal, supportive, fun, empowering, comforting, transferable, special (ownership). "[55] PACE and other family education programs offer families the opportunity to

[54] Ibid
[55] Jo Kay, "Fifteen Years Later- PACE Families Revisited", First Fruit 2 Whizin Landscapes.

become Jews at home and in the world, and not just the synagogue Jews that they are most often trained to be.

Jan Katzew wrote of the monumental need for parental involvement in their children's Jewish education,

> Moses understood that while Jews would need an army to defend their land, they would need schools to defend their values. And for the next 3,000 years, we built our communities around schools, and as stated in the most famous of our prayers, we took the words that God commanded us in order to teach them diligently to our children...we know that the school cannot succeed on its own- that it needs the active participation of parents.[56]

Maimonides too, in Mishna Torah stressed the importance of parents educating themselves as well as their children,

> If a parent wishes to study Torah, and he has a child who must also learn – the parent takes precedence. However, if the child is more insightful or quicker to grasp what there is to be learned, the child takes precedence. Even though the child gains priority thereby, the parent must not ignore his own study, for just as it is a Mitzvah to educate the child, so, too, is the parent commanded to teach himself.[57]

Both the PEP and the PACE program have a parallel learning component for the adults as part of their programs. Parents participate in specially designed lessons with their children, and then meet alone to study material that may or may not be directly related to the Hebrew School curriculum. These parallel learning classes provide parents with the prospect of creating community. They allow for the possibility of the parents engaging in further adult learning often unrelated to the family education classes, and frequently to additional participation by the family

[56] http://archive.jesna.org//pdfs/agenda_15.pdf
[57] Maimonides, Mishna Torah (Laws of Torah Study 1:4)

in synagogue life. Parents and children may also be inspired to share emotional responses to their experience of the parallel learning, and also to the material covered in the classes, thereby bringing the families closer together.

Jo Kay says about parallel learning, "The parallel learning class allows parents to learn without the embarrassment of appearing foolish to their children."[58] I believe that this is a valid concern for parents, but imagine if the parents were learning the same material alongside their children. It would not just be an opportunity for parents and children to spend time together, but it would be a real chance for families to connect as they struggled together to create meaning for themselves out of the new material that they are learning together. The goals of a Jewish family education program like PEP or PACE are quite clear:

- To involve the entire family in the educational process
- To bring the family into the school, and the school into the home
- To create Jewish self esteem by transmitting knowledge, skills, and values, within a Jewish context for the entire family
- To enable students and their families to become part of a community that studies, worships, and celebrates together. [59]

For many parents, these family education programs do not function as enhancing or supplementing their Jewish education, they function as their **only** Jewish education experiences. The Mishna stresses the importance of Torah study,

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[58] J. Kay, "Parallel Learning and Parent Empowerment". First Fruit – A Whizin Anthology of Jewish Family Education, ed. Adrienne Bank and Ron Wolfson, (Los Angeles: The Shirley and Arthur Whizin Institute for Jewish Family Life) 1998

[59] J. Kay, PACE: Parent and Child Education Family Education Model (handout)

> These are the things, the fruits of which man enjoys in this world, while the reward remains for him in the World to Come: honoring one's father and mother, performing deeds of kindness, making peace between man and his fellowman. And the study of Torah is equal to all of them. (Mishna: Pe'ah 1:1.)

But how can one expect a parent to be fully engaging in Torah study when he/she does not even know the basic building blocks of Jewish education, e.g. the Aleph Bet? Imagine a scenario where the parent and child are equals in their lack of Jewish knowledge. The parent cannot help the child process the new information that he is learning in Religious school, and the parent may be too embarrassed, or unwilling for various reasons to sign up on his own for an adult class in basic Judaism. What if parent involvement and participation in all their child's classes was a pre-requisite to enrolling in the Hebrew school? Parent and child would learn together; the same material, at the same time. There would be no stigma involved because all parents, regardless of their skill level would be required to take the class and to actively participate.

Shinichi Suzuki was born on October 17, 1898, in Nagoya, Japan. More than forty years ago, Suzuki realized the implications of the fact that children the world over learn to speak their native language with ease. He began to apply the basic principles of language acquisition to the learning of music, and called his method the mother-tongue approach. The ideas of parent responsibility, loving encouragement, constant repetition, etc., are some of the special features of the Suzuki approach. As when a child learns to talk, parents are involved in the

musical learning of their child. They attend lessons with the child and serve as "home teachers" during the week. One parent often learns to play before the child, so that s/he understands what the child is expected to do. Parents work with the teacher to create an enjoyable learning environment. Suzuki believed that parents were truly an integral piece of the child's learning process, and in fact a part of the child's ability to learn entirely. He said,

> We begin by training the parent rather than the child...First we teach the mother to play one piece so that she will be a good teacher at home...Children are really educated in the home, so in order that the child will have good posture and practice properly at home, it is necessary for the parent to have firsthand experience. The correct education of the child depends on this. Until the parent can play one piece, the child does not play at all. This principle is very important indeed, because although the parent may want him to do so, a three- or four-year-old child has no desire to learn the violin. The idea is to get the child to say, "I want to play too;" so the first piece is played every day on the gramophone, and in the classroom he just watches the other children (and his mother) having their lessons. The proper environment is created for the child. The child will naturally before long take the violin away from his mother, thinking, "I want to play too." He knows the tune already. The other children are having fun; he wants to join in the fun. We have caused him to acquire this desire.[60]

The Suzuki philosophy can be broken down to seven basic steps and beliefs:

- Suzuki teachers believe that musical ability can be developed in all children.
- Students begin at young ages.
- Parents play an active role in the learning process
- Children become comfortable with the instrument before learning to read music.
- Technique is taught in the context of pieces rather than through dry technical exercises.
- Pieces are refined through constant review
- Students perform frequently, individually and in groups.

[60] http://www.suzukiassociation.org/about/suzuki/instilling/

The Suzuki approach is successful because it requires full parent involvement and because it instills in its students the belief and confidence that they can learn. I believe that if we can create a program for our religious schools that draws on some elements from the Suzuki approach, we can be successful in producing jewishly educated children and parents.

Suzuki requires that the parent learn the material and participate in the lesson to assist with their child's education. I suggest that the parent learn alongside their child to aid in their **own** education. To go back to Everett Fox's translation of *vishinantam l'vanecha*, "You are to repeat them **with** your children,"[61] not just to teach them, but to teach yourselves alongside them. Having parents and their children in the classroom learning the same material at the same time, presents some exciting opportunities as well as some interesting problems. How can we teach in a way that will appeal to both adults and children? To accomplish this successfully, we must employ the method of differentiated instruction. Differentiated instruction applies an approach to teaching and learning so that students have multiple options for taking in information and making sense of ideas. The model of differentiated instruction requires teachers to be flexible in their approach to teaching and adjusting the curriculum and presentation of information to learners rather than expecting students to modify themselves for the curriculum. Differentiated Instruction is a teaching theory based on the premise that instructional approaches should vary and be adapted in relation to individual and diverse students in classrooms.

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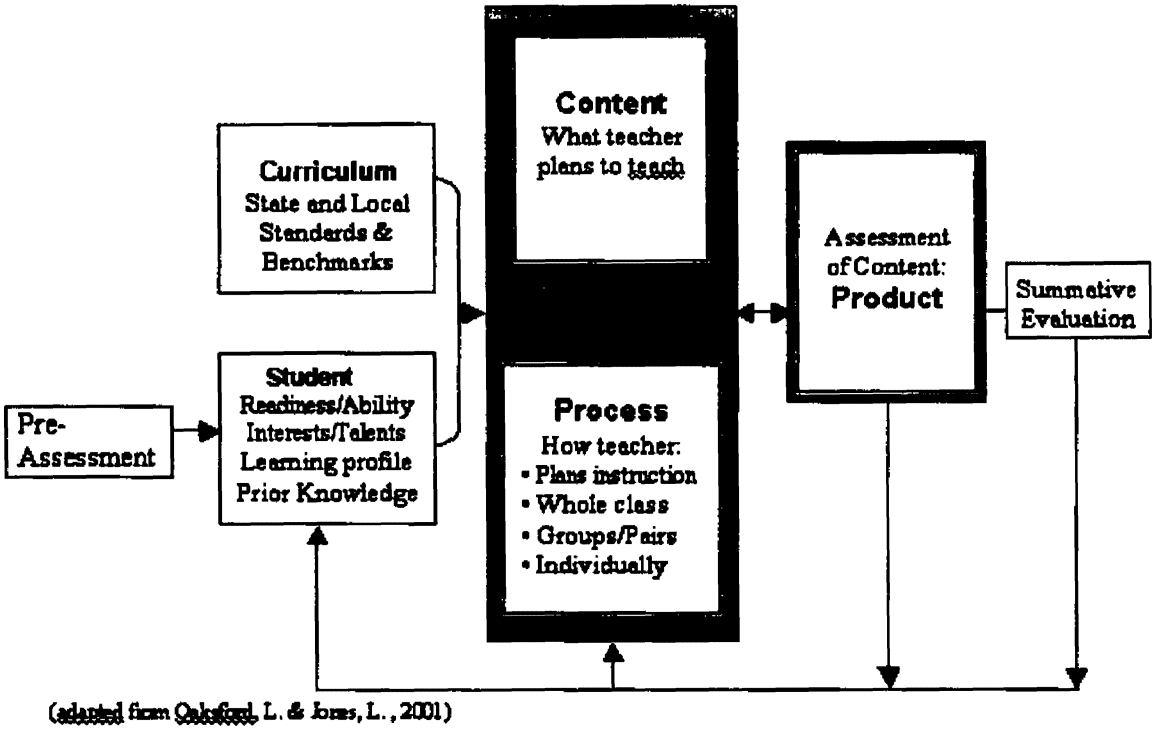
[61] The Five Books of Moses – The Schocken Bible v.1 p. 881

Learning Cycle and Decision Factors Used in Planning and Implementing Differentiated Instruction[62]



(adapted from Oakford, L. & Jones, L., 2001)

Differentiating instruction means creating multiple paths so that students of different abilities, interest or learning needs experience equally appropriate ways to absorb, use, develop and present concepts as a part of the learning process. It allows students to take greater responsibility and ownership for their own learning.[63] By employing differentiating instruction we allow both children and adults to process the same material in different ways and give them the tools necessary to create meanings for themselves based on their differing emotional and cognitive stages of development. When we allow people the opportunities to

[62]http://www.cast.org/publications/ncac/ncac_diffinstruc.html
63 http://members.shaw.ca/priscillatheroux/differentiating.html

create meaning, we are empowering them to take an active role in their own transformative learning experience. Even with something as basic and as seemingly mundane as the letters of the Aleph Bet, we can provide the pathways for real transformation. Galileo the astronomer once said, "You cannot teach a man anything; you can only help him find it within himself."[64] The parents will not only have the abilities necessary to help their children learn their letters, but they will have mastery over the building blocks of the Hebrew language and all our sacred texts. Once they are the possessors of this material, their confidence in their own abilities to continue their Jewish education will increase. By providing parents with the keys to Jewish learning, we make an entire world of Jewish knowledge available to them. The parents will also be learning these core skills in an environment that is entirely safe and free from judgments. The parents will be required to attend and fully participate in the class even if they already posses the knowledge that will be taught in the classroom so that no one will feel singled out as lacking education or know-how.

This type of program can fulfill the needs of the parent who does not have basic skills or the building blocks of Judaism, but what does this program have to offer to the parent who already has some level of Jewish education? Motivational writer Ben Sweetland says, "We cannot hold a torch to light another's path without brightening our own."[65] If we are not constantly learning and re-learning, we have little to offer to others. When children are taught something for the first time, they approach the material with amazement and a sense of awe in the new

[64] http://www.heartquotes.net/Education.html
[65] http://www.wisdomquotes.com/cat_education.html

skills that they are acquiring. Watching a child learn can give us a new perspective on old ideas. Confucius said, "This is what learning is. You suddenly understand something you've understood all your life, but in a new way."[66] The writer Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky wrote, "There is no subject so old that something new cannot be said about it."[67] Even when we think we know all there is to know on a subject, we can always find something new. Looking at information with a child has the ability to open up new pathways and worlds of thought. Children most often delight when they encounter new ideas; they are open to new thoughts because they have no pre-conceived notions about the material. It is beneficial to adults to spend a fair amount of time watching the unadulterated joy that children express when they are amazed at their own abilities and intellect. The enjoyment of watching this process take place is increased manifold when one is watching their own child learn. Children can listen to the same story every night at bedtime and each time they hear it, find something new to delight in. Children can watch the same movie again and again, and still shiver and fear and laugh with abandon even as they know exactly what is coming. We, as adults need to recapture that sense of joy and adventure that we had as children; we need to rekindle a sense of growing and achieving for the sheer pleasure that it brings us, for the sake of learning Torah *lishmah* rather than looking for the payoff at the end.

Vishinantam l'vanecha, and you should repeat words of Torah, study them, review them, and teach them, diligently to and **with** your children. Although we

[66] http://quotationspage.com/subjects/learning
[67] http://quotes.prolix.nu/Education/

may look to educators to help us fulfill the commandment that we were commanded as parents, the ultimate responsibility to educate our children Jewishly rests with us; to quote A.J. Heschel yet again, "diligently, not vicariously."[68]

I believe that in order to fulfill the commandment of *vishinantam l'vanecha*, we must be educated ourselves so that we may be able to teach our children. The building blocks and foundational stones of our sacred texts, our prayer book, and even some of the ritual objects we use in our homes, is the Hebrew alphabet – the Aleph Bet. Without learning the letters, we have no hope of reading Hebrew, or studying the language that has tied our people together for thousands of years.

In some Orthodox circles, a boy is introduced to formal Jewish learning on his third birthday. The child is brought to school to meet with the nursery class and the *rebbe* or teacher. The teacher opens up a book on the Aleph Bet and places a candy on each letter. The teacher recites the letters and the boy repeats each one after the teacher, and eats each little candy. This is done so that sweetness and learning will always be connected in the mind of the child. The child's first introduction to learning is the letters. By learning these skills, it opens up a rich world of history and scholarship.

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[68] Wolfson, Dr. Ron "Shall You Teach Them Diligently?" The University of Judaism, 1983 p.2

The lesson plans that I have included in this thesis are lesson plans geared towards both parents and their children. How can we teach in a way that will appeal to both adults and children? To accomplish this successfully, we must employ the method of differentiated instruction. Differentiated instruction applies an approach to teaching and learning so that students have multiple options for taking in information and making sense of ideas. The model of differentiated instruction requires teachers to be flexible in their approach to teaching and adjusting the curriculum and presentation of information to learners rather than expecting students to modify themselves for the curriculum. Differentiated Instruction is a teaching theory based on the premise that instructional approaches should vary and be adapted in relation to individual and diverse students in classrooms. Through the method of differentiated instruction, we can construct a curriculum that appeals to both parent and child.

When we first start learning to play an instrument, we begin learning note by note so that eventually we can learn to make beautiful music. We begin by learning letter by letter, so eventually we can discover the sweetness and beauty of our tradition, and learn to make it our own.

Family Religious School Education Lesson Plan
6th Class of the year – Aleph Bet

5:00 – 5:05	Sing welcome song together with everyone's name
5:05 – 5:15	Check in and review letters and words learned to date
5:15- 5:25	Introduce new letter – daled - how is the letter written in print & script form - key Hebrew words that begin with this letter (dag & degel)
5:25– 5:35	Practice writing letter in its different forms - practice writing and spelling key words with their respective vowels
5:35 – 5:45	Snack/break
5:45 – 6:05	Activity – separate activity for children and adults
6:05 – 6:15	Children and adults present their finished assignments
6:15 – 6:20	Recap and review

Core Concept:

The road to ongoing Jewish study and a commitment to lifelong Jewish learning needs to begin with learning the basics. By learning the letters of the Aleph Bet, the learners begin with the keys that will help them unlock and discover the riches in our sacred texts and prayers.

Essential Questions:

- What is the fourth letter of the Aleph Bet?
- How do we write the letter using both print and script forms?
- What two key Hebrew words (that we learned) begin with the letter?
- How do we write these words? What vowels do we use?
- For the children – what symbols do I use to best represent myself and my life?
- For the adults – how do we work together as a group to design a campaign using newly learned Hebrew words and letters?
- How does it feel to share learning experiences with your child/parent?

Aims:

- To create a warm and safe environment to encourage parent and child learning.
- To introduce the fourth letter of the Hebrew Alphabet along with key words.
- To foster continued growth and learning by providing an inviting arena to study enjoyably.
- To promote ownership of growing Hebrew knowledge, skills, and vocabulary.

Procedure:

1. Gather together in the classroom – parents sit together with their children.

2. Check in – how has the week been? Does anyone want to share something significant that happened?
3. Review the letters already studied by naming the different letters, by recognizing them from oversize flashcards shown to the group.
4. Introduce the new letter – daled
    a. How does this letter look in script and print?
    b. What sound does the daled make?
5. Introduce key words to study that begin with the letter daled
    a. dag – fish
    b. degel – flag
6. Practice writing the letter in both print and script
7. Practice writing the two key Hebrew words that have just been introduced.
    a. What vowels are used in the spelling of these words?
8. Snack/break – Parents sit with their children as teacher brings in the snack.
9. Parents and children separate and move to different sides of the room. Children and adults sit around long tables in preparation to do activity.
10. Parents and children come together for presentation of finished projects.
11. Recap and review what we learned.

Materials:

1. Paper and pens/pencils
2. Picture of the letter Daled
3. Picture of the letter in both print and script with vowels
4. Picture of fish and the word 'dag' spelled out in Hebrew letters with vowels
5. Picture of flag and the word degel spelled out in Hebrew letters with vowels.
6. Snack (baby carrots, string cheese, crackers, coffee, juice)
7. Rectangular cardboard, sticks, glue sticks, arts & crafts supplies, crayons, stickers.
8. Poster board, markers, paper, pens, various magazine pages with pictures.

Procedure for Activity: Children

1. Parents and children move to separate sides of the classroom and sit around large tables.
2. Each child gets a rectangular piece of cardboard and a stick.
3. Explain that they will each be making their own 'degel' with symbols of their own choosing (using the materials on the table) that they believe best represents themselves and their lives.

4. Once children have finished the decorating portion, the teacher will affix the stick to each child's cardboard and they will have a flag – a degel.
5. Tell the children that they may share their flags and its meaning with the entire group once we rejoin.

Procedure for Activity – Adults:

1. The adults separate from the children and move to a table set up on the opposite side of the room.
2. Explain to the parents that they are now all 'advertising executives' working to promote the letter daled and the two key Hebrew words.
3. The adults, working as a group, should design an ad. campaign that includes a poster and some sort of jingle/commercial.
4. Explain that they may set their words to an existing commercial, and/or borrow ideas from an existing ad. campaign to craft their poster.
5. Tell the parents that they will present their campaign to the entire group when we rejoin.

Recap & Review

What did we learn this week? How did each group feel when they were doing their activities/sharing the results?

Family Religious School Lesson Plan
10th Class of the year – Aleph Bet

5:00 – 5:05 Sing welcome song together with everyone's name

5:05 – 5:10 Check in and review letters and words learned to date

5:10- 5:20 Introduce new letter – Ḥet
- how is the letter written in print & script form
- key Hebrew words that begin with this letter (Challah & Cherut)

5:20– 5:30 Practice writing letter in its different forms
- practice writing and spelling key words with their respective vowels

5:30 – 5:40 Talk about Shabbat: what it is, what it symbolizes, what we do, what makes it different than the rest of the week, special foods,

5:40 – 5:50 Snack/break

5:50 – 6:10 Activity – separate activity for children and adults

6:10– 6:15 Children and (adults) present their finished assignments

6:15 – 6:20 Recap and review

Core Concepts:

- The road to ongoing Jewish study and a commitment to lifelong Jewish learning needs to begin with learning the basics. By learning the letters of the Aleph Bet, the learners begin with the keys that will help them unlock and discover the riches in our sacred texts and prayers.
- Shabbat is a holy day that we distinguish from the rest of the week by creating sacred space and refraining from doing certain kinds of work.

Essential Questions:

1. What is the eighth letter of the Aleph Bet?
2. How do we write the letter using both print and script forms?
3. What two key Hebrew words (that we learned) begin with the letter?
4. How do we write these words? What vowels do we use?
5. What does Shabbat mean to me?
6. How can I make Shabbat a special day that is separate and unique from the rest of my week?
7. What makes something sacred?

Aims:

- To create a warm and safe environment to encourage parent and child learning.
- To introduce the eighth letter of the Hebrew Alphabet along with key words.
- To foster continued growth and learning by providing an inviting arena to study enjoyably.
- To promote ownership of growing Hebrew knowledge, skills, and vocabulary.
- To introduce and re-enforce the idea of Shabbat as a sacred, special day of rest that we mark in some distinct way.

Procedure:

1. Gather together in the classroom – parents sit together with their children.
2. Check in – how has the week been? Does anyone want to share something significant that happened this week?
3. Review the letters already studied by naming the different letters, by recognizing them from oversize flashcards shown to the group.
4. Introduce the new letter – ḥet
    a. How does this letter look in script and print?
    b. What sound does the ḥet make?
5. Introduce key words to study that begin with the letter Ḥet
    a. Challah
    b. Ḥerut – freedom
6. Practice writing the letter in both print and script
7. Practice writing the two key Hebrew words that have just been introduced.
    a. What vowels are used in the spelling of these words?
8. Snack/break – Parents sit with their children as teacher brings in the snack.
9. Parents and children separate and move to different sides of the room. Children and adults sit around long tables in preparation to do activity.
10. Parents and children come together for presentation of finished projects.
11. Recap and review what we learned.

Materials:

1. Paper and pens/pencils
2. Picture of the letter Ḥet
3. Picture of the letter in both print and script with vowels
4. Picture of challah and the word 'challah' spelled out in Hebrew letters with vowels
5. Picture of the word ḥerut spelled out in Hebrew letters with vowels.
6. Challah cover to show as an example.
7. Snack (baby carrots, string cheese, crackers, coffee, juice)
8. Felt sheets, glue sticks, felt cutouts, fabric markers, sequins, art supplies, etc.
9. Paper, pens.

Procedure for Activity: Children

1. Parents and children move to separate sides of the classroom and sit around large tables.
2. Each child gets a piece of felt.
3. Explain that they will each be making their own challah cover that they can use on Shabbat – using the material on the table.
4. Once children have finished the decorating portion, the teacher will show the children how to write 'Shabbat Shalom' on the cover and reiterate that Shabbat is a day of peace.

5. Tell the children that they may share their challah covers with the entire group once we rejoin.

Procedure for Activity – Adults:

1. The adults separate from the children and move to a table set up on the opposite side of the room.
2. Explain to the parents that they are now going to be working individually to come up with their own plans of 'ḥerut' for themselves and their families.
3. They should think about some things that they could do differently to mark the day as a day of freedom – a day of rest from work, shopping, etc. and write a new list of 'rules' for Shabbat that will outline what freedom means to them.
4. Tell the parents that they may share their ideas and 'rules' with the rest of the group if they choose to do so, but they are not required to share

Recap & Review

What did we learn this week? How did each group feel when they were doing their activities? Does each group feel that they can/are willing to use their creations to enhance their experiences of/on Shabbat?

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