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**Education for All:  
Special Needs Education as Seen through Our Sacred Texts and  
Applied to Our Congregational Schools**

Tobi R. Innerfield

- ❖ 5 chapters, 2 appendices
- ❖ This thesis addresses the issue of special education especially for the Jewish community. Drawing upon a wide range of Biblical and Rabbinic texts, it compiles and analyzes traditional Jewish thought regarding the education of special needs children within a single compendium.
- ❖ The goal of this thesis was to locate, identify, and analyze the sacred Jewish texts dealing with the education of those with special needs and apply those texts to our modern supplementary religious education system, integrating these classic materials with modern educational methods relating to special education.
- ❖ This thesis is divided into the following parts:
  - 1 chapter provides a definition and discussion of "special needs"
  - 2 chapters which identify and examine Biblical and Rabbinic texts that apply to special needs education
  - 2 chapters address the application of those Jewish sources to the education of special needs students in our congregational schools
  - 2 appendices that list the Biblical and Rabbinic sources relating to special needs education, divided by category
- ❖ Materials used in this thesis included: Biblical and Rabbinic Texts, articles and books about Jewish special education, and articles, books and the internet on the topic of special needs and special education in the secular world.

Education for All:  
Special Needs Education as Seen through Our Sacred Texts and  
Applied to Our Congregational Schools

Tobi R. Innerfield

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of  
Requirements for Masters of Arts in Religious Education Degree

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

February 22, 2001  
Advisors: Dr. Michael Chernick  
Jo Kay, Director, School of Education

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Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion

**CONTENTS**

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Acknowledgements.....  | iii |
| Introduction.....  | vi  |
| Chapter 1 Who are Students with Special Needs? .....                     | 1   |
| Learning/ Processing Disabilities .....                                  | 4   |
| Developmental Disabilities.....  | 16  |
| Physical Disabilities.....   | 19  |
| Emotional Disabilities .....   | 21  |
| The Gifted .....   | 22  |
| Chapter 2 Educating Those with Special Needs as Seen in the Tanakh ..... | 25  |
| Chapter 3 ...as Seen in Rabbinic Literature .....                        | 36  |
| Starting Age of Education .....  | 37  |
| Hiring a Teacher .....   | 40  |
| The Teacher: Qualifications and Characteristics.....                     | 43  |
| The Teacher and the School .....   | 46  |
| The Special Needs Student .....  | 50  |
| Teaching Methodologies .....   | 55  |
| The Gifted Student.....  | 64  |
| Chapter 4 Special Needs Education in the Congregational School.....      | 67  |
| Physical Disabilities.....   | 69  |
| Learning/ Processing Disabilities .....                                  | 77  |
| Developmental Disabilities.....  | 82  |
| The Gifted Student.....  | 84  |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Chapter 5 The Congregational School .....                   | 86  |
| Appendix A Sources in the Tanakh by Category.....           | 98  |
| Appendix B Sources in Rabbinic Literature by Category ..... | 100 |
| Bibliography .....  | 109 |

## Acknowledgements

I truly believe that there are no coincidences in life. Nearly twenty-four years ago, I entered college in the fall of 1977. I wanted to be involved with the education of 'mentally retarded' children. After a year and a half in the program, I transferred out. I could not in good conscience continue in a program which endorsed practices that I knew in my soul were wrong. I graduated with an engineering degree and proceeded to work in the field of Quality Engineering for many years.

Education of special children was far behind me; but that was not the way it was to be. Somehow, I was led step by step back into education, but this time in a Religious School. I started working with children that had special needs. Within a few years, I was led to Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. While at HUC-JIR, I continued my work with special needs children. Choosing a thesis topic was not difficult. Yet I was unsure who would be the right advisor. It was suggested that I speak to Dr. Michael Chernick. After our first conversation I knew that he was the right person. We spent many hours together discussing the sacred texts and going over my findings. His guidance, support and wisdom have been immeasurable.

The texts, however, were only one aspect of my thesis. Educational theory is not Dr. Chernick's area of expertise, and he suggested that I find an educational advisor for my thesis as well. Jo Kay filled that position. I have treasured the time that we spent working together. Her insight and probing questions pushed me to find the answers to the complex problems. Her thoughtfulness, compassion and encouragement supported me through difficult times. I have been blessed to have these two people to work with.

I would like to thank Dr. David Sperling for his help while I was researching Biblical sources. I appreciate the time that he gave me. In addition, Rabbi Martin Schloss, from the Board of Jewish Education, was a great resource in the field of special education. Their assistance was of immense value to my work on this thesis.

My time at HUC-JIR has been enriched by a wonderful and diverse faculty. I have a special 'thank you' to several professors who have made a difference in my life. Besides being my thesis advisor, I have learned a tremendous amount from Jo Kay. Her insight and experience has helped to guide me during the past two years. I must thank Dr. Sherry Blumberg for all that she taught me and all that she inspired me to find in myself during my first years at the college-institute. I must also thank Dr. Martin Cohen for challenging me to see beyond the obvious. And of course, I would like to mention my classmates, my friends. You are all very special. I have been blessed by your support, your encouragement and your friendship.

My journey through Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion started nearly six years ago. Yet one thing was constant through all of it; my family. To my parents and my in-laws for your confidence in me and the many hours that you gave of yourselves to watch the children; thank you.

My children, Meryl and Andrew, you have both been very patient and understanding. I know that all my long nights and weekends doing classwork and writing papers were difficult for you, yet there were few complaints. Thank you, I love you both.

Steven, my husband, you supported me when I took my first class, back when I didn't think I was capable of going to school after so many years. You were there through all the difficult times, and the good ones too. You rearranged your schedule to be with

our children for my early classes and late nights. Through all of this your support and your faith have never wavered. To you I give my greatest thanks and my love.

There are no coincidences in life. The time I have spent at HUC-JIR has been a gift from God. I have been affected by all the people I have encountered. Here I have learned and have grown. Blessed is the Eternal, our God, who opens the eyes of the blind.



## Introduction

In a 1999 survey of all Congregational schools, regardless of affiliation, in the New York Metropolitan area<sup>1</sup> only 68 congregations were identified as having a program for special needs students. Of these, only 18 schools (twenty-six percent) had programs for the Developmentally Disabled, 7 schools (ten percent) had programs for students with hearing impairments, and 4 (approximately six percent) had programs for students who were Physically Disabled. Yet nearly 35 years earlier, in the fall of 1966, a conference entitled "Religious Education for the Handicapped: A Birthright" addressed the need for the Jewish community to educate disabled students. We still have far to travel.

In 1993 the UAHC published a set of requirements for congregational certification called "*Liheyot: Access to Judaism*." The purpose was to ensure that all congregations are accessible to those with special needs. This year, the UAHC's Department of Jewish Family Concerns is releasing an informative publication about creating educational programs for students with special needs, called "*Al-Pi Darco: According to Their Ways*." The topic of special needs education clearly remains in the forefront of our religious thought.

I have been interested in the area of special needs for many years. Throughout my time in public school I had academic difficulties; school was hard work. It was not until I

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<sup>1</sup> This survey was conducted by the Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York, FEGS - Long Island Division, and the Westchester Jewish Community Services, and included New York City and its Boroughs, Nassau County, Suffolk County, and Westchester County.

was in college that my difficulty was identified. I discovered that I had a reading-processing learning disability. At the age of 27, when I finally learned to read Hebrew in an adult education class, the teacher gave the class a couple of 'tricks' to help remember the letters. That was my beginning.

As I started to teach Hebrew school, I used the tricks that my teacher had taught me along with a few other tricks that I created on my own along the way. What I found was that the students who had difficulties in class as well as the other students seemed to benefit from using these Hebrew 'tricks'. As time went on, I discovered more techniques and strategies for teaching Hebrew. These I share with other teachers. For the past four years I've taught two courses at the Long Island Temple Educators Conference entitled, "'Tricks' for Beginner and LD Hebrew Readers" and "Strategies for Hebrew Reading: Including LD Readers."

When the time came to choose a thesis topic, I chose one which was not only relevant to my personal situation, but also one which I could not find much written information about: what our sacred texts say about educating those with special needs and its application to our congregational schools. While I was researching I discovered that there was very little written about educating those in congregational schools. Most of the material I was able to locate that was written specifically for congregational schools on the topic of special needs had to do with teaching Hebrew. The majority of the information available about educating those with special needs was for either secular schools or Jewish day schools. Furthermore, this material had very few textual references, and those references were not exceedingly varied or uncommon.

What has surprised me the most over these many months of research was the wealth of texts from both Biblical and Rabbinic sources. I did not think when I first started this paper that I would find nearly 50 Biblical references and over 110 references from Rabbinic literature. Furthermore, the texts covered an entire spectrum of topics ranging from inclusiveness to teaching methodologies to education of the gifted student. Many of the methodologies that were used to teach those with special needs hundreds and even thousands of years ago are methods that we still use today. It is amazing how little has changed.

Today we identify five basic categories of special needs: Learning Disabilities, Developmental Disabilities, Physical Disabilities, Emotional Disabilities and the Gifted. We are aware of many more types of disabilities, all of which can fit into one or more of these five areas. Our ancestors may not have labeled each child according to the names that we have today. However, they were aware that there were many children who did not learn as others did and believed that we are obligated to educate each child according to their own special needs.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Who are Students with Special Needs?**

The field of education changes and grows to accommodate the learners of the times and the needs of the people. In the secular world, we see schools vying to compete with each other for the attention of the residents. Local taxpayers look at different school districts to see which ones meet the needs of their children. Candidates for public office talk about their views and what they feel should be the educational goals of the country. The focus on education is foremost in the eyes of the people.

New York State reflects the changes going on in education throughout the country. In New York State, for example, there has developed a set of 'Learning Standards' for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century which students are required to meet. These standards have been established in seven different areas: English/ Language Arts, Math/ Science and Technology, Social Studies, the Arts, Languages other than English, Health/ Physical Education and Home Economics, Career Development and Occupational Studies. The New York State Academy for Learning and Teaching states, "At the approach of the twenty-first century, the Board of Regents approved a new set of learning standards for New York students. They represent the core of what *all* people should know, understand and be able to do as a result of their schooling. As such, these learning standards are to form the basis for a re-vision of education in New York."<sup>2</sup> In addition, New York State's goals include:

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<sup>2</sup> New York State Academy for Teaching and Learning, New York State Education Department, (accessed 13 October 2000), available online [www.nysatl.nysed.gov/standards.html](http://www.nysatl.nysed.gov/standards.html).

- ♦ All students will meet high standards for academic performance and personal behavior and demonstrate the knowledge and skills required by a dynamic world.<sup>3</sup>
- Education, information, and cultural resources will be available and accessible to all people.<sup>4</sup>

These statements reflect the need for all students to meet the high standards in education regardless of their abilities. Educators are empowered to use a variety of 'tools' available to meet the individual needs of each student, while at the same time giving each student the knowledge and skills that they need to thrive in our ever-changing world. Utilizing devices such as learning styles, learning modalities, student characteristics, effective teaching strategies and faculty/staff development, a continuum of services for students with special needs may be necessary for successfully meeting the educational challenges in New York and other states throughout the country.

### **Diversity in Children**

When one looks into the face of a child, one sees that each child is unique. Children bring with them their past experiences, their genetic pool, their own personality and along with a whole plethora of variables, their own unique abilities. School systems try to respond to the needs of their students, knowing that no two are alike. Many average students find difficulty with some aspect of their schoolwork. Experts tell us that over 4.9 million children in the school systems today have some sort of special needs.<sup>5</sup> Just a few years ago, the number of students recognized by the experts in the field as having special

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<sup>3</sup> New York State Education Department, (accessed 13 October 2000), available online [www.nysed.gov](http://www.nysed.gov).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

needs in the public system were approximately 4 million<sup>6</sup>. This change has come about because professionals are now recognizing greater diversity in the learning capabilities of students. A child who is found to have problems copying notes off a blackboard while having no trouble writing an essay was once considered a difficult child. Today, one understands that this child has a form of a perceptual processing problem which becomes apparent when transferring information from one plane to another. Now recognized as a learning disability, this type of problem along with others, was not previously included in our educational statistics.

Special needs students fall into five general categories; students with learning/processing disabilities, students with developmental disabilities, students with physical disabilities, students with emotional disabilities, and students who are gifted. Though there are five distinct groupings, none of them are exclusive; there may be overlap from students in one group into another. For example, there may be child with a learning disability who is musically gifted. Current research has shown that people learn in a variety of different ways. Howard Gardner in his theory of Multiple Intelligences suggests that people possess a full spectrum of intelligences, and that each individual reveals distinctive cognitive features. Individuals possess varying amounts of each of seven intelligences and learn through the strengths in each of them.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Samuel A. Kirk, James J. Gallagher and Nicholas J. Anastasiow, *Educating Exceptional Children, Ninth Edition*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 4-5.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Linda Campbell, Bruce Campbell and Dee Dickenson, *Teaching & Learning Through Multiple Intelligences*, (Needham Heights, Massachusetts: Allyn & Bacon, 1996), xv.

Before one can understand the varying types of disabilities, it is important to know what a disability is. The *Americans with Disabilities Act* (ADA) defines disabilities as follows:

- ♦ a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of the individual
- ♦ a record of a substantially limiting impairment, or
- ♦ being regarded as having a substantially limiting impairment<sup>8</sup>

This does not mean, however that a temporary impairment, such as a broken bone is considered a disability. The ADA is quite specific in what is considered an impairment. It states that an impairment refers to a problem with a 'major life activity, those which average Americans do with little or no difficulty. This includes caring for one's self, walking, talking, breathing, learning, performing individual tasks and working.'<sup>9</sup> The ADA does recognize that an impairment is measured 'objectively'. It is a comparison to others' ability to perform specific activities. If a person has difficulty carrying out any of these activities, that person has an impairment. The 'substantially limiting impairment' provision is designed to protect those individuals with physical or mental impairments which may not limit one of their major life activities but are perceived as doing so. For example: an employer discriminates by refusing to hire a cerebral palsy victim simply because of the individual's physical appearance.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> "Americans with Disabilities Act; Glossary". The President's Committee on Employment of People With Disabilities, (Washington, D.C., 1990), 2.

<sup>9</sup> "Americans with Disabilities Act". The President's Committee on Employment of People With Disabilities, (Washington, D.C., 1990), 2.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 3.

## Learning/ Processing Disabilities

The term *learning disabilities* has often been viewed as vague, even among researchers, because it encompasses a variety of disorders that often overlap.<sup>11</sup> In many instances learning disabled children in their pre-school years are seen as very bright. Often called the hidden handicap, learning disabilities are not usually manifested until school age when these students are unable to successfully reach their full academic potential, which can be a surprise to many teachers. Once tested, these children are found to have average or more often above average intelligence.

According to the *Education of All Handicapped Children Act, Public Law 94-142*, learning disabilities refers to a 'disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written...'<sup>12</sup> It occurs in many forms and covers broad categories, which include difficulties in several areas: listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, and mathematics. Some professionals list mathematical calculation and mathematical reasoning as two separate areas. In addition, spelling is considered by some as its own distinct area. Nevertheless, experts do list the six areas above as the general areas in which learning disabilities are evident. Learning is found to be slower or different in the 'affected area(s)' and therefore performance in school is uneven. Each person with a learning disability is unique, presenting different combinations and severity of problems.

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<sup>11</sup> Rick Allen, "Learning Disabilities: At the Assessment Crossroads," *Curriculum Update*, (Fall 2000), 2.

<sup>12</sup> *Taking the First Step...To Solving Learning Disabilities*, (Pittsburgh: Association for Children with Learning Disabilities), 2.



Learning/ Processing Disabilities include those disabilities which are linked to visual perception and processing difficulties, as well as auditory perception and processing difficulties.

Children with these types of disabilities are children with at least average to near average intelligence whose achievements in learning are significantly lower than their intellectual potential, even though all other basic integrities needed for learning are present. This includes intact sensory abilities, i.e. vision and hearing, basic emotional health, a decent opportunity to learn provided by home and school. The learning problems are based upon disturbances or differences in some of the basic psychoneurological processes needed for the receiving, processing storage and activation of information.<sup>13</sup>

There are four criteria that must be considered when identifying children with learning disabilities: academic difficulties, discrepancy criterion, exclusion criterion, and neuropsychological criterion.<sup>14</sup> In the academic difficulties criteria, the child with learning disabilities has difficulty learning how to read, write, spell, organize thoughts, or do mathematical calculations. The child that is identified here is compared with children of the same age. These 'academic difficulties' have a direct correlation with the work a child does or is able to do in the classroom.

Discrepancy criterion distinguishes between a child's academic potential and personal academic achievement. Children in this category have the intellectual ability to perform in school, yet they show problems with schoolwork. There is a serious disparity between what they should be able to do and what they are actually able to accomplish. The exclusion criterion rules out the classification of learning disabilities for children

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<sup>13</sup> Reuven Hammer, *The Other Child in Jewish Education; A Handbook on Learning Disabilities*, (United Synagogue Commission of Jewish Education, 1979), 19 - 20.

who show learning problems which are explained by conditions other than learning disabilities. These are problems which are caused by visual or hearing impairments, mental retardation, motor disabilities, emotional disturbances or environmental factors. Finally, the neuropsychological criterion refers to children whose basic learning disabilities are the results of some type of neuropsychological disorder. This includes disturbances in perceptual-motor functioning or problems with the brain's perceptual functioning such as short-term or long-term memory problems.

Almost one-half of the students who are recipients of special education services are categorized as learning disabled. This disorder is referred to as one of the least understood and most debated disabling conditions in the United States (Lyon & Moats, 1993).<sup>15</sup> In the pre-referral process, a classroom teacher tries to cope with a child's learning problems before referring him/ her for special education. There is much that the classroom teacher can do on his/her own without sending a child for special education. (This will be discussed further in Chapter 4 of this paper.) In addition, it is understood that there are many learning disabled children who are not categorized as needing special education services. Some of these children have found ways to compensate for their own personal special needs through their own hard work, by creating 'tricks' which clue them into the correct answer or way of doing something, or even by depending on friends and family for help. Some children take additional classes outside of school to assist them with their difficulties. In school systems, it is statistically unlikely that all children are identified, and some just slip through the cracks. These are the ones that fool the system.

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<sup>14</sup> Kirk, Gallagher and Anastasiow, 220.

Sally Smith identified 17 different behaviors that learning disabled students use to hide their problems.<sup>16</sup> These include; super confidence - 'Oh, sure, everybody knows that!', being a clown, being the victim - 'That's not fair', acting bored, not caring, being helpless, pretending illness, and being the 'tough guy', to name a few.

Further, there are two classifications of learning disabilities, *academic learning disability*, and *neuropsychological or developmental learning disability*. An 'academic learning disability' is a condition that inhibits reading, writing, spelling or computation thereby affecting a child's performance in school. Many of these academic learning disabilities deal with reading. Dr. Estelle L. Fryburg defines these terms that deal with reading and learning disabilities:

- ♦ Reading - Communication between an author and a reader during which the reader accurately recognizes (word recognition) and interprets (comprehension) the graphic symbols which represent language and the author's message.
- ♦ Writing - The act of recording language in graphic symbols that include physical activities often used in written communication, such as handwriting, spelling and grammar.
- ♦ Reading Disability - Severe impairment or an inability to read as indicated by a substantial discrepancy between anticipated (intellectual level and/or chronological age) and actual achievement, despite reading instruction and the opportunity to learn.

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<sup>15</sup> Estelle L. Fryburg, *Reading and Learning Disability: A Neuropsychological Approach to Evaluation and Instruction*, (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C Thomas Publisher, Ltd. 1997), 34.

<sup>16</sup> Sally L. Smith, "The Mask Students Wear," *Instructor*, (April 1989), 27-28, 31-32.

Reading disability, reading retardation and reading disorder are words which are used synonymously. Reading disorder is the term used in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV under the category of learning disorders.<sup>17</sup>

Since different abilities of children, including attention, memory and problem solving, are still developing when they begin to read, a reading difficulty may be evidence of differing rates of maturation, a deficiency in one or more of the student's abilities or the interaction between the learner and the method of instruction.<sup>18</sup>

One type of reading disability is dyslexia; which is actually a language based learning disability. Dyslexics experience difficulty utilizing language skills particularly in reading, writing, spelling and sometimes math. Studies suggest that 15-20% of the population has a reading disability and of those, 85% have dyslexia.<sup>19</sup> The problems shown by dyslexics involve difficulties in acquiring and using language. About 60% of dyslexic people have phonological difficulties, which means that they find it difficult to sort out the sound within words.<sup>20</sup> The most common school-age signs of dyslexia include:

- ♦ letter reversals, **b** for **d**
- ♦ word reversals, **rat** for **tar**
- ♦ inversions, **m** and **w**, **u** and **n**
- ♦ transpositions, **felt** and **left**
- ♦ substitutions, **house** and **home**

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> *Dyslexia Basics*, (Baltimore: The International Dyslexia Association (IDA), May, 2000, accessed 30 October 2000) available online <http://www.interdys.org>.

- ♦ difficulty reading words in isolation (out of context)
- ♦ difficulty reading similar words, **country** and **county**
- ♦ using the wrong (similar sounding) word
- ♦ awkward pencil grip
- ♦ avoids reading out loud

This list is far from being totally inclusive. There are many other signs of dyslexia, but the above list is representative of many of the problems dyslexics have been found to have. Dyslexic is a most debatable term, since there are many types of reading disabilities. Unfortunately, it has become common for children with reading disabilities to be called dyslexic if they show signs of reading problems.

Some professionals feel that if one could pinpoint the children at risk and give them early and appropriate help, we could reduce the frequency and/or severity of dyslexia. Their objective is to demonstrate statistically significant correlation between early childhood measures and later school achievement. However, most clinicians feel that even significant correlation does not guarantee that individual children at risk for dyslexia will be identified.<sup>21</sup> It may be easier to predict which children would be good readers than who will be dyslexic, for a low score may reflect low intellectual functioning, cultural deprivation or emotional stress. Low achievement in early tests does not necessarily mean that one has a learning disability. Only a thorough analysis can actually determine the type of learning disability a child has and whether it is dyslexia or another type of reading disability.

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<sup>20</sup> *What is Dyslexia*, (UK: Dyslexia Institute, 1999, accessed 30 October 2000), available online <http://www.dyslexia-inst.org.uk/faqs.htm>.

Many poor readers have language/ reading impairments that are more widespread than are typically found in dyslexia, problems that go beyond phonological processing. Termed *language-learning disabled (LLD)*, these children also have limitations with vocabulary, syntax, or text processing. Unlike dyslexia, children who are LLD have broad-based problems with comprehension. Two separate categories of LLD have been recognized, *specific language impaired* and *nonspecific language impaired*. Modern researchers have begun to compare the reading and reading-related cognitive abilities of specific and nonspecific language impaired children. Further, a third category of reading disability has been identified. *Hyperlexics* are poor readers who have problems in listening comprehension but with few difficulties in phonological processing and word recognition. Much less is known about this subgroup of poor readers.

Learning disabilities are not limited to reading. Dyscalculia is an inability to conceptualize numbers, number relationships (arithmetic facts) and outcomes of numerical operations (estimating the answers to numerical problems before actually calculating).<sup>22</sup> According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES 1997, 123-4) almost 93% of America's 17 year-olds graduate without proficiency in multi-step problem solving and algebra, and 22% of American adults cannot perform simple arithmetic (NCES 1997, 416).<sup>23</sup> Although some dyslexics have similar problems with sequencing and organization, the problems of the dyscalculic stem from the language,

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<sup>21</sup> Nathalie A. Badian, "Predicting Dyslexia in a Preschool Population," in *Preschool Prevention of Reading Failure* (Parkton, Maryland: York Press, 1988), 78-9.

<sup>22</sup> "Dyscalculia," (Framingham, MA: The Center for Teaching/ Learning Mathematics, 1997, accessed 11 December 2000.), available online <http://www.shianet.org/~reeneenew/BerkshireMath.html>.

concepts and the procedures of the mathematics. Dyscalculia can fit into three different categories. The Center for Teaching/ Learning Mathematics clarifies, "Qualitative dyscalculia is a deficit in the skills of counting and calculating. Quantitative dyscalculia is the result of difficulties in comprehension of instructions or the failure to master the skills required for an operation. Intermediate dyscalculia involves the inability to operate with symbols, or numbers."<sup>24</sup> The following characteristics are often displayed by dyscalculics:

- ♦ Normal or accelerated language acquisition: verbal, reading, writing. Poetic ability. Good in areas of science (until a level of higher math skills is required), geometry, and creative arts.
- ♦ Difficulty with abstract concepts of time and direction. Unable to keep track of time. Difficulty with schedules.
- ♦ Inconsistent results in addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. Poor mental math ability.
- ♦ reversals in writing or copying
- ♦ substitutions, 2 for 5
- ♦ transpositions, 75 for 57
- ♦ uses fingers when counting
- ♦ unable to grasp and remember math concepts, rules, formulas, sequences
- ♦ difficulty with recipes

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<sup>23</sup> "Diagnosing Math Learning Disabilities/ Recommended Practices," (Henderson, Michigan: Dyslexia & Dyscalculia Support Services, 1998, accessed 11 December 2000), available online <http://www.shianet.org/~reeneenew/Edu502.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

- ♦ difficulty with spatial orientation; left-right orientation; reading and interpreting maps, charts and measurements
- ♦ difficulty dealing with money
- ♦ difficulty keeping score during games, or remembering how to keep score
- ♦ difficulty sight-reading music, learning fingering to play an instrument

This list gives a general understanding of some of the characteristics of dyscalculia. Dyscalculics may exhibit some of the characteristics listed above, while still others exhibit characteristics not mentioned here.

Developmental agraphia or dysgraphia, a handwriting disability, may exist in isolation but more commonly occurs with other learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, and attention deficit disorder,<sup>25</sup> which may make it difficult to identify, diagnose and treat. Writing is the act of recording language in graphic symbols which includes the physical activity of handwriting, spelling, and grammar, and is used in written communication. Dysgraphia interferes with the communication of ideas from the brain to the paper. It is a neurological disorder, as are other learning disabilities, and cannot be cured but can be understood and worked with.

Children can be seen to have handwriting problems that are dysgraphic in nature but are not neurologically based. This non-specific dysgraphia may result from psychosocial deprivation, poor school attendance, or developmental disabilities such as mental retardation. Some children do not develop adequate handwriting skills because they have not received proper or enough instruction in writing.

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<sup>25</sup> Renee M. Newman, "Dysgraphia: Causes and Treatment," (Henderson, Michigan: 1998, accessed 11 December 2000), available online <http://www.dyscalculia.org/Edu563.html>.



Two types of neurological based dysgraphia are seen. In the first type, students form accurate answers and legible letters, but write exceedingly slow, generally resulting in unfinished work. The second type exhibits poor quality handwriting, where letter formation is illegible and results are unproductive. Writing speed of the second type of student can vary from slow to adequate.<sup>26</sup> In addition dysgraphics are often characterized by:

- ♦ decreased writing speed
- ♦ mixture of print and cursive letters
- ♦ misuse of line and margin
- ♦ difficulty using writing as a communication tool
- ♦ irregular shapes and sizes of letters
- ♦ fingers easily become cramped when writing

Although dysgraphic students have difficulties with the written word, they can usually express themselves in other ways. The verbal ability of many with dysgraphia is high, as they try to compensate for their special need. Students with this type of handwriting difficulty are eligible for special education under the federal IDEA-Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act, amended 1997.

The classification of 'neuropsychological or developmental learning disability' includes children with attention problems, memory problems, and disorders in thinking and using language, which in turn leads to difficulties in academic situations.

Attention deficit disorder (ADD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are considered learning disabilities within this classification. They affect an

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

"estimated 35 % of school age children, or 1.46 to 2.46 million American children", according to the United States Department of Education. (USDE, 1994)<sup>27</sup> affecting boys four to nine times more frequently than girls.<sup>28</sup> A biological disorder and not an emotional disability, many ADD/ADHD children take medication to try to control their behavior. The most common signs associated with attention deficit are:

- ♦ insatiability --difficulty being satisfied, difficulty being contented
- ♦ disinhibiton -- says or does things without regard to social consequences; may fly off the handle with little provocation; lack of planning
- ♦ overactivity -- selective attention; moves from one activity to another; does not 'sit still' even when sitting still
- ♦ impersistence -- difficulty falling asleep; difficulty following through, many tasks may be left unfinished
- ♦ inconsistency -- variations in focus (has 'off' days or weeks)
- ♦ inattention and distractibility -- difficulty with paying attention; difficulty focusing on 2 stimuli at once (teacher and taking notes)
- ♦ social failure -- does not fit in with other children.
- ♦ superficiality -- interests are highly superficial; responds quickly to rewards

ADD/ADHD children often feel isolated from their peers displaying behaviors that are age-inappropriate and intense. It is not uncommon for their behaviors to be emotional and overactive. However, it should be noted that the hyperactivity should not be confused with normal activity.

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<sup>27</sup>Renee M. Newman, "Home-School Management for Attention Deficit." (Henderson, Michigan: Dyslexia & Dyscalculia Support Services, 1998, accessed 11 December 2000), available online <http://www.shianet.org/~reneenew/ADHD.html>.

In the classroom, ADD/ ADHD children tend to draw the attention of the teacher by being a negative force in the classroom. These children are not necessarily less intelligent than other children in the classroom, however their behavior and inattentiveness affects their own work completion and test performance. It is important for both teachers and students to know that the ADD/ADHD child does not choose to behave in a disruptive manner.

According to the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities, the term learning disabilities refers to "a category of children and does not describe a specific deficit or dysfunction of the child or the specific academic or achievement problem of the child."<sup>29</sup> Children with learning disabilities have unusual ways of perceiving the world, and their needs are varying. The types of learning disabilities and the needs of these children range from behavioral to language to social. A few of the more common types of learning disabilities that are seen in educational systems have been described here, but this list is far from being inclusive.

### **Developmental Disabilities**

Much of the early research on learning disabilities came out of studies of mildly retarded children.<sup>30</sup> Academic similarities can be seen between these two groups of children which include reading difficulties, working below grade level and personal frustration. Developmental learning disabilities have already been discussed in the previous section.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Kirk, Gallagher and Anastasiow, 220.

<sup>30</sup> Samuel A. Kirk and James J. Gallagher, *Educating Exceptional Children, Sixth Edition, Instructor's Manual*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989), 67.

Different from people with developmental learning disabilities, those with *developmental disabilities* have lifelong conditions which occurred at or before birth, in childhood or before the age of twenty-two. The Federal definition of developmental disabilities, as it appears in the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 1990, Public Law 101-496, Section 102 also states that:

The term "developmental disabilities" (DD) means severe, chronic disabilities of a person five years of age or older which...

- ♦ is attributed to a mental or physical impairment or combination of mental and physical impairments;
- ♦ is likely to continue indefinitely
- ♦ results in substantial functional limitations in three or more of the following areas of major life activity ...self care, receptive and expressive language, learning, mobility, self-direction, capacity of independent living, and economic self-sufficiency, and
- ♦ reflects the person's needs for a combination and sequence of special, interdisciplinary, or generic, treatment, or other services that are of lifelong or extended duration and are individually planned and coordinated<sup>31</sup>

Mental retardation, which accounts for 70% of those with developmental disabilities<sup>32</sup>, is the most common of all the developmental disabilities. Historically, professionals tried to distinguish among the different levels of mental retardation by

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<sup>31</sup> DD InSite, The Techknowlege Developmental Disability Resource for Georgia, (accessed 23 December 2000), available online [www.arch.gatech.edu/crt/Techknow/DDdis.htm](http://www.arch.gatech.edu/crt/Techknow/DDdis.htm).

assigning labels; originally *idiot*, *imbecile* and *moron*; later the terms *mild*, *moderate*, *severe* and *profound*. *Mild* indicated development at one-half to three-fourths of the normal rate; *moderate* describes development at one-half of the normal rate; *severe* places the individual at approximately one-fourth of the normal level; and *profound* places the person at less than one-fourth the normal rate of cognitive development, where normal is attributed to an 'average' IQ and abilities. These terms put the emphasis on the individual, making it seem as though the problem is the child as opposed to the disability.

Another way of looking at the situation is looking at the level of support the individual needs. In this method, the intensity of support is measured as *intermittent*, *limited*, *extensive* and *pervasive*. *Intermittent* indicates that a level of support is needed but is not necessary at all times. *Limited* refers to support that is needed on a regular basis but for short periods of time. *Extensive* describes support that is ongoing and regular. Finally, the *pervasive* level indicates that the individual needs constant high-intensity help which involves more staff members than the other categories.

Based on the list of adaptive skills that can describe and rate the functional ability of a mentally retarded individual, it is possible to have a lower than average IQ and still be self sufficient in the community. These skills include: communication, self-care, home living, social, community use, self-direction, health and safety, functional academics, leisure and work.

The limited cognitive ability of the mentally retarded child is their most obvious characteristic. Many children who have mental retardation have problems in central

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<sup>32</sup> Ginny Thronburgh and Ann Rose Davie, *All That May Worship: An Interfaith Welcome to People with Disabilities*, (Washington D.C.: National Organization on Disability, 1992), 29.

processing. This problem is seen in language related subjects such as reading and the language arts, and may result in an academic lag of up to two to five grade levels. Those with mental retardation have slower rates of learning and a limited capacity for abstract thinking. There has been a move recently to study elements of language of the mentally retarded, so that there can be a better understanding of their language and communication skills. For these studies, *semantics* (meaning and comprehension) is separated from *pragmatics* (the use of language for communication) and *phonology* (speech expression).<sup>33</sup>

The conditions that are considered developmental disabilities result in personal limitations which are sometimes severe. Developmental disabilities are attributed to mental retardation or related conditions which include, autism, cerebral palsy, down's syndrome, epilepsy, traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injury, or some other neurological condition. The special needs of developmentally disabled children vary with the conditions they have and the level of severity of the conditions.

### **Physical Disabilities**

Children with physical disabilities have many different types of conditions. Most of these affect either the *neurological system* (the brain, spinal cord or nerves) or the *musculoskeletal system* (the muscles, bones or joints).<sup>34</sup> In the neurological system, the spinal cord and nerves send messages from the brain to the different parts of the body. This area controls functions such as muscle movement and brain communication, and to some extent sight and hearing. Neurological conditions include cerebral palsy, epilepsy

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<sup>33</sup> Kirk, Gallagher and Anastasiow, 179.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 488.

or Tourette syndrome. The musculoskeletal system includes muscles that support the frame of the body, the skeleton. Problems in this area can result in muscular dystrophy, arthritis, scoliosis or polio.

For the sake of this paper, visual and hearing impairments will be included in the section of physical disabilities. These conditions may or may not be neurologically based, but may be caused by a malfunction in the eyes or ears themselves.

Visual impairments range from normal vision to profound visual difficulty to blindness. A child who is legally blind can see at a corrected vision of 20/200 or less. That means that the child can see something no further than 20 feet away what someone with normal sight can see at 200 feet away. Educationally, different classifications are being used to describe the visual abilities of children. Those who have a *moderate visual disability* can be almost entirely corrected with the help of visual aids. A *severe visual disability* refers to someone who is only helped somewhat with visual aids, but can still use sight for learning. Someone with a *profound visual disability* cannot use visual aids in the classroom for learning purposes. This last type of child learns through the other senses.

Sighted children learn language through listening, reading and watching movements. Children learn to associate a particular word with a particular sight. Visually impaired children acquire language almost the same way, however they are not aided by visual clues. Both the sighted and visual impaired can learn what a cat is. The visually impaired child will have a much greater difficulty learning and understanding descriptive words such as the color white, for example, a *white* cat.

When language is learned, speech patterns are developed which are similar to native speakers. When there are physical barriers such as problems with the neurological system or hearing center a communication disorder may result. Humans hear sounds ranging from very low frequencies to very high frequencies, however the middle range frequencies are the ones that are the most important for the sounds of speech. When the impairment keeps a person from hearing and understanding speech, that person is deaf. The concept of language is important to the cognitive and academic development of children with hearing problems or deafness; the ability to communicate is vital.

Those who have become deaf before the acquisition of speech, *prelingual deafness*, have a greater difficulty in communicating, and therefore have a disadvantage in our educational system. Those who have lost the ability to hear after speech and language have been developed is known as *postlingual deafness*. The deaf are capable of developing speech by imitating visual presentation of phonetic elements.

### **Emotional Disabilities**

Children with emotional problems affect the classroom as greatly as children with learning disabilities. Both types of children demand attention from the teacher, which may take away time from the rest of the class and the other students. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), PL 101-476, describes a person with a serious emotional disability:

... a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics, displayed over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance-



- ♦ an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors
- ♦ an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers or teachers
- ♦ inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances
- ♦ a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression
- ♦ a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.<sup>35</sup>

Though emotional disabilities are recognized as special needs and children with emotional disabilities clearly deserve special attention, this condition is a specialty unto itself and will not be addressed any further in this paper.

## **The Gifted**

On the other end of the special needs spectrum are students who are gifted. Traditionally the term used to describe someone with great intellectual gifts, students who are gifted may excel in one or more areas. The concept of multiple intelligences points to seven possible areas of strength: linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, spatial intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, musical intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence. The Federal government defines someone who is gifted as, "Children and youth with outstanding talent perform, or show

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<sup>35</sup> Bernadette Knoblauch and Barbara Sorenson, "IDEA's Definition of Disabilities. ERIC Digest E560. What Disabilities Entitle a Child to Special Education?," (accessed 23 December 2000), available online, [www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC\\_Digests/ed429396.html](http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed429396.html).

the potential for performing, at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment."<sup>36</sup>

We no longer look at students as only gifted, but as being 'gifted and talented'. The Department of Education's Javitz Gifted and Talented Education Program, sec. 10202 declares that:

- ♦ students ... must develop their talents
- ♦ gifted and talented students are a national resource
- ♦ special abilities of gifted and talented students are recognized and developed during such student's elementary and secondary school years
- ♦ the Federal Government [must] ...ensure that the Nation' schools are able to meet the special educational needs of gifted and talented students<sup>37</sup>

The needs and characteristics of gifted and talented students vary greatly from student to student and from talent to talent. This list is not inclusive and due to talents and abilities in so many areas, it cannot reflect all possibilities. Some students are likely to possess the following abilities:

- ♦ reads earlier and with greater comprehension
- ♦ delves into some interests beyond the usual limitations of childhood
- ♦ comprehends non-verbal clues
- ♦ learns basic skills better, faster; needs less practice; can lead to boredom
- ♦ manifests creative and original verbal or motor responses
- ♦ assumes leadership role

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<sup>36</sup> Kirk, Gallagher and Anastasiow, 118.

- ♦ reads widely, quickly and intensely in one or many subject areas<sup>38</sup>

In addition to students who are gifted there is sixth category of students recognized as having special needs. These students are 'dual exceptionalities' or 'dually abled', which means that they are gifted students with disabling conditions. Quite often the students that fall into this area are not recognized for their gifts and are only seen for the disability that they possess. Customary identification methods such as standardized tests are usually inadequate unless major modifications are made. Students who are deaf cannot take oral tests. Likewise, many students who are both gifted and ADHD have difficulty adhering to classroom rules and exhibit behavior problems which may be more severe than would normally be expected for the ADHD student<sup>39</sup>. This may be due to additional frustrations that the student who is also gifted might be feeling.

The child with dual exceptionalities is unique in the classroom. There needs to be a commitment to identify and nurture the gifts of students with disabilities. Much of what is still necessary comes in the form of teacher, or staff education. Teachers and schools must learn to deal with and adjust to this type of developing situation. As we are becoming more informed and understanding better the diversity within children, we are able to recognize the ever growing special needs of the students in our schools.

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<sup>37</sup> Department of Education, "Javitz Gifted and Talented Education Program, Sec.10202. Findings and Purposes" (accessed 24 December 2000), available online, <http://www.ed.gov/legislation/FSEA/sec00202.html>.

<sup>38</sup> Zena W. Sulkes, "Providing for the Jewish Gifted," *The New Jewish Teachers Handbook*, (Denver: A.R.E. Publications, Inc, 1994), 99.

<sup>39</sup> Colleen Willard-Holt, "Dual Exceptionalities. ERIC Digest E574," (accessed 24 December 2000), available online [http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC\\_Digests/ed430344.html](http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed430344.html).

## Chapter 2

### Educating Those with Special Needs as Seen in the Tanakh

We speak of Torah as a תורת חיים, a '*Torah of life*', or a '*living Torah*'; a Torah that speaks to every person, and has meaning for every person. In congregations around the world, the Torah is read every week, and countless people say *divrei Torah* based on a single *pasha*. How is it possible that a single portion can inspire so much commentary? It is because each individual can draw from the words of Torah to bring meaning to their own lives.

We must remember that words change over time and that some words that were readily used even 100 years ago are no longer in use today. So when examining this sacred text, it is not only important to see what was being said at the time it was written but also to see its relevance to us today.

As Yaacov was lying on his deathbed he called his sons to him. He wanted to give each of his sons a blessing before he died, just as his father had done before him. There was not one blessing for the eldest and one other generic blessing which each of the rest of the sons received. In reading Genesis 49:28 we see that after Yaacov spoke to his sons, we are told that with these blessings he was, "...addressing to each a parting word appropriate to him,"<sup>40</sup> (according to one interpretation). Yaacov gave a separate personalized blessing to each son. He spoke to each of them in a way in which they could understand, a way in which each could derive a personal relevant meaning.

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<sup>40</sup> *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh: The Traditional Hebrew Text and The New JPS Translation- Second Edition*, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1999), 109.

Yaacov's blessings to his sons encompass the whole of what special education is about. Giving each individual that which they need to succeed, according to their own ability to understand.

One of the most obvious themes running through the Tanakh in regard to special needs is that of inclusiveness. The word of God is for all people, no matter the age, sex or ability. Throughout the Tanakh, Moshe, the Kings and the prophets were told to read the book, or the teachings to the people.

ויעל המלך בית-יהוה וכל-איש יהודה וכל-ישבי ירושלם אתו והכהנים והנביאים  
וכל-העם למקטן ועד-גדול ויקרא באזניהם את-כל-דברי ספר הברית

The king went up to the House of the YHWH, together with *all* the men of Judah and *all* the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests and the prophets - *all* the people, young and old. And he read to them the entire text of the covenant...(2 Kings 23:2)

We see other examples of reading or speaking to the people to include them. It is important to see that these texts do not say just the men, or just the adults, but repeatedly state: 'to/ of the people' or 'to/ of all the people'.

ויקח ספר הברית ויקרא באזני העם

And he (Moshe) took the book of the covenant and he read in the ear of (out loud to) the people. (Exodus 24:7)

ויבא משה וידבר את-כל-דברי השירה-הזאת באזני העם הוא והושע בן-נון  
ויכל משה לדבר את-כל-הדברים האלה אל-כל-ישראל...

Moshe came and spoke all the words of this song in the ear of *all* the people, he and Hoshea the son of Nun.

And when Moshe finished speaking all these words to *all* Israel...

(Deuteronomy 32:44-45)

Not only is reading to the people inclusive, but it is also a teaching methodology. When one person reads out loud, there is more control as to how the listeners may hear the words. There are inflections on certain words and stresses upon others. The mannerism and the objective of the reader are expressed in the reading. In early Biblical times, few people read, and reading to the people was a necessary function of the times in order to relay the same information or message to everyone.

In addition to reading to the people, Moshe, the Kings and the prophets spoke to the people in order that they learn. The message of these lessons varied somewhat, but a consistent thread is still the message of inclusiveness. These were the words that were given to all people, from God or about God's laws.

ויקרא משה אל-כל-ישראל ויאמר אלהם שמע ישראל את-נחקים ואת-המשפטים  
אשר אנכי דבר באזניכם היום ולמדתם אתם ושמרתם לעשתם  
Moses called to *all* Israel and said to them: Hear, O Israel, the laws and  
the rules that I speak in your ears today. Learn them and guard them (that  
you) to do them. (Deuteronomy 5:1)

ויצו משה וזקני ישראל את-העם לאמר שמר את-כל-המצוה אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם היום  
Moses and the elders of Israel commanded the people (Deuteronomy 27:1)

וידבר משה והכהנים הלויים אל כל-ישראל לאמר...  
ושמעת בקול יהוה אלהיך ועשית את-מצותיו ואת-חקיו  
Moses, the priests, the Levites spoke to all Israel saying...  
Listen to the voice of YHWH your God and you do his commandments  
and his laws (Deuteronomy 27:9/ 10)

We are further instructed to teach these laws to all of our children and not  
some of our children selectively. On this point, the Tanakh does not distinguish

between children who are learning disabled, physically disabled, or otherwise  
abled.

ושננתם לבניך

Sharply impress them [the laws] upon your children (Deuteronomy 6:7)

ולמדתם אתם את-בניכם

Teach them, your children (Deuteronomy 11:19)

וכל-בניך למודי יהוה

All your children will learn of YHWH. (Isaiah 54:13)

This is a message that is repeated throughout the Tanakh, and it is assumed that all children should hear the word of God. Even those children who do not know (yet), find knowing difficult, or are incapable of knowing should still hear God's message. Further, it is understood that they will all be made able to hear and come to understand to the full extent of their ability.

ובניהם אשר לא-ידעו ישמעו ולמדו ליראה את-יהוה אלהיכם

And their children who do not know, will hear and learn to revere YHWH,  
your God (Deuteronomy 31:13)

ולמדה את-בני-ישראל שימה בפיהם

Teach it to the children of Israel, put it in their mouth.

(Deuteronomy 31:19)

There is a parallel image between putting the teachings in the mouth of the children so that they can learn and God's putting words in Moshe's mouth to instruct him.

Both verses indicate that if one ingests, or even devours God's word, then God's teaching will remain with the person.

ואנכי אהיה עם-פיה וְהוֹרִיתִיךָ אֵשֶׁר תִּדְבֹּר

I will be with your mouth, and teach you what you will speak.

(Exodus 4:12)

Regardless of capability, God's directions are for all. Even Moshe, our great prophet, had limitations connected with his speech. When God chose Moshe to be a messenger, Moshe protested:

בִּי אֲדֹנִי לֹא אִישׁ דְּבָרִים אֲנִכִּי גַם מִתְמוּל גַּם מִשְׁלֶשֶׁם גַּם מֵאִזְ דְּבַרְךָ אֶל-עַבְדְּךָ  
כִּי כְבֹד-פֶּה וְכֹבֵד לִשׁוֹן אֲנִכִּי וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלָיו מִי שֵׁם פֶּה לְאָדָם אוֹ מִי-יֵשׁוּם  
אֲלֵם אוֹ חֹרֶשׁ אוֹ פֶקֶה אוֹ עוֹר הֲלֹא אֲנִכִּי יְהוָה

"I am not a man of words. Either in the past or now that you have spoken to your servant. Because I am slow of mouth and slow of speech." YHWH said to him, "Who put (makes) man's mouth or who puts (makes) him dumb or deaf or seeing or blind? Is it not I, YHWH?" (Exodus 4:10-11)

We see here that God gave Moshe his disabilities, but that was not to be a barrier for Moshe. Even with the limitations that God had given him, it was something that Moshe was able to work with, put to use and therefore make part of his strength. He did not let his disability be a crutch, but rather, he became enabled. There are those that believe that it was not God who caused Moshe's disability, but rather as the Midrash suggests, it was Moshe who caused his own speech impediment when he touched the coal to his tongue.<sup>41</sup> Yet no matter where Moshe's speech impediment originated, it existed to be surmounted.

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<sup>41</sup> *Shemot Rabbah* 126



Examining the story of Moshe's encounter with God, we need to consider a further implication of this. We read that God made Moshe who he was, and that God made mankind. The Tanakh further states that God created man in his own image:

וַיִּצַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם

YHWH, God formed the human being (Genesis 2:7)

וַיְבָרֵא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם

God created mankind in God's image, in the image of God he created it, male and female he created them (Genesis 1:27)

If God created all of mankind as we see here, then each person has a part of the divine spark within themselves. Plaut explains that, "Man's nature is radically different from God's but man is capable of approaching God's actions: His love, His mercy, His justice."<sup>42</sup> Thus life is sacred and when we interact with people it is as if we were interacting with God. Because people were created in God's image, the way in which we treat others is equal to the way in which we treat God. When we treat others with respect and *kavod*, we are indeed showing that at the same time to God. Therefore:

לֹא-תִקְלַל חֵרֶשׁ וּלְפָנֶי עוֹר לֹא תִתֵּן מַכְשָׁל וִירֹאת מֵאַלְהֵיךְ אֲנִי יְהוָה

You will not curse the deaf, and before the blind, you will not put a stumbling-block. You shall stand in awe of your God. I am YHWH.

(Leviticus 19:14)

Initially this verse can be viewed as a refrainment from taking advantage of those whom are disabled. We should not do anything that would harm another, physically or

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<sup>42</sup> W. Gunther Plaut, ed., *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981), 22.

mentally, knowingly or unknowingly. Pentateuchal law prohibited compromising the intrinsic worth of someone with special needs as a human being.<sup>43</sup> Looking further at this verse, for the same reason and with the same understanding that we are not to curse the deaf or place a stumbling block before the blind, we do *tikkun olam*. It is our job to mend the world through our actions:

עינים הייתי לעור / ורגלים לפסח אני  
אב אנכי לאביונים / ורב לא-ידעתי אחקרהו

I was eyes to the blind / and feet was I to the lame,  
I am father to the needy / And the case of one I did not know, I will search  
(Job 29:15/16)

כי-יהיה בך אביון מאחד אחיך באחד שעריך הארץ אשר-יהוה  
אֶדְחִיק נָתַן לְךָ לֹא תִאֶמֶץ אֶת-לִבְּךָ וְלֹא תִקְפֹּץ אֶת-יָדְךָ מֵאֶחִיךָ הָאֲבִיוֹן  
כי-פתח תפתח את-ידך לו והעבט תעביטנו די מחסרו אשר יחסר לו

When there is among you a needy-person, from one of your brothers, in one of your gates in the land that YHWH your God is giving you, you are not to toughen your heart, and do not shut your hand from your brother, the needy one. Rather, you will open your hand to him, and pledge, you will pledge to him sufficient for his lack that is lacking to him.

(Deuteronomy 15: 7/8)

כי לא-יחדל אביון מקרב הארץ על-כן אנכי מצוך לאמר פתח תפתח  
את-ידך לאחיק לעניך ולאבינך בארץ

Because the needy will not cease from among the land, and so I command you, saying: open, you will open your hand to your brothers, to your poor and to your needy one in your land. (Deuteronomy 15: 11)

<sup>43</sup> Edward Kaminetzky, *Studies in Torah Judaism: Sins of Omission - The Neglected Child*, (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1977), 90.

There are those that need in our midst. They are the ones who are unknowing, unable to learn the same way as most others, the ones who physically are unable to keep up, and the ones whose everyday is a struggle. All of these people are poor if we do not reach out our hands to them. It is our job to make sure that education is available to all people. Just like God, we teach. We give those with special needs that which they need in order to be successful.

חנך לנער על-פי דרכו / גם כן-יזקין לא-יסור ממנה

Educate each child according to his [own] way

So when he is old, he will not turn aside from it. (Proverbs 22:6)

כִּי-יִשְׁאַלְךָ בֶּןְךָ מָחָר לֵאמֹר מָה הָעֵדֻת וְהַחֻקִּים וְהַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ  
אִתְּכֶם וְאָמַרְתָּ לְבֶןְךָ...

When your child asks in a time to come, what is the meaning of the statutes, and the laws that YHWH our God commands us, you will say to your child... (Deuteronomy 6:20)

These last two statements are very significant in the way in which we view all people, not only children. Proverbs 22:6 explicitly states that each child is to be taught in a way in which they could learn. This opens the door to a whole plethora of possible teaching methodologies, each of which is specific to the needs of a particular student's needs. (Information on teaching methodologies can be found in chapter 4.)

Deuteronomy 6:20 takes the previous verse a little further. Not only are we supposed to teach each child in a way in which they can understand, but also not before they are ready to hear / learn it. When a child asks a question, there is an underlying statement that says that 'I am at a point in my life that I want to know this information'. One needs to be cognizant of the child's ability to comprehend and at what level the

response to the question should be. In addition, the response is to be given in a manner which would be appropriate for the child.

A further example of this is the story of young Samuel and the priest Eli:

ויקרא יהוה אל-שמואל ויאמר הנני וירץ אל-עלי ויאמר הנני כי-קראת לי ויאמר  
לא-קראתי שוב שכב וילך וישכב ויסף יהוה קרא עוד שמואל ויקם שמואל וילך  
אל-עלי ויאמר הנני כי קראת לי ויאמר לא-קראתי בני שוב שכב ושמואל טרם  
ידע את-יהוה וטרם יגלה אליו דבר-יהוה ויסף יהוה קרא-שמואל בשלשית ויקם  
וילך אל-עלי ויאמר הנני כי קראת לי ויבן עלי כי יהוה קרא לנער ויאמר עלי  
לשמואל לך שכב והיה אם-יקרא אליך ואמרת דבר יהוה כי שמע עבדך וילך  
שמואל וישכב במקומו  
ויבא יהוה ויתיצב ויקרא כפעם-בפעם שמואל שמואל ויאמר שמואל דבר כי  
שמע עבדך

YHWH called to Sh'muel, and he said, "Here I am." And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, because you called to me." And he said, "I did not call you, lie down again." And he went and lied down. YHWH called still again, "Sh'muel." Sh'muel got up and he went to Eli and said, "Here I am, because you called to me." And he said, "I did not call you my son, lie down again." Sh'muel did not yet know YHWH, and the words of YHWH were not yet revealed to him. Again YHWH called Sh'muel a third time. He got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, because you called to me." Eli understood that YHWH called to the boy. Eli said to Sh'muel, "Go lie down, and it will be, if you are called, you say, 'Speak YHWH, because your servant is hearing.'" And Sh'muel went and lied down in his place. And YHWH came, and He stood, and called like the other times, "Sh'muel, Sh'muel." Sh'muel said, "Speak, because your servant is hearing." (1 Samuel 3:4-10)

There are many ways to communicate with a child. However, not all these ways can be understood. Only when the recipient of the teaching or message is ready to learn

and the teacher speaks in such a way in which the child can understand can actual learning take place. Sh'muel was not yet at the point where he was ready to understand what was being said to him. Once he was given the proper guidance by Eli, he was able to 'hear' the message. The words can be made known when the teacher and the student are both prepared.

האזינה עמי תורתי הטו אזנכם לאמרי-פי...

ואבותינו ספרו-לנו

לא נכחד מבניהם לדור אחרון מספרים...

...אשר צוה את-אבותינו להודיעם לבניהם

למעו ידעו דור אחרון בנים יולדו יקמו ויספרו לבניהם

Give ear, my people to my teaching (Torah), bend your ear to the words of my mouth... our fathers have told us, will not hide from their children, from retelling to generations to come... that our fathers are commanded to make known to their children, for the sake of the generations to come will know, children that will be born, in their turn, they will tell it to their children. (Psalms 78:1, 4- 6)

The teachings are for all the children. The text is not concerned whether a person who hears and learns the message is someone with special needs. All of us must learn and pass on the teachings of the Torah, no matter our many abilities. We can not withhold the words of Torah from our children. The teacher must find a way to transmit the message to the students. Further, it is imperative that the student be able to learn so that they in turn can become the teacher and pass the information onto the ones who follow.

ויהיא עזרא הכהן את-התורה לפני הקהל מאיש ועד-אשה וכל מבין לשמ...

...האנשחם וננשחם והמבינים ואזני כל-העם אל-ספר התורה...

והלויים מבינים את-העם לתורה והעם על-עמדם ויקראו בספר בתורה האלהים

מפרש ושום סכל ויבנו במקרא

Ezra the priest brought the teaching (Torah) before the congregation, from men to women and all between to hear...the men and the women and the ones who understand, the ears of all the people [were given] to the book of the teaching (Torah). (Nehemiah 8:2/ 3)

...and the Levites gave understanding of the teaching to the people (caused the people to understand), while the people stood. They read in the book in the teaching of God, explaining explicitly, putting sense, and causing them to understand the reading. (Nehemiah 8:7/ 8)

Ezra brings the Torah for all the people to hear; men women and all who will understand. This statement does not exclude anyone, for we read only a few verses later that the Levites and an entire group of people (who were listed directly before the Levites in verse 7), explained the material in variety of ways, so that all people were able to understand what had been read to them. There was no one who would be able to say that they did not understand. The Tanakh is explicit here, all people can be taught, and it is up to us to make sure that none are omitted.

God's Torah and its teaching are for everyone. We cannot make a differentiation between those who can read themselves and those who need it explained so that they do understand. It is up to us to find the way to make the words of the Torah available, so that God's house is a place where people of all abilities feel welcome and at home.

כי ביתי בית-תפלה יקרא לכל-העמים

For my house shall be called a House of Prayer for all people.

(Isaiah 56:7)

### Chapter 3 ...as Seen in Rabbinic Literature

Education is viewed as a central element in Judaism. We see this in the Biblical sources, where the law was being read and explained to the people of Israel. As we explore the Rabbinic literature, this becomes even more obvious and explicit. The Rabbis concurred that education was for all people, and that it was the duty of everyone to ensure that the law of Torah was available to all people to observe and to study. We read, לעמל תורה נברא, "Man was created for the study of Torah." (*Sanhedrin* 99b)

רב יהודה אמר רב כל המונע הלכה מפי תלמיד כאילו גזולו מנחלת אבותיו...  
מורשה היא לכל ישראל מששת ימי בראשית

Rabbi Judah said in Rab's name: Whoever withholds a teaching from his student, it is as though he had robbed him of his ancestral heritage...It is an inheritance destined for all Israel from the six days of creation.

(*Sanhedrin* 91b)

כל איש מישראל חייב בתלמוד תורה -- בין עני בין עשיר. בין שלם בגופו בין בעל יסורין.  
בין בחור בין שהיה זקן גדול שתשש כחו

Every Jewish man is obligated to study Torah, whether poor or rich, whether healthy in body or afflicted, whether young or whether aged (to the extent that) his strength is diminished.

(Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 1:8)

These statements are twofold. First, there is an educational obligation. According to the Rabbis the study of Torah is not an option but is the purpose for which humankind exists. God created people for the sole intent of studying and fulfilling the words of the Torah. That was to be life's purpose. A critical aspect is that the study of Torah is not just for some selectively, which leads to the second point. It was explained that the

information revealed in the Torah was not to be denied to anyone because it was felt that the person wouldn't comprehend, or was unable to process the information. The Rabbis stressed the inclusiveness of education. Everyone regardless of intellectual ability, physical capability, economic status or age is required to study Torah. This point is critical, for our Rabbis have mandated that education is the birthright of every human being, and that it is the absolute obligation of the community to educate every individual. All Israel, inclusively, has the inheritance of the Torah, and it is for everyone to learn and observe. So, just as we ourselves are compelled to study, we are also compelled to assist those who may not have the ability or drive to educate themselves.

Throughout the balance of this chapter, we will examine the thoughts of our sages on key components of this principle. An additional listing of citations in Rabbinic literature is provided in Appendix B.

### **Starting Age of Education**

Torah was seen as a way of life and children were taught early on, infused from infancy. A talmudic passage equates the laws of Torah with the nourishment flowing from a mother's breasts,<sup>44</sup> indicating the exposure to Torah which begins almost from birth.

במי אתה מוצא חמאה של תורה - במי שמקיא חלב שינק משדי אמו עליה

With whom do you find the cream of the Torah? With him who spits out upon it the milk which he has sucked from the breasts of his mother.

(Berakhot 63a)

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<sup>44</sup> John Cooper, *The Child in Jewish History*, (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1996), 83.



In addition, we read of R. Yehoshua ben Hananyah: "R. Ovadiah Bartenura comments that, from the day he was born, his mother never took his crib out of the *bet midrash*, the study hall, so that all his ears should hear would be Torah thoughts. Thus we see that merely hearing the Torah being studied makes an impression on a child. That, indeed, is the reward of those who bring the young." (*Melo Ha-Omer*) The study of Torah was so central that there was the belief that Torah education could start even from the time a child was still an infant, for the Rabbis considered it as nutrition.

More formal education began at home, with the children learning to recite the שמע, from the time they began speaking. After this, the letters of the *aleph-bet* were taught. The methods used for this reinforced the teaching, for children were taught little by little so that they were able to grasp the words and the material being taught. This demonstrates that children of varying abilities are able to learn, as long as the material being taught is given in small amounts.

מאימתי מתחיל ללמד לבנו משיתחיל לדבר מתחיל ללמדו תורה צוה

לנו וגו' ופסוק ראשון מפרשת שמע ואח"כ מלמדו מעט מעט

From what time does he begin teaching his son, from the time he begins to speak he begins teaching him Torah verse, we are commanded so. From the Sh'ma and then afterwards teach him a little bit at a time.

(*Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'at* 245:5)

מאימתי אביו חייב ללמדו תורה? משיתחיל לדבר מלמדו

"תורה צוה לנו משה" ו"שמע ישראל"

At what age is a father obligated to teach [his child] Torah? From when he begins to speak, he should teach him "Torah *tzivah lanu* Moshe" and "Shema Yisrael" (*Maimonides, Hilchot Talmud Torah* 1:6)

בן ג' שנים שלימוד מלמדן אומן אחרות התורה כדי שירגיל עצמו לקרות בתורה

Nevertheless as soon as the child is three years old we teach him the letters of the aleph-bet so he gets ready to read Torah.

(*Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'at 245:8*)

This method of instructing very young children teaches language both orally and aurally. Combining both modalities increases the likelihood that children will learn the material being taught. Education in the home was based on memorization and recitation of Biblical passages. The repetition of the sounds and use of easy common phrases reinforces the learning. When a child was old enough, usually by age 3, they were able to start learning to read letters. The children were to learn at home, little by little, until they could then be placed into a formal educational system, usually school.

The Rabbis were aware of diversity in children and that not all children could start school at the same age. They incorporated an allowance for variance in ability in their writings. This did not change the basic obligation that every Jewish man is obligated to study Torah.

מכניסים התינוקות להתלמד בן חמש שנים שלימות ובפחות מכאן אין

מכניסין אותן ואם הוא כחוש מכניסין אותו בן ו' שנים שלימות

You can enter the children to learn after they have completed five years, and less than this you don't enter them into the school. If he is puny you enter him when he has completed six full of his years.

(*Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 245:8*)

מכניסין את התינוקות להתלמד כבן שש כבן שבע לפי כח הבן ובנין גופו

Children should be brought to study at the age of six or seven according to the strength of the child and the maturity of the form of his body.

(*Maimonides, Hilchot Talmud Torah 2:2*)

מלמדו מעט מעט פסוקים פסוקים עד שיהיה בן שש או בן שבע

הכל לפי בריו ומוליכו אצל מלמד התינוקות

He should teach him, little by little, verse by verse, until he is six or seven, depending on his health. (Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 1:6)

Around the age of 6 children were no longer taught at home, but were expected to attend school. In *Pirkei Avot* there is an entire curriculum laid out for a child's life, which includes education, "בן חמש שנים למקרא. בן עשר למשנה. בן שלש עשרה למצות..." age five for the Bible, age ten for the Mishnah, age thirteen for the commandments...(5:21). However, the Rabbis were aware that the ability and health of children were diverse, and which meant that the entrance to school as a result also varied. From these readings, difficulties that children had could be either in their physical health (which could include illness, a physical disability) or maturity. 'Depending on his health' left open any number of problems children might have, which meant that they were not up to the rigors of structured education at that time. This is a clear case for special education.

### **Hiring a Teacher**

It is everyone's obligation to study Torah, regardless of ability.<sup>45</sup> In addition, it is also the obligation to educate the children. Once they are old enough, children attend school. The teaching of the child, as well as the child's entire education was the responsibility of the parent. If a parent could not fulfill that responsibly, then they were obligated to hire a teacher. It is seen as a mitzvah to teach all students.

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<sup>45</sup> As previously discussed in chapter 3, *Sanhedrin* 99b, *Sanhedrin* 91b, Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 1:8.

אלא מצוה על כל חכם מישראל ללמד לתלמידים שגם הם נקראים בנים

But it is a mitzvah for all wise from Israel to teach to the students which are also called [their] children. (*Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah* 245:3)

מצוה על כל חכם וחכם מישראל ללמד את תלמידים

אף-על-פי שאינן בניו

It is a mitzvah for each and every wise from Israel to teach all students, even though they are not his children.

(Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 1:2)

Even more than being obligated, a person who is wise is doing a mitzvah by teaching children that are not his/her own. There is a sense of communal responsibility with these statements. One who is wise is fulfilling an obligation to teach our children. Furthermore, the responsibility to educate one's own children was extended to also be responsible for all children within the Jewish community, as stated by Rabbi Judah the Pious. "All Israelites should be as your children and your children as all Israelites. Just as you are required to teach your own children, so are you responsible to educate all children."<sup>46</sup> These statements are inclusive; there is no discrimination as to the ability of the children which are to be taught. The teachers are not to feel as though their efforts are without merit, even without immediate or tangible result as is often the case in a special needs setting. There is an intrinsic value in teaching a child; all children are to get an education.

וחיב לשכר מלמד לבנו ללמדו...

מי שלא למדו אביו. חיב ללמד את עצמו כשיכיר

One is obligated to hire a teacher for one's son...

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<sup>46</sup> Edward Kaminetzky, *Studies in Torah Judaism: Sins of Omission -- The Neglected Child*, (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1977), 43.

He who is not instructed by his father is obligated to arrange for his own instruction when he can understand.

(Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 1:3)

According to the Rabbis, a father (family) is obligated to provide his child's education. When a parent could not fulfill his educational responsibility personally, the child was obligated to arrange for his own instruction when he reached the age of obligation. The education of a child became part of the communal responsibility. Everyone who could potentially teach, as well as the general community, became responsible to provide an education for the child.<sup>47</sup> The community was obligated to assure that all children, whether they could or could not pay and no matter the level of their ability, received an education.

The phrase 'when he can understand' opens up the possibility that arranging for the student's own instruction should not wait until he is an adult. This places the obligation on the child. It is up to the student, in this instance, to take on the responsibility to seek out and arrange for his or her own teacher. An alternate possibility is that this statement takes into consideration the abilities of students and their varying educational needs. We have already seen that it is an obligation for all children to study Torah regardless of their abilities. Further, since there is such a strong communal responsibility to assure that all children receive an education, this mandate for a child to receive an education when he or she can understand should extend to the student with special needs. These students should begin their education at the time when they are ready to learn, emotionally and mentally. Special needs students are obligated to study

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

with a teacher, and the parent's inability to pay or make arrangements for the child should not prevent the child from studying. There is a need for flexibility in teaching students with special needs. We have the obligation to teach our children according to their own ability to learn and understand, at that time that they are ready to learn.

### **The Teacher: Qualifications and Characteristics**

The Rabbis remarked on the qualifications for teaching and the characteristics that a teacher should hold, however there were no set standards for a teacher. At the time of the writing of the Rabbinic literature, the marital status of the teacher was commented on.

לא ילמד אדם רווק סופרים ולא תלמד אשה סופרים

An unmarried man may not teach young children, and a woman may not be a teacher of young children. (*Kiddushin* 4:13)<sup>48</sup>

In addition, the teacher should maintain his own health and provide himself with the proper care so that his health did not deter him from his duties as a teacher. The *Shulchan Arukh* states that the "...teacher needs to take care of himself, so that he can educate best..." with enough sleep, food, etc.<sup>49</sup> The purpose of this statement was for the benefit of the education that the children would receive. A teacher who was not taking care of himself was not in any condition to be able to teach a room of children. With all children being taught, the teachers have to be alert to focus on the various needs of the children in their care.

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<sup>48</sup> The later writings of the *Shulchan Arukh*, *Yoreh De'ah* 245:20 and 245:21 also make these same statements.

<sup>49</sup> *Shulchan Arukh*, *Yoreh De'ah* 245:17

The rabbis understood that the characteristics of the teacher were a significant aspect in the child's education. They made suggestions as to the desirable characteristics that the teacher should hold. Maimonides comments about the characteristics of the way of the righteous, היא הדרך הטובה. These ways are directly applicable to the behavior of the teacher.

ומצוין אנו ללכת בדרכים אלו הבינונים והם הדרכים הטובים והישרים...  
שנאמר: והלכת בדרכיו

We are commanded to walk in these intermediate paths...as it says, And you shall walk in his ways. (Maimonides, *Hilchot De'ot* 1:5)

ארך אפים ורב חסד. צדיק וישר. תמים. גבור וחזק...  
וחיב אדם להנהיג עצמו בהן

Slow to anger, abundant in kindness, righteous, just, perfect, almighty and strong...A person is obligated to accustom himself to these paths.

(Maimonides, *Hilchot De'ot* 1:6)

עושין מאהבה ושמחים

They do this with love and are joyous. (Maimonides, *Hilchot De'ot* 2:3)

When a teacher walks in the intermediate paths they are not being extreme in one respect or the other, this Maimonides sees is an imitation of the characteristics of God. A teacher who emulates God's deeds as well as God's qualities to the best of their ability will be a more successful teacher. If one teaches with love he will find compassion in his teaching and be understanding of the students needs. Furthermore, a teacher who loves what they do will teach with more interest in the students and the material being taught, which will reflect and show in his teachings.

וילמד לתלמידים בשובה ונחת בלא צעקה ובלא אריכות לשון

He should teach his students in calm and tranquility without shouting or wordiness. (*Hilchot De'ot* 2:5)

If a teacher does teach with shouting or wordiness, this could cloud a students understanding or ability to learn. Calmness and tranquility is also a way of teaching with love. Besides showing the positive characteristics, there were some suggestions as to what negative behaviors should not be exhibited while teaching. When instructing the students, a teacher should have patience and not show anger. A teacher's anger should not be taken out on a student with violence. This is very important for a teacher, for as Rambam points out, when a wise man becomes angry, his wisdom leaves him.

לא יכעס עליהן וירגז...

He should not become upset with them and display anger...

(Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 4:4)

לא יכה אותו המלמד מכת אויב מוסר אכזרי לא בשוטים ולא במקל אלא  
ברצועה קטנה

The teacher will not hit him with the blows of the enemy (brutally), not with a whip, not with a stick, but with a small lace.

(*Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah* 245:10)

שכל הכועס אם חכם הוא חכמתו מסתלקת ממנו

Whenever one becomes angry, if he is a wise man, his wisdom leaves him.

(Maimonides, *Hilchot De'ot* 2:3)

A teacher's behavior in the class has a direct correlation to a student's learning. If a teacher is easily angered, then the students will not learn effectively. However, if the teacher instructs the students with patience, kindness, and love, a student will learn.



## The Teacher and the School

Besides describing the characteristics of the teachers, the Rabbis also chose to discuss the teacher's place in the school. We see that sometimes one person is a better teacher than another person. There are several statements about choosing the right teacher. Especially when dealing with special needs students, it is critical that the right teacher is selected for each student. With the proper teacher, the students can learn in the manner that is best for them.

אם יש כאן שני מלמדים האחד קורא הרבה ואין מדקדק עמהם  
להבינם על נכון ואחד אינו קורא כל כך אלא שמדקדק עמהם  
להבינם לוקחין אותו שמדקדק יותר

If there are two teachers, one reads a lot but does not analyze with them so that they properly understand; and one doesn't read that much, but he analyzes with them in order that they understand; choose the one who analyzes. (*Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 245:19*)

אם יש כאן מלמד שמלמד לתינוקות ובא אחר טוב ממנו מסלקין  
הראשון מפני השני

If you have a teacher who teaches children and another comes who is better than him, you get rid of the first in place of the second.

(*Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 245:18*)

It is important that the teacher work with the students so that they understand the material being taught. Especially when dealing with students with special needs, it is beneficial for the teacher to be able to deeply consider the material, analyze the teaching possibilities and then present that material in the best possible way for the students. Though it is acceptable to have a teacher who is a scholar, if the teacher is unable to transmit the information to the students in a way in which they can understand, the

teacher is not the most effective teacher for those students. The text says that if there is a teacher who is teaching a group of students, and another teacher who is better qualified than the original teacher comes into the community, it is acceptable to replace the first teacher. It is important to find the appropriate teacher who can address the needs of the students.

In addition, in the Talmud, there is a discussion about whether to choose a teacher who is quicker and makes mistakes or one who is slower and does not make mistakes. R. Dimi concludes that the teacher who is slower and does not make mistakes is the better teacher, for once a mistake is made it is implanted in the mind of the student it cannot be eradicated, "... מותבין דדייק ולא גריס שבשתא כיון דעל על ..." (*Bava Bathra* 21a). This point is very well taken, because children want to believe their teacher, thinking that the information transmitted is accurate. It would take a much longer period of time to teach new corrected material after this error. Furthermore, for many special needs students, this type of error is even more detrimental. Learning can normally take a great deal of time and attention and to relearn new material would increase the difficulty level for these students.

The class sizes which a teacher supervised varied. The Rabbis were conscious that there were only so many students any one teacher could instruct at a time, so they developed standards for the classroom. These standards led to two conclusions, the maximum class size desired, and the minimum level of service a community is required to give their children.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Za'ev Abramson and Eliyah Touger, translators, *Maimonides Mishneh Torah: Hilchot De'ot, The Laws of Personality Development and Hilchot Talmud Torah, The Laws of Torah Study*, (New York: Moza'im Publishing Corporation, 1989), 184.

עשרים-וחמשה תינוקות למדים אצל מלמד אחד

היו יותר על עשרים-וחמשה עד ארבעים מושיבין עמו אחר לסייעו בלמודם

היו יותר על ארבעים מעמידין להם שני מלמדי תינוקות

[A maximum of] 25 students should study under one teacher. If there are more than 25, up to 40, an assistant is appointed to help him in their instruction. If there are more than forty students, two teachers are appointed. (Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 2:5)<sup>51</sup>

Reasonably, there is a limit to how many students can be taught in a group. In larger classes, there is diminished attention for each student which means that individual needs cannot be met as readily. While the number of students the rabbis commented on were maximum class sizes, optimally this number would be less. The community therefore had an option as to what level of service would be provided to their students. The numbers in the text represented the minimum service provided. Allowing another school to be open was another option for the community. This provides a choice as to where students can go to study, and with the teacher that would best suit the needs of the students.

וכן מלמד תינוקות שבא חבירו ופתח בית ללמד תינוקות בצדו כדי

שיבואו לו תינוקות אחרים...אין יכולים למחות בידו

If a colleague of an established teacher comes and opens a school next door so that children will come to him...they cannot stop him.

(*Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah* 245:22)

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<sup>51</sup> Yosef Karo in the *Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah* 245:15 concurs with these statistics. In the Talmud, *Baba Bathra* 21a, Rav agrees that there should be one teacher for 25 students, however the second teacher is not added until the number of students reaches 50. The assistant in the class, which is at the expense of the town, is not hired unless there are 40 students.

Maintaining a school in a community not only provided the students with an instructor, but it was important for the community as a whole. The Rabbis believed that the education of children was so important that a city only exists for their sake, so that they can learn.

מושיבין מלמדי תינוקות בכל עיר ועיר וכל עיר שאין בה מלמד  
תינוקות היו מחרימים אנשי העיר עד שיושיבו מלמד תינוקות ואם  
לא הושיבו מחריבין העיר שאין העולם מתקיים אלא בהבל  
פיהם של תינוקות של הית רבן

Place a teacher of children in every city, and any city that doesn't have a teacher of children you boycott until they bring in a teacher. If they don't bring in a teacher, you destroy that city, because the world only exists on the breath of the children who are learning in the house of study.

*(Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 245:7)*

There is a story that eloquently explains the importance of a school to a community:<sup>52</sup>

Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi II sent out Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba, Rabbi Assi and Rabbi Ammi to learn through an investigation of all the villages and towns of Palestine, whether they had schools.

They came to a place where there was no schoolmaster. They asked the head of the community to summon the town's watchmen. The night watchers were brought into their presence.

"They are no profit to a city," the Rabbis said, "they are only an expense."

"And who do you call watchmen?" the Rabbis were asked.

"The schoolmasters," they responded. "A town without schools will not be guarded by the Lord." *(Y. Hagigah, 1)*

There is a sacred obligation for all people to study Torah. Therefore, it is also an obligation to provide an education to all children. If a town does not have a school, then they are not fulfilling their obligation to teach their children. The community must do their part to assure that all children receive an education, regardless of the level of their ability. In every town, the community is required to maintain a school for their children to learn. Only when a town is able to provide an education for all of their children are they in compliance with their obligations.

### **The Special Needs Student**

There are many different types of students, with all types of abilities. A classic view of varying abilities in children is seen each year when we read the Passover Haggadah, with its discussion of the 'Four Sons'. In this familiar story, the Rabbis describe four very different children, each of whom should be taught of the Exodus from Egypt; one who is wise חכם, one who is wicked רשע, one who is naïve תם, and one who is unable to ask שאינו יודע לשאול. Each of these children perceives information differently and hence need to have the story relayed to them in accordance with their understanding.

The Rabbis of the *Mishnah* speak in another way about differences in learning. They describe the characteristics of four types of students according to the speed with which they understand or forget what is being taught to them. Included in this is the student who would be categorized as having special needs.

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<sup>52</sup> Louis I. Newman, ed., *The Talmudic Anthology: Tales & Teachings of the Rabbis*, (West Orange, New Jersey: Berhman House, 1945), 417.

ארבע מדות בתלמידים מהר לשמוע ומהר לאבד...

קשה לשמוע וקשה לאבד...

מהר לשמוע וקשה לאבד...

קשה לשמוע ומהר לאבד...

There are four types of students: quick to understand, quick to forget...; slow to understand, slow to forget...; quick to understand, slow to forget...; slow to understand, quick to forget... (*Avot* 5:12)

This *mishnah* is pointing out individual differences which educators must be aware of when instructing children. The easiest students to teach would be the ones who understood the material quickly and did not easily forget what was taught to them. However, the Rabbis recognized these variations in teaching students. They pointed out that there might be some students who have retention problems, for they are quick to understand their teachings, yet forget them easily. There are also the students who have difficulty understanding what is being taught, but when they finally did understand, they did not easily forget it. Finally, the *mishnah* describes the students who had difficulty understanding the lesson and also easily forget what was taught to them. This incorporates an entire spectrum of students who may range from those having mild learning disabilities to students who have developmental or physical disabilities, as well as students who are gifted. This is noteworthy. For an instructor to be able to teach productively, the teacher needed to be aware that there were different types of students who learned the lesson in different ways, so that the teacher could best meet the student's needs and subsequently adjust teaching methods and strategies to the abilities of the students.

There is a Rabbinic obligation to train one's children in the performance of mitzvot. Maimonides states that there are no mitzvot which equal that of Torah study,

because Torah study leads to deed. He concludes "study takes precedence over deed." (*Hilchot Talmud Torah* 3:3) This centers around the principle that Torah study is the highest rung a person can reach.<sup>53</sup> The Rabbis acknowledged that there are differences in students. All students need to study Torah so that they will not be denied the opportunity to reach the highest rung, even students with special needs. Each person learns according to their own ability, yet when they study they are performing the ultimate mitzvah.

אמר רבא לעולם ליגריס איניש ואף על גב דמשכח ואף על גב  
דלא ידע מאי קאמר

Rava said: A person should always study texts, even though he may forget, even though he may not understand what he is reciting.

(*Avodah Zara* 19a)

וכן לא יאמר התלמיד: הבנתי והוא לא הבין אלא חוזר  
ושואל אפלו כמה פעמים...  
יאמר לו רבי תורה היא וללמד אני צריך ודעתי קצרה

The student should not say "I understood" when he did not understand, Rather, he should ask again and again, even if it requires several repetitions...he should tell him, "My teacher, this is Torah. It is necessary that I study and my comprehension is weak."

(Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah*, 4:4)

Education is for all students and it is necessary that students study and apply themselves. There are students who may forget what they studied, but the Rabbis took this into consideration and concluded that it is the act of studying (Torah) itself that is important. Special needs students will be able to achieve a certain level of understanding,

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<sup>53</sup> Za'ev Abramson and Eliyah Touger, translators, *Maimonides Mishneh Torah: Hilchot De'ot, The Laws of Personality Development and Hilchot Talmud Torah, The Laws of Torah Study*, (New York: Mozaim Publishing Corporation, 1989), 191.

according to their own abilities. This limited understanding does not preclude them from the obligation of making the effort to study. Even our greatest Prophet, Moses, had difficulties. According to the Talmud, he too forgot Torah:

אמר רבי יוחנן כל אותן ארבעים יום שעשה משה בחר היה למד תורה  
ומשכחת ובסוף נתנה לו במתנה כל כך למה בשביל להחזיר את הטיפשים

Rabbi Yochanan said, "Each of the forty days that Moses was on Mount Sinai he learned the entire Torah and then forgot it. In the end God gave him it (the Torah) as a gift. Why was all this necessary? To bring students who experience learning difficulty closer to Torah." (*Y. Horiot*, page 36)

The commentary called *Pnei Moshe* attempts to clarify what Rabbi Yochanan meant by the statement: 'To bring students who experience difficulty closer to learning'. It says:

Of those who forget their learning it should never be said in the Jewish community, "Why do we teach certain children who appear not able to comprehend the material?" The answer is derived from Moses. He diligently continued to learn in spite of his constant forgetfulness. And, at the very end he acquired it." (*Pnei Moshe*)

Students who do have difficulty with learning should have the opportunity to make the attempt to learn. If someone as great as Moses forgot these teachings forty times, and only then was able to remember with the assistance of God, then an ordinary person, a person with their own difficulties, should also make the attempt to learn with the understanding that even Moses needed help.

Further, the Rabbis say that a student should not be embarrassed if others understand and he does not. The student should endeavor to recognize that he is having



difficulty in an area and strive to learn. Additionally a student should ask repeatedly for material to be reviewed or for an explanation if he does not understand. This means conversely, that it is the teacher's responsibility to assist their students. They have to recognize that the current method of teaching the students may not work for all their students and adjust their presentation accordingly. They need to have patience and recognize that there will be students who learn at different rates. The level of learning will vary from student to student.

ולא יהא התלמיד בוש מחבירו שלמד בפעם הראשונה או שניה והוא לא למד  
אפלי אחר כמה פעמים שאם נתבייש מדבר זה נמצא נכנס ויוצא לבית המדרש  
והוא לא למד כלום

A student should not be embarrassed if a fellow student has understood something on the first or second time, and he has not grasped it even after a number of attempts. If he is embarrassed because of this, it will turn out that he will have spent his time in the house of study without learning anything at all. (*Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 246:11*)

וכן לא יאמר התלמיד: הבנתי והוא לא הבין אלא חוזר  
ושואל אפלו כמה פעמים

The student should not say, "I understood" when he did not understand. Rather, he should ask again and again, even if he requires several repetitions. (*Maimonides, Hilchot Talmud Torah, 4:4*)

Some people are born with an innate ability; intellectual, musical, or perhaps visual. There are others who have many good abilities even though they are lacking in one area or another. These individuals need to be taught and learn. How that teaching takes place varies, and is dependent upon a student's capabilities. We read:

הקדוש ברוך הוא טבע כל-אדם בחותמו של אדם הראשון

ואין אחד מהן דומה לחברו

The Holy One, Blessed be he, stamps all mankind in a sign of the first man, and not one of them is like to his fellow. (*Sanhedrin* 4:5)

People were made in the image of God. God made Adam, and from Adam, the rest of humanity. Though minted from the first human's form, each person, and each child is unique, unlike any other child. All possess the divine spark within them. The individuality of each person reflects his/her own individual abilities. *Mekorot Gedolot* in expounding on Proverbs 22 states in *Metzudat David*, "Initiate the child ...in accordance with his level of intelligence, whether great or limited." Being individuals, children learn in their own unique way. It does not matter that a child does not learn like another child. Torah is the birthright of all students, including special needs students. They should have an equal opportunity for an education in it.

### Teaching Methodologies

The initial step in learning to read the Bible was in learning the letters of the *aleph-bet*. Many children learned at home, and others were taught by their teacher. The teacher would write several letters on a tablet and then have the children identify each one by name.<sup>54</sup> Children were slowly introduced to simple Hebrew words and shown the proper pronunciation and meaning of the words. Students were taught through the use of repetition with an emphasis made on memorization. By repetition, continual study and

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<sup>54</sup> Nathan Drazin, *History of Jewish Education from 515 B.C.E. to 220 C.E.*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1940), 110.

reinforcement, the use of the letter, words and phrases became natural, like an ingrained trait.

יעשה וישנה וישלש במעשים...

ויחזור בהם תמיד עד שיהיו מעשיהם קלים עליו ולא יהיה בהם טרח עליו

He should perform - repeat - and perform a third time... He should do this constantly, until these acts are easy for him and do not present any difficulty. (Maimonides, *Hilchot De'ot* 1:7)

Repetition is a methodology that has been used to teach for a long time. The Talmud speaks of Moses using this method to teach Aaron, Aaron's sons and the elders.

Moses learned from the mouth of the Omnipotent. Then Aaron entered and Moses taught him his lesson. Aaron then moved aside and sat down on Moses' left. Thereupon Aaron's sons entered and Moses taught them their lesson. His sons then moved aside, Eleazar taking his seat on Moses' right and Ithamar on Aaron's left. R. Judah stated: Aaron was always on Moses' right. There upon the elders entered and Moses taught them their lesson, and when the elders moved aside all the people entered and Moses taught them their lesson. It thus followed that Aaron heard the lesson four times, his sons heard it three, the elders twice and all the people once. At this stage Moses departed and Aaron taught them his lesson. Then Aaron departed and his sons taught them their lesson. His sons then departed and the elders taught them their lesson. It thus followed that everybody heard the lesson four times. (*Eruvin* 54b)

In the Tanakh we read that Moses was 'slow of speech' (Exodus 4:10) and had difficulty speaking. Yet we have just read that he was able to teach the lesson four times. It was Moses who communicated to Aaron, Aaron's sons, the elders, and finally the people, and there is nothing here to say that he was unable to do so. This is significant.

We learn that just because someone has a disability, it does not mean that they are incompetent or incapable.

א"ר אליעזר חייב אדם לשנות לתלמידו ארבעה פעמים...  
אהרן שלמד מפי משה ומשה מפי הגבורה כך הדיט מפי הדיט על אחת  
כמה וכמה

R. Eliezer inferred: It is a man's duty to teach his pupil four times.  
...Aaron who learned from Moses who had it from the Omnipotent had to  
learn his lesson four times how much more so an ordinary pupil who  
learns from an ordinary teacher. (*Erubin 54b*)

From this text it is explicit that someone who is extraordinary still needs to learn through repetition. It is not just a method for someone who needs extra assistance. Repetition reinforces the material trying to be learned by creating pathways to memory. So if even the gifted need to learn through repetition, even moreso the ordinary person. Teachers used repetition to assist their students in learning the aleph-bet, words and readings in the Bible. This was, however, not just for the average child. As was already previously discussed, the child with special needs has a right to also be taught and to learn. The special needs child should be given what they need in order to succeed.

רבי פרידא הוה ליה ההוא תלמידא דהוה תני ליה ארבע מאה זימני וגמר יומא  
חד בעייה למלתא דמצוה תנא ליה ולא גמר א"ל האידנא מאי שנא א"ל מדההיא  
שעתא דא"ל למר איכא מילתא דמצוה אסחאי לדעתאי וכל שעתא אמינא השתא  
קאי מר השתא קאי מר א"ל הב דעתך ואתני לך הדר תנא ליה ד' מאה זימני

R. Pereda had a pupil whom he taught his lesson four hundred times before the latter could master it. On a certain day having been requested to attend to a religious matter he taught him as usual but the pupil could not master the subject. 'What' the master asked, 'is the matter today?' 'From the moment' the other replied, 'the Master was told that there was a religious

matter to be attended to I could not concentrate my thoughts, for at every moment I imagined, Now the Master will get up or now the Master will get up.' 'Give me your attention', the Master said, 'and I will teach you again.' As so he taught him another four hundred times.

*(Erubin 54b)*

R. Pereda was not aware that he was not teaching as well as he would normally have. The text reads, 'he taught him as usual but the pupil could not master the subject'. 'Taught him as usual' means that R. Pereda did teach the student 400 hundred times, which was the usual. Being distracted by another matter that was on his mind, R. Pereda continued to teach through numerous reviews of one lesson without being aware that the student was not learning as he was himself distracted by his teacher's preoccupation with another matter. Only after teaching the lesson 400 times did R. Pereda learn that his teaching was ineffectual.

This story is teaching that the teacher needs to be attentive, have patience, and work with students through multiple repetitions of a teaching. The distracted teacher will not only divert the mind of the students so that they will have difficulty learning a lesson, but will also not be as effective a teacher. This teacher will not be able to teach a thorough lesson and may even make errors in his or her teaching. The teacher must be able to focus attention on the students and will need to have patience to be able to reexamine a lesson many times. This is not an easy task. Reviewing a topic several times, the teacher needs to be consistent, without anger, understanding and show compassion towards the student who is having difficulty. The teacher must have calm patience, which is a very important aspect of teaching.

There may be times in which a student needs a lesson, a concept or even one letter explained to them 400 times before they are able to understand. However, this seems to be an extreme. Whether this story is literally accurate or created to make a point is unknown. The issue is that there are students who require special attention and it is essential to their development that they review with a teacher who is fully attentive, possibly many times before they are able to grasp a concept. The Rabbis understood this and included this story in the *Gemara* to emphasize that students learn through repetition and that special needs students are no exception.

הרב שלמד ולא הבינו התלמידים -- לא יכעס עליהן וירגז אלא חוזר ושונה  
הדבר אפלו כמה פעמים עד שיבינו עמק ההלכה

If the teacher taught [a concept] and it was not grasped by the students, he should not become upset with them and display anger. Rather, he should repeat and review the matter, even if he must do so many times, until they understand the *halachah* in all its depth.

(Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 4:4)

For many students, including those with special needs, teaching using too much information can be extremely distracting. Maimonides further commented, "One should teach his students in calm and tranquility without shouting or wordiness." (*Hilchot De'ot* 2:5) There will be students who are unable to discern between that material which they need to know and material which is superfluous. The teacher's presentation of the material is critical in teaching those with special needs. Excess words or explanations can confuse the student. It was felt that it was important to teach students with brevity.

וכן בדברי תורה ובדברי חכמה יהיו דברי האדם מעטים ועניניהם מרבים  
והוא שצו חכמים ואמרו: לעולם ישנה אדם לתלמידיו דרך קצרה

If speaking about matters of Torah or knowledge, one's words should be brief, but rich in content. This is what the Sages commanded when they said: "One should always teach his students in a brief way."

(Maimonides, *Hilchot De'ot* 2:4)

Maimonides explained that one should also limit the amount of teachings that are done at the time. There should be a limit of three *halachot* while studying the same subject because it would be too difficult for the average child to grasp more than three new concepts at the same time.<sup>55</sup> For the student who needs special attention, even three *halachot* would be too much. Both the words and the quantity of work to be learned should be brief, without sacrificing the quality of the teaching.

In teaching the lessons, the material should be revealed slowly, so that the students have the opportunity to be able to grasp the information. In this way the students' knowledge will grow and their wisdom will increase. This may not be enough assistance for the student with special needs. For all children, the Rabbis stressed the importance of using mnemonic devices while teaching text. אמר רב חסדא אין תורה נקנית אלא בסימנין, "R. Hisda stated: The Torah can only be acquired with [the aid of] mnemonic signs." (*Eruvin* 54b). There are two stories in the Talmud which exemplify the use of mnemonics.

The first story comes from the Palestinian Talmud, where we read:

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<sup>55</sup> Touger, 222. Commentary to *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 4:7.

So they [the students] said: why two letters<sup>56</sup> - *mem mem, nun nun, tzade tzade, pe pe, and kaph kaph?* From word (*ma'amer*) to word, from a true one (*ne'eman*) to a true one, from a righteous one (*tzadek*) to a righteous, from mouth (*peh*) to mouth and from the hand (*kaph*) of God to the hand of Moses." <sup>57</sup>

The second example is part of a mnemonic device which is found in the Babylonian Talmud:

The Scholars said to R. Joshua b. Levi: the children came today to the House of Study and said things like of which were not said even in the days of Joshua son of Nun:

*Aleph bet - elaph binah* (learn understanding), *gimmel dalet - gemol dallim* (deal kindly with the poor). Why is the foot of the *gimmel* stretched towards the *dalet*? Because a charitable man runs after the poor. Why is the foot of the *dalet* stretched towards the *gimmel*? Because he (the poor) should let himself be found. And why is the face of the *dalet* turned away from the *gimmel*? Because he benefits him secretly, so as not to shame him.

*He* and *vav* form the name of God.

*Zayin, bet, tet, yod, kaph, lamed*; if you do so, God will feed (*zan*) you, be merciful (*had*) to you, show goodness (*metiv*) to you, give you a heritage (*verushah*) and crown (*keter*) you for the world to come (*leolam haba*)....

(*Shabbat* 104a)

<sup>56</sup> Why do the letters מנצפ have two forms? One for the beginning or middle of the word and one for the end of a word.

<sup>57</sup> Eliezer Ebner, *Elementary Education in Ancient Israel: During the Tannaitic Period*, (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1956), 89. In his endnote, Mr. Ebner sites two sources for this reading, *Yer. Megillah* 1, 11-71d: Cf. *Genesis Rabbah* 1, 15 for a variant reading.



Not only are the letters themselves used to help students remember words and moral concepts, but as seen in the second example, the shapes of the letters are also used to help children to recognize the forms of the letters themselves. The use of mnemonic devices helps children 'zero in' on the clues needed to remember more complicated material. Teachers had the leeway to create their own mnemonics to assist the students that they taught. Using these verbal clues as well as writing allowed the students to use multiple stimuli to reinforce the information that was being taught.

The teachers used many teaching methods to help their students learn the lesson. The use of positive reinforcement assisted the teacher in his endeavor. Students were rewarded for their efforts and their success. It was believed that if the student tries very earnestly to study, even though he has not improved, the teacher should use positive reinforcement to persuade the student to continue in this diligence.

If a child does not comprehend this well... it is necessary for the teacher... to motivate him to his studies with things that he loves...he should say, "I will give you nuts, figs, or a little honey." ...When he becomes older, he should be encouraged and motivated to learn by the promise of things he holds dear. His teacher should tell him, "Study, and I will buy you nice shoes or beautiful garments."

(Introduction to *Sanhedrin* 10)

The Rambam further states that because of a person's intellect, it may be necessary to make the goal of wisdom something other than wisdom.<sup>58</sup> Teachers often give their students acknowledgement of good effort and a job well done. In modern times this is accomplished through the use of stickers, pieces of candy or small toys. Entire

classes can be convinced to work harder through the promise of a party, or some other larger reward. Using the reward system is not only beneficial for persuading students to put in greater effort, but for the special needs student, this form of positive reinforcement is an instant acknowledgement that either their endeavors were acceptable or that they have responded correctly. This in turn motivates the student to continue to strive to achieve.

Besides using positive reinforcement to assist special needs students to learn, the Rabbis also supported the strategy of peer tutoring. Peer tutoring is a way to accomplish individualized instruction, reinforcing or even teaching concepts previously explained by the teacher. This teaching method also allows students who are inattentive to learn positive work habits from students who are more advanced.

אפילו תינוק שאינו מבין לקרות לא יסלקוהו משם אלא ישב עם האחרים  
אולי יבין

Even a child who doesn't understand how to read, don't throw him out from there (school), but seat him with the others. Perhaps he will understand [the issues]. (Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 245:9)

דקארי קארי דלא קארי ליהוי צוותא לחבריה

The attentive one will read [of himself], and if one cannot read, let him become a partner with his (literate) friend. (Bava Bathra 21a)

These statements clearly indicate that the Rabbis were quite aware of the needs of their students. They tell us that students with learning or other disabilities are not to be

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<sup>58</sup> Touger, 194.

removed from a classroom, rather, they should be encouraged to learn by placing them with students who do understand.

The teacher is responsible for the education of his students. Through the use of various strategies, techniques and methodologies, he should encourage, guide, motivate and educate his students. In discussing the quintessential teacher, Rabbi Yossi explains it in another way, אפילו לא האיר עיניו אלא במשנה אחת - זה הוא רבי, "Even if he did no more than make his eyes light up from an explanation of a single selection from the Mishnah -- he is still considered to be his Rabbi." (*Bava Metzia* 33a)

### **The Gifted Student**

The Rabbis were aware that the abilities of children occupied a full spectrum which included those with learning and developmental disabilities, physical disabilities, average abilities, and those who were intellectually gifted. It was the responsibility of the parent to assure that these children received an education.

ויש לו בן ללמוד ואין ידו משגת להספיק לשניהם...

ואם בנו נבון ומשכיל מה שילמד יותר ממנו בנו קודמו

And [if] he has a son that needs to study, and he doesn't have enough money for both of them,<sup>59</sup> ...if his son is smart and understanding with good intellectual capabilities, and he will study more than his father, the son comes first. (*Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah* 245:2)

ת"ר הוא ללמוד ובנו ללמוד... ר' יהודה אומר אם בנו זריז וממולח ותלמודו

מתקיים בידו בנו קודמו

Our Rabbis taught, if he has himself to teach and his son to teach... R. Judah said: if his son is industrious, bright, and retentive, his son takes precedence over him. (*Kiddushin* 29b)

The Rabbis were quite clear in their message. If there is both a parent and child who need an education and a choice has to be made as to which one receives the education; if the child is smart, with good intellectual capabilities, and is retentive, the child's education has priority over the parent's education. It is understood that the parent's education was important, however following the Rabbinic obligation mentioned in *Nazir* 29a, it is an obligation to train one's children in the performance of mitzvot,<sup>60</sup> and that all children should study Torah.

However, bringing a gifted student to a teacher to be taught is not enough. It is important for the parent to be aware of how their child's studies are progressing. If the teacher that was selected for the student initially is the inappropriate teacher, unable to teach the student according to his or her ability, then as the Rambam explains, the child may be transferred to another teacher.

מוליכין את הקטן ממלמד למלמד אחד שהוא מהיר ממנו

A child may be transferred from one teacher to another teacher, who is capable of teaching him at a faster pace...

(Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 2:6)

Through ongoing communication with the child and with the teacher it is possible to follow the student's progress. Though accurate in the situation of the gifted child, maintaining an open communication is relevant in all educational situations. It can be easy to come to the conclusion that because a child seems to fit into the class where he or she is first placed, it does not mean that this is the situation which will ultimately be the

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<sup>59</sup> For himself as a parent and for his son to study.

<sup>60</sup> Touger, 158.

best for the student. The student and the situation need to be constantly reassessed so that we can be sure we are giving the student every opportunity to learn and grow.

It is important to remember that the Rabbis did recognize that there were differences among our people, and that this is the way people were supposed to be created. Every person possesses many different traits and abilities. The Talmud reminds us of the diversity in people:

הרואה אוכלוסי ישראל אומר ברוך חכם הרזים שאין דעתם דומה זה לזה

ואין פרצופיהן דומים זה לזה

If one sees a multitude of Jews he says, "Blessed is ...the wise who knows the hidden secrets," because just as their minds are not similar to each other, their faces are not similar to each other. (*Berachot 58a*)

It is up to us as Jews and Educators to give each person the respect and *kavod*, they are due. We need to recognize our individuality, accepting the differences among ourselves and treat each person as if they are a blessing. We need to be able to show no partiality among ourselves. The children that we teach are to be treated all alike. This does not mean that each child receives exactly the same lesson, but that each child should be given a complete education based on their abilities without discrimination.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Special Needs Education in the Congregational School**

The Jewish people have historically placed an emphasis on education. In Biblical times, a priority was put on teaching all people by reading the text to them, in order for them to know the laws. In our Rabbinic literature we saw the necessity of hiring teachers so that all children could be taught. The common thread which weaves in and out of Biblical and Rabbinic literature is that of inclusiveness. Hearing and learning text was not considered optional, and all the children of Israel were to have the opportunity to learn regardless of their abilities.

This basic premise has not changed for thousands of years. As Jews we believe that every Jewish child deserves a Jewish education; it is nothing less than their birthright. We are not only obligated to teach our children, but must also recognize the diversity of our children. Many of today's Jewish educators acknowledge that the education each child receives has to be in accordance with that child's individual abilities and needs.

In our congregational schools, often called supplementary schools, there has been a move to include children with disabilities of varying degrees of severity in the educational system. Though the Biblical writers and Rabbis spoke of the importance of education for all, inclusive education has not been commonly found in American congregational schools. Sporadic efforts at establishing special education within the Jewish community began primarily in the 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>61</sup> As secular school systems have concentrated more on special needs education, there has been a refocus of

direction within our congregational schools. With the development of advanced diagnosis, identification and teaching methodologies, the techniques and strategies once used primarily in the secular world have been adopted and are now used by Religious Schools. However, much of what is now being done in secular and religious education was recognized long ago in our sacred texts.

The Tanakh teaches us that, וְכָל-בִּנְיָן לִמּוּדֵי יְהוָה "All your children will learn of YHWH." (Isaiah 54:13) In accordance with that teaching, our congregational schools must open their doors to all of our children, enabling them to receive a Jewish education. This, however, is not an easy task. The community of learners in a congregational school ranges from very young children to those who are young adults. As we learn more about the needs of the children within our community, the more willing we must be to adapt so that each child's individual needs are met. The congregational school will need to be aware of these varying abilities and work with each student and his or her family to find the best placement and the program that is best suited for the student.

According to the Rabbis of the Talmud, everyone is required to study regardless of their intellectual ability or physical capability. We see this in the Passover Haggadah when reading of the 'Four Sons'. The Rabbis knew that children are different from one another, and the way each child is responded to parallels the various traits and abilities of the students that are seen in our congregational schools. This teaches us how we should respond to the needs of our students. From the ones who are unable to ask questions, whether they are too young to understand or have developmental, physical or learning disabilities which keep them from being able to understand, to the ones who are gifted

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<sup>61</sup> Edward Kaminetzky, *Studies in Torah Judaism: Sins of Omission - The Neglected*

and need enrichments beyond the rest of the class. What is clear is that the account of the 'four sons' described in the Haggadah is a paradigm for teaching all kinds of learners. We have a sacred obligation to ensure that our schools have the capability to teach all our children through a curriculum that is appropriate, stimulating and enriching, while providing for the intellectual and physical requirements of all the students.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the 1990 law which provides a national mandate for eliminating discrimination against those with disabilities, reaches beyond the public realm into the private, religious domain. It defines a religious entity as a "religious corporation, association, educational institution or society",<sup>62</sup> thereby mandating that congregations, camps and other of our faculties fall within the auspices of the ADA. Providing for the physical requirements of the students ensures them total accessibility to the congregation. Going beyond providing literal access to bathrooms and ramps, an accessible congregation makes every effort for people with disabilities to be able to participate fully in the congregation's activities.

### **Physical Disabilities**

In Leviticus 19:14 we are instructed to not curse the deaf nor put a stumbling block before the blind. When we deny accessibility to our students that is exactly what we are doing. The stumbling block is that which keeps our children from learning to the best of their ability in school. The physically disabled student is entitled to full spectrum of education, the same as every other student. It is this access to Jewish knowledge that our sacred texts require of us.

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*Child*, (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1977) 106-108.



Granting physical access means that congregations must ensure that the synagogue and the classrooms are suitable for students with physical disabilities. Though physical abilities of students vary greatly, considerations should include:

- ♦ Can the students physically enter the building, sanctuary, classroom and bathroom, and move around in these spaces?
- ♦ Can the students ascend the bima, so that they can participate in services, Junior Congregation and Junior Choir?
- ♦ Are special programs held in locations that allow the students to participate?
- ♦ Are classroom materials designed for ease of handling?

Students who are blind or visually impaired have another set of educational considerations. Not restricted by movement, these students are challenged by their sight limitations. Our Rabbinic literature tells of those who are blind and are also educated, including those who were both students of Torah and teachers of Torah despite their disability.

גדולי חכמי ישראל היו מהן חוטבי עצים ומהן שואבי מים. ומהן סומים  
ואף-על-פי-כן היו עוסקין בתלמוד תורה ביום ובלילה. והם מכלל  
מעתיקי השמועה

The greatest Sages of Israel included wood choppers, water drawers and blind men. Despite these [difficulties] they were occupied with Torah study day and night and were included among those who transmitted the Torah's teachings.... (Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 1: 9)

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<sup>62</sup> "Liheyor: Access to Judaism, Guidelines for Congregational Certification," (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1990), 13.

The Sages Maimonides spoke about, Rav Yosef and Rav Sheshet, two of the more prominent *Amoraim*,<sup>63</sup> exemplify that blindness does not restrict a person's ability to study Torah. The large number of Talmudic sages who were blind probably reflect the wide prevalence of this disability at those times.<sup>64</sup> There were a number of people who were both blind and educated. Their blindness, though a disability, was not a handicap. It did not hold them back from being able to learn. Even with their sight limitations they were able to fulfill the mitzvah of *Talmud Torah*. Our lesson is that the study of Torah remains an obligation for all people, even those who can't see the Torah.

The teachers in Rabbinic literature used repetition, mnemonics and memorization to educate. Modern methodologies of teaching the blind include these older and well-tested strategies, along with others. Braille, the system of reading for the blind using combinations of six raised dots, was developed in the early 1800's. The use of Braille for teaching Judaica allows students to participate in the classroom and in the school's programming. The Hebrew Braille System, developed in the 1930's, was universally adopted in the 1950's. Using Hebrew Braille, a blind student can learn to read Hebrew and actively participate in Religious services, including reading of the *Haftarah* and reading from a siddur.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Za'ev Abramson and Eliyah Touger, translators, *Maimonides Mishneh Torah: Hilchot De'ot, The Laws of Personality Development and Hilchot Talmud Torah, The Laws of Torah Study*, (New York: Moznaim Publishing Corporation, 1989), 171.

<sup>64</sup> Louis Isaac Rabinowitz, "Blindness: In Talmud and Jewish Law" *Encyclopedia Judaica - CD-ROM Edition*, (Israel: Judaica Multimedia Ltd., 1997).

<sup>65</sup> Tape recorded materials, large-print books, or materials written in Braille can be obtained from the Jewish Braille Institute of America located in New York City, (800) 433-1531, [www.jewishbraille.org](http://www.jewishbraille.org). In addition, the JBI will transcribe any Jewish textbooks into a large-print book, a tape recording or Braille upon request. All materials are available in both Hebrew and English. Their services are free of charge.

In addition to reading Braille, blind and visually impaired students can learn through other strategies. Using confluent education to blend together the cognitive, affective and the psychomotor to teach a concept, blind and visually impaired students can be exposed to and learn about different areas of Judaism. Some strategies can include:

- ♦ The students should use a tape recorder in class to tape the class session and record assignments.
- ♦ Use the sense of touch in teaching/ learning: ritual items, holiday objects, clay, and craft materials.
- ♦ Use music and kinesthetics as a means of communicating and teaching/ learning.
- ♦ Use descriptive language in the classroom.
- ♦ Utilize computers and specialized software to enrich the classroom learning. Software is available in large print Hebrew/ English, as well as programs that use auditory means of teaching.
- ♦ Use large print and/ or Braille materials to enhance teaching/ learning, including *siddurim* and *humashim*.
- ♦ Have magnifying glasses available in both the classroom and the sanctuary for the visually impaired student to use. (Large print and Braille books can be bulky and too heavy for some people.)

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Hebrew Braille materials can be obtained from the Jewish Institute for the Blind in Jerusalem, 02-6599555 or 02-6599504.

A Central Library for the Blind in Israel, 972-9-8617874, makes available books and materials in Hebrew and English as well as other languages.

- ♦ Seat visually impaired students away from glare and close to the chalkboard; have adequate sight lines to board or speaker; maintain adequate lighting.
- ♦ When using visual aids, give the visually impaired student a large print or Braille copy of the material being shown.
- ♦ Utilize student peers to volunteer to tutor, tape record materials and assist student when requested.
- ♦ Familiarize the students with the layout of the synagogue.

Those with hearing impairments were not always considered educable. A person who was mute was ineligible to study with the sages. Those with hearing impairments in early Rabbinic literature were long thought to be uneducable because they were unable to understand spoken language and many times were unable to communicate. Yet one Talmudic story to some extent invalidates this view:

Behold there were two mute men in Rabbi [Yehudah HaNasi's] neighborhood, sons of the daughter of Rabbi Yohanan ben Gidgada, who would go in to the House of Study whenever Rabbi [Yehudah HaNasi] entered [there] and they would sit before him [and other sages] and they would nod their heads and move their lips. And Rabbi [Yehudah HaNasi] prayed for them and they were healed, and it turned out that they knew *Halakhah* (i.e. *Mishnah*), *Sifra*, *Sifre*, and the whole Talmud!

(*Hagigah* 3a)

These two men were allowed to study even though they were considered incapable of learning, because there were no formal means of educating them. They were later found competent to do so, for they were able to learn the whole Talmud.

Yet much of the same negative attitude remained until the late 1800's when a new insight regarding the education of deaf-mutes came in the form of *responsa*.<sup>66</sup> This described a group of deaf-mutes who were visited in the Vienna Institute for the Deaf and Dumb. Their curriculum and behavior was so impressive that they should be considered 'normal' and obliged to fulfill the commandments of the Torah.<sup>67</sup>

Educational and technological advances in modern society have enabled those with hearing impairments to be actively involved in congregational life. Hearing aids have been developed to assist those with limited or deficient hearing. Speaker systems and hearing devices are used in synagogue programming and allow many to hear more clearly.

The use of sign language to teach those with hearing impairments has changed the shape of deaf education. The development of sign language began in Italy in sixteenth century c.e. by a physician. In 1620 the first book on sign language was published. American Sign Language, not developed until the 1800's, plays a key role in teaching deaf children in our congregational schools. Sign language in the classroom enables students to participate in Judaic studies with the rest of the class, although American Sign Language (ASL) has some shortcomings and does not always meet the special needs of the Jewish people.

Many prayers have been translated into sign language with hand symbols, as opposed to finger spelling, and there have been many 'new' signs created to represent words where the old word was inappropriate. For example, the ASL sign for 'prayer'

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<sup>66</sup> The *responsa* by Rabbi Simcha Bunim Sofer, *Shevet Sofer*, *Even ha-Ezer*, No. 21.

<sup>67</sup> Louis Isaac Rabinowitz, "Deaf-Mute: Further Developments in the 1970s," *Encyclopaedia Judaica - CD-ROM Edition*, (Israel: Judaica Multimedia Ltd., 1997).

places both hands flat together in front of the person with the head bowed, clearly a Christian symbol. The 'new' Jewish sign for 'prayer' places the one hand in another, palms facing up while the whole body moves back and forth representing "shuckeling" in prayer.<sup>68</sup>

This development in sign language is vital to the education of our deaf students. The goal of Jewish Educators is to help prepare each student to become a knowledgeable Jewish adult, helping each to develop their own Jewish identity and function in this world as a Jewish adult. Jewish sign language reinforces teachings in the congregational school using language which supports and substantiates the curriculum and programming of the school. It is not enough to be able to follow along in a prayerbook. The use of sign language enables students to understand what is being said in religious services by giving them the opportunity to make spiritual connection. Using sign language, the deaf student can be called to the Torah to become a Bar or Bat Mitzvah. 'Reading' through signing allows students to fully participate in the congregational religious experience.

Using sign language is only one aspect of what can be done to meet the needs of Jewish deaf and hearing impaired students.<sup>69</sup> Teachers need to be aware of other strategies and considerations when instructing in the congregational school. It is important to realize that we must adapt our methods and our procedures so that our students receive a full Jewish education. Some of these suggestions deal with hearing impaired students using lip-reading to assist themselves with communication:

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<sup>68</sup> Adele Kronick Shuart, *Signs in Judaism: A Resource Book for the Jewish Deaf Community*, (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1986), 121.  
An additional resource for Jewish signing is : David Bar-Tzur, *Survival Signs for Jewish Vocabulary*, online <http://www.rit.edu/~dabdis/rign/vocab/srvivlsins.html>

- ♦ Speak only when facing the class.
- ♦ Use visual aids when teaching, including slides, video tapes, overhead projector, posters, maps, etc.
- ♦ Do not move around much when teaching. Do not stand in front of a window.  
(This makes it harder for the student to see the teacher's face.)
- ♦ Repeat questions that were asked by other students.
- ♦ Use the sense of touch in teaching/ learning: ritual items, holiday objects, clay, and craft materials.
- ♦ Use kinesthetics as a means of communicating and teaching/ learning.
- ♦ Utilize computers and specialized software to enrich the classroom learning.  
There is a variety of Judaic software available, including Hebrew Sign Language.
- ♦ Utilize volunteer student peers to take notes of class discussions, and also assist student when requested.
- ♦ Use sign language when appropriate; teach sign language to other members of the class.

Students with deafblindness are both deaf and blind. They hold special challenges for the congregational school, the biggest of which is communication. These students need to receive their education through their other senses, and most of their input will be from tactile stimulation. The sense of touch plays a major role in the education of deafblind students including the use of Braille, fingerspelling, and exploring through the

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<sup>69</sup> Resources for Jewish Deaf/ Hearing impaired can be obtained through the National Congress of Jewish Deaf and its affiliates.

sense of touch. The teacher, in turn, needs to be aware of the students' non-verbal signs and clues to communicate. Students should be encouraged to participate in congregational and school activities. Teaching the deafblind child is not easy but by using non-traditional methodologies the deafblind child can learn about and be a part of their Jewish community.

### **Learning / Processing Disabilities**

Children with learning disabilities are unique in their abilities, and learn in different ways and at different rates than other children in their classes. Our Biblical and Rabbinic literature referred to those whose ability to learn differed from that of other children. Even in ancient times it was recognized that not all children learn in the same way. There are times when we need to work with our children so that they can understand and apply what they are learning. This is clear in the words of Proverbs 22:6, חנך לנער על-פי דרכו 'educate each child according to his [own] way'.

The word 'educate' is significant because of its implications. This statement could have easily said 'show each child...' or 'tell each child...', or even 'teach each child...'. Both the words 'show' and 'tell' deal with a single level of understanding, which is either visual or auditory learning. This is a cursory learning with no deep understanding. The learning disabled child learns best through multiple modalities, using the various senses and diversified teaching techniques.

The word 'teach' implies instructing and imparting knowledge or skill. When a person teaches a child they are transmitting information for the child to learn. There may or may not be various techniques used to teach the material, and the level of knowledge is deeper than that of 'showing' or 'telling' a student. The word 'teach' למד, is found



throughout the Tanakh and is used in various instances to describe instruction. However, the word 'educate' *יָדַע*, is used in this verse of the Tanakh. To educate a child develops the innate capabilities of a child, so that they are brought to a higher level of understanding. A child is just not memorizing the words so that they can be spit back. When we educate each child according to his own ways, we are helping each child to develop a deeper understanding by using the child's own strengths and developing his or her abilities. This is important for the special needs student who might understand a teaching on a superficial level, yet not be able to apply that leaning. To 'educate' implies a fullness, awareness and depth to the education that the special needs student must receive.

In the congregational school classroom, teachers are exposed to children with various types of learning disabilities. Current studies suggest that approximately 15% of the US population have learning disabilities.<sup>70</sup> However, because of the lack of uniformity within the definition of learning disabilities, statistical figures may not be accurate.<sup>71</sup> Often difficult to recognize at first, the difficulties of these students may become more obvious in the classroom as time progresses. This is especially true of schools which hold classes on weekday afternoons, after the child has had a full day of public school. The additional hours in school may make some learning disabilities more exaggerated (i.e. ADD/ ADHD or dyslexic students).

The majority of special needs children in the congregational schools are those with learning/ processing disabilities. These disabilities affect the way that children learn in school. People learn language differently then they learn other things. Language is

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<sup>70</sup> Kirk, Gallagher and Anastasiow, 222.

learned aurally, orally, and visually. For some, language is also learned kinesthetically. Many learning disabled children are not able to learn by one specific method of teaching. The teacher must use multiple modalities when instructing special needs students, and they must be prepared to adapt to the needs of their students. This is especially true for students learning to read Hebrew.

When our sages taught Hebrew they made sure that the students only received information in small bits, "When a man acquires his Torah...little by little, it increases," (*Eruvin* 54b). They knew that children needed to be exposed to the information slowly and carefully in order to learn. The sages also used mnemonics and repetition to help assist students to learn to read Hebrew.<sup>71</sup> No one method alone will effectively teach children with learning disabilities. Learning Disabled students need multiple triggers in order to learn to read Hebrew. To teach Hebrew it is suggested:

- ♦ Use kinesthetic methods to reinforce learning
- ♦ Many learning disabled children have a short attention span, teaching techniques may have to change often
- ♦ Use arrows of directionality
- ♦ Visually distinguish between look-alike letters
- ♦ Repetition is necessary for improvement. Have students practice reading out loud, this uses multiple modalities.
- ♦ Use window blocks to assist students with reading, when necessary

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> "The children come today to the House of Study and said things...*Aleph Bet - elaph binah* (learn understanding)..."(Shabbat 104a), "He who studies and does not repeat his lessons is as one who plants and does not enjoy the fruit." (Sanhedrin 99)

- ♦ Print vowels in a different color from the consonants
- ♦ Give positive reinforcement for students who do good work
- ♦ Reading and repeating familiar (reading) material at lower reading levels helps to reinforce and strengthen the reading ability
- ♦ Building the students ability to read sight words will increase their reading level
- ♦ Teach the students how to practice reading Hebrew. As we learned from our Rabbinic literature, small bits at a time. When reading a prayer or verse, read 1-3 words at a time, then repeat them before going on
- ♦ Use computers to enhance teaching. There are many programs designed to teach Hebrew readiness, Torah reading and trope.

In addition to Hebrew classes, students with learning disabilities also have difficulty learning in their Judaic studies classes. Often students are sitting for long periods of time, possibly doing textbook work. It is necessary for teachers with learning disabled students to adapt their teaching strategies in order to become more effective. There are three adaptation strategies which can be used; adaptation of objectives, adaptation of materials, and adaptation of instructional presentation.<sup>73</sup>

#### Adaptation of Objectives

- ♦ Selecting the objectives to meet the needs of the students
- ♦ Task Analysis- breaking the objectives into two or more sequential objectives.

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For a more complete listing of material written in Rabbinic literature, see Appendix B, Teaching Methodologies.

<sup>73</sup> "Adapting Curriculum for Students in Special Education: A Teacher's Handbook." (New York: New York City Board of Education, Division of Special Education, Office of Curriculum and Professional Development, 1987), 7-17.

### Adaptation of Materials

- ♦ Enlarge printed material
- ♦ Reduce amount of information on a page
- ♦ Increase space on answer sheets and between words, sentences and lines
- ♦ Modify vocabulary used
- ♦ Color code information in book. Highlight topic in one color, examples in another color, etc.
- ♦ Tape record materials to be used in class and to be taken home
- ♦ Outline items in picture that needs to be distinguished, i.e. Israel on a map
- ♦ Use materials that are visually appealing
- ♦ Use three dimensional examples, do not rely only on books, handouts and chalkboard

### Adaptations of Instructional Presentation

- ♦ Use a variety of teaching techniques: visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile.
- ♦ Change mode of presentation by changing materials, directions, and information
- ♦ Use several modes simultaneously; show a physical example while describing it
- ♦ Keep similar topics together
- ♦ Use repetition and reinforcement in teaching
- ♦ Individualize task completion schedules
- ♦ Use computers to enhance teaching. There is a multitude of Judaic software available.
- ♦ Use modeling in teaching, show students how you want them to behave and what you want them to do

- ♦ Have students repeat directions back to teacher
- ♦ Sit distractible students near teacher
- ♦ Adapt tests to fit the learning needs of the students, i.e. use an oral exam for a child with dysgraphia; do not ask a child with dyscalculia to number the order in which Biblical stories are read
- ♦ Be aware of spatial / directional/ problems
- ♦ Use window blocks to assist students with reading, when necessary

When working with special needs students in the congregational school, it is important to recognize that sitting at desks for long periods of time, and reading and writing present an obvious area of difficulty for learning disabled students. However, there are other locations within the congregation that may also cause problems. Educators and teachers need to be aware that the Sanctuary and library, where students must sit still for periods of time, and art room, where there may be many distractions, may be equally difficult for some students with special needs.

### **Developmentally Disabled**

The term 'developmental disability' was not used in ancient times. Yet it was recognized in our sacred texts that there were those who were obviously more severely disabled than those with learning disabilities. In *Mekorot Gedolot*, Metzudat David comments upon Proverbs 22 stating, "Initiate the child... in accordance with his level of intelligence, whether great or limited." Those with developmental disabilities have limited intelligence and a slower rate of learning. That however, does not mean that they are unable to learn. The statement in *Mekorot Gedolot* is clear in its meaning; children should be taught Torah, at whatever level they are able to learn it.

Students with developmental disabilities may not always seem to be able to follow the material being taught in our congregational schools. However, we can't assume that these students get nothing out of education, Religious Services, and the many programs that our synagogues have to offer. Students with developmental disabilities simply progress at a slower rate than other children.

Families of students with developmentally disabled children may opt to place their child in a self-contained classroom with other students that have similar disabilities. Other families may wish to have their child included in the regular classroom.<sup>74</sup> These decisions should be made by the family of the student in conjunction with the congregation's Educator. Either placement will require additional staff in the classroom to assist the students so that an optimal level of education can take place for all the students.

Our Rabbis described using several methodologies in teaching, including: teaching in small bits, using repetition, motivation using rewards, peer tutoring and mnemonics. These educational methods are crucial for successfully instructing students with developmental disabilities. Furthermore, teaching and reinforcing social skills should play a major role in religious education for the developmentally disabled. Some teaching strategies may include:

- ♦ Take small steps. Break all elements into the smallest possible units.
- ♦ Adapt materials to work on the students' level.
- ♦ Create tasks for the students that are brief and uncomplicated.
- ♦ Keep the tasks and materials concrete. Use familiar objects when teaching.

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<sup>74</sup> Rabbinic sources suggest that students who are having difficulty in the class to be placed with other students who know the material. See Appendix B, Teaching Methodologies.

- Use repetition to reinforce learning. Do this by creating tasks, games, etc., which reinforce the same point.
- When teaching Hebrew, use audio tapes and transliteration when necessary.
- Reward success. Each task attempted or accomplished should be rewarded. Failure can damage a student's confidence and desire to learn.
- Use music in teaching. Music is understood in a different center of the brain than speech. Many children with developmental or neurological disabilities find it easier to learn when music is involved.
- Show praise and physical affection.

### **The Gifted Student**

Gifted students are usually easy to spot in the congregational school. They are generally the ones who easily answer questions in class discussions, learn quickly, can be creative and volunteer to do extra for the class. A gifted student in the class can be an asset. However, there are some gifted students who are not recognized right away for their abilities. These are the students whose needs are not being met, who have become bored and educationally unstimulated.

The Rabbis recognized the abilities of gifted students and the importance of placing them with teachers who will be able to motivate and challenge them.

מוליכין את הקטן ממלמד למלמד אחד שהוא מהיר ממנו

A child may be transferred from one teacher to another teacher, who is capable of teaching him at a faster pace...

(Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 2:6)

In addition the Rabbis used gifted students to assist those who had more difficulty in the classes.<sup>75</sup> This method of helping the disabled also kept the gifted students engaged in the lessons in the school. Other suggestions for the gifted student might be:

- ♦ Provide the students with enrichment material to do when other classwork is completed
- ♦ Provide the students with extra credit (research) work
- ♦ Ask the student to assist other students
- ♦ Adapt the lesson to accommodate the abilities and multiple intelligences of the students
- ♦ Use the computer and appropriate software to enrich the class
- ♦ Develop mini-courses which utilize other modalities of learning
- ♦ In Hebrew develop an advanced level reading group
- ♦ Track students in Hebrew according to level not age
- ♦ Encourage students to write their own worship service using alternative styles

The role of the congregational school and its teachers is not an easy one. There are many types of students within our walls who are vying for attention; students who have disabilities, those who are gifted and those who are average children. However, we can learn from our patriarch, Jacob. As he lay on upon his deathbed, he addressed an appropriate parting word to each of his children.<sup>76</sup> It is the responsibility of the congregational school to emulate the actions of Jacob and provide each student a Jewish education which is best suited for his or her abilities.

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<sup>75</sup> See Appendix B, Teaching Methodologies

<sup>76</sup> Genesis 49:28



## Chapter 5

### The Congregational School

Our sacred texts spoke about the importance of giving all our students an education. Schooling, per say, was not specifically addressed in the Tanakh. It was not until later in the Rabbinic literature that the school itself was mentioned. The type of system that the Rabbis described was a full day program where students spent many hours a day being instructed.<sup>77</sup> This instruction lasted all day and into the night.

יושב ומלמדם כל היום וקצת מהלילה כדי לחנכם ללמוד ביום ובלילה

The teacher sits and teaches them all day and a little into the night in order to educate them to study day and night.

(*Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 245:11*)

The amount of time that the students spent in school learning as depicted in the *Shulchan Arukh* has similarities to the public and Jewish day schools of modern time. Public schools and Jewish day schools both operate on a system in which the students attend school 5 days a week for approximately 6 hours each day. This allows for the school to vary its approach with those who need special attention. Students may attend special classes as needed, get pulled out of class for some small group work or stay in the classroom with the rest of the students, with or without a class aide.

The congregational school setting is unique in the way it must deal with special needs students. The Biblical and Rabbinic literature does not describe educational systems which are similar to the model found in congregational schools. The form of

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<sup>77</sup> In addition to daily instruction, the teacher should "...not stop teaching them at all except for *erev Shabbat* and *erev Yom Tov*." (*Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'at 245:12*)

education that is seen in congregational schools is an adaptation to the needs of modern society. In congregational schools, classes meet 1-3 times a week for approximately 2 hours each class session. Not only is there a time constraint within the congregational school setting, but also the reality that children are usually going to the congregational school after attending a full day of public or day school. Many children may be tired after already putting in a full day in a classroom.

Some may have concerns that any alternative class setting will tend to take students away from the limited socializing that can occur during the school session. It is important to realize that Religious education is more than academics; it is also about being part of *Am Yisrael*. The interaction that the students have with other students during Religious or Family Services, holiday celebrations and other synagogue programs adds to the students' socialization. The richness of heritage that students acquire in the congregation is all part of the students' educational experience.

Though limited on time, the congregational classroom can avail itself of several options while trying to decide upon the correct setting to positively meet the educational needs of its special needs students.<sup>78</sup>

- ♦ The **self-contained classroom** provides a separate classroom for students with a special needs instructor and possibly an aide. The more serious the disabilities, the smaller the teacher/student ratio needs to be. For all non-academic school activities, the special needs child would be mainstreamed with the rest of the student body.

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<sup>78</sup> "Handbook for Special Education Programs in the Synagogue Schools," Bureau of Jewish Education of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties, (Fall 1996), 9-13

Those non-academic activities might include special trips, assemblies, services, and special programming.

Advantages of the self-contained classroom are that students receive specialized academic attention and therefore may experience more success. Classes are generally smaller, and the curriculum can be specifically adjusted to meet the special needs of each child.

Disadvantages of the self-contained classroom are that the students are isolated from other students and the 'special class' status might stigmatize some students.

- ♦ In **inclusion**, students are integrated into the congregation's regular education program. Inclusion allows special needs students and other students to learn side by side and are serviced by the regular class teacher. The curriculum of the special needs student (1) may be the same as the other students, (2) may follow the same curriculum, but pursue different objectives, based on the students' abilities, (3) may follow the same lesson, but pursue different goals from different curricular areas or (4) they may pursue alternative activities from the rest of the class. This may be obtained in association with either a pull-out program or a plug in program, when necessary.

The advantage to inclusion is that all students are part of the class and therefore develop social benefits of peer interaction. The remainder of the students learn about diversity and tolerance.

The disadvantages to inclusion are that there may be some students who feel uncomfortable with the diversity in the class. Having students with different needs in

the same class may be difficult for some teachers. Teachers must be trained to handle classes with a diverse student body.

- ♦ In the **pull-out program**, special needs students are taken out of the classroom by a special needs instructor to work either individually or in a small group for part of the class time. The special needs instructor also works with the classroom instructor to help coordinate how the teacher works with the child in the classroom setting.

Advantages are that the students are able to get some social benefits of being in a regular classroom with other students. Each student receives individualized learning intervention, while all the rest of the students learn about diversity in the classroom environment.

Disadvantages of the pull-out model are that the students miss what is being taught in the classroom while they are out of the class. Some students may feel uncomfortable or self-conscious with the special treatment they receive. Scheduling pull out time may be difficult for the classroom and special needs teachers to coordinate.

- ♦ In the **plug-in program** the special education teacher goes into the classroom to work either with an individual student or with a smaller group of students. The small groups may either consist of special needs students only or special needs students with some of their other classmates.

The advantage to this program is that the students are able to be fully included in all the classroom programs, without feeling segregated from other students. They receive individualized instruction while at the same time exposing the rest of the class to diversity.

The disadvantages of this model are that team teaching can be difficult for some teachers, especially for teachers who have little experience. There is much coordination required between both the classroom and special education teachers as the latter must enter into the classroom at different times; this may well be when the teacher is in the middle of a lesson. The amount of support that the special needs students receive may not be enough. Some special needs students may feel uncomfortable with having a special education instructor enter the classroom.

There are opposing views on whether or not the special needs children should be placed in special self-contained classes in the congregational school. Some believe that creating special classes results in segregation, which does not enhance the children's Jewish self-image and, as a result, has a negative impact upon the children.<sup>79</sup> There are others who are wary of making universal statements such as 'religious school classrooms should be heterogeneous'.<sup>80</sup>

Long before the modern educational system was trying to decide how best to educate those with special needs, Joseph Karo seemed to ponder this question. In the *Shulchan Arukh*, we read:

אם יש כאן מלמד שמלמד לתינוקות ובא אחר טוב ממנו מסלקין  
הראשון מפני השני

If you have a teacher who teaches children and another comes who is better than him, you get rid of the first in place of the second.

(*Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah* 245:18)

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<sup>79</sup> Zena W. Sulkes, "An Expression of Our Commitment to *Klal Yisrael*," *Compass*, Winter 1986, 8.

<sup>80</sup> Kerry M. Olitzky, "Proceed with Caution.," *Compass*, Winter 1986, 8.

This statement looks at class placement on two levels. First, in a general sense, if the teacher of a class is unable to convey the information to the students, and the students are not learning from this particular teacher, then for the sake of the class, the first teacher needs to be replaced by one who is better. A second explanation for this statement is one which looks at the placement of special needs students. The question at hand is what type of placement is best for a special needs child, self-contained or inclusion. There is strong support for inclusion in Maimonides' and *Shulchan Arukh's* view that a student with reading problems should be allowed to stay with their classmates because perhaps they will understand the lesson on an oral or aural level. Further, what can be deduced from Karo's comment in regard to special needs children is that they need to be placed with that teacher who is able to teach them better than another teacher. This is not saying that the first teacher is unable or unqualified to teach. It is saying that the first teacher may not be the right teacher for a particular special needs student.

In addition to classroom setting, class size is also relevant for the special needs students. Our Rabbinic literature addressed the situation of class size differing in regard to how many teachers should be in a class when there are more than 40 students. The point on which they agree however, is that there should be no more than 25 students to one teacher.

עשרים וחמשה תינוקות למדים אצל מלמד אחד

היו יותר על עשרים וחמשה עד ארבעים מושיבין עמו אחר לסייעו בלמודם

היו יותר על ארבעים מעמידין להם שני מלמדי תינוקות

[A maximum of] 25 students should study under one teacher. If there are more than 25, up to 40, an assistant is appointed to help him in their instruction. If there are more than forty students, two teachers are appointed. (Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 2:5)

In congregational schools the size of classes vary from those that are very small with only a few students to those classes that are much larger with over 20 students in a class. This is dependent upon the size of the classroom and the needs of the students. Classes that have students with physical disabilities or students with mild learning disabilities may comfortably contain 20 students. However, classes which have students with more serious learning or developmental disabilities would require a smaller class size.

It is necessary for the classes to meet the needs of the students, therefore a school must place a student in a class of the type and size that is best suited for the student. This may entail creating an inclusive class with pull-out sessions for some students, or creating a smaller self-contained class for other students. Whether a class is self-contained or inclusive, it is necessary to give each student as much personalized attention as possible without isolating him or her from the other students. Smaller class sizes appear to be optimal in teaching our students.

Regardless of which classroom setting is best for a special needs student, using peers to interact with the special needs students is beneficial to both students. As early as the Talmud, we saw the benefit of peer tutoring for special needs students. We read of putting one student with another, 'if one is inattentive, put him next to a diligent one' (*Bava Bathra* 21a). Throughout our sacred texts are descriptions of students learning from other students who know more: 'Even a child who doesn't understand to read...you sit him with others' (*Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah* 245:9), 'One student is sharpened by a fellow-student' (*Bereshit Rabbah*, 69,2).

Peer tutoring or 'pairing' teaches children that though there are some students who have different abilities, they are all still fellow human beings and Jews. This educational strategy also improves academic performance, boosts confidence, nurtures friendships, improves social attitudes, provides positive interactions and attitudes towards tutor, tutee, and subject content.<sup>81</sup> Peer tutoring, however, should not mean that the students are unsupervised. In this type of interaction, the teacher must set objectives, select and match students, prepare materials, determine schedule, monitor progress and evaluate the sessions.

Professional educators need to be able to look at each child and their specific needs and develop a program that best suits the needs of the child and his or her family. No one program is appropriate for every student who comes into the congregational school. Educators must be conscious that the program that is right for a child one year may not meet the needs of that same student in subsequent years.

The congregation's Educator/ Principal and the teacher must be in close contact with the parents of the special needs child. This is not only for assessment purposes, but also to establish a partnership for the child's learning. The Rabbinic literature directed the parent to bring the child to school when they were ready to learn,<sup>82</sup> yet ongoing communications between the family and the school are not noted. In our congregational schools, this communication is necessary for the well being of the students. The Educator should set the tone of the school and is responsible for communication between teachers, parents, and students. Maintenance of communication records and student records is vital

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<sup>81</sup> Judy L. Olson and Jennifer M. Plaut, *Teaching Children and Adolescents with Special Needs 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*, (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Merrill, Prentice Hall, 2000), 292-5.



in striving to give the students the best education possible. When a special needs student enters the congregational school, creating an IEP (Individualized Education Plan) is critical. With the IEP, the school and the parents can cooperatively map the needs of the student and the actions to be taken to give the student the best education possible.

Oftentimes parents have their own issues connected with their child's special needs and may tend to blame themselves. It is always important to be sensitive to this but also not to allow parental anxiety or denial to interfere with what is necessary for the student educationally.<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, the parents are the primary advocates for their own child's wellbeing and should always be involved in the decisions related to their education.

The classroom teachers and resource room teachers spend the most time with the special needs students. They are responsible for carrying out the educational instruction as outlined in the IEP, and they are foremost in ensuring that the students fit into the class structure. It is the teacher who is able to make the student feel comfortable in the class. The manner in which the teacher treats the special needs students will be reflected in the way the other students interact with and accept the students. The teacher needs to treat the students with respect in all settings.

The qualities of the teachers also reflect how they instruct the students. Maimonides believed that one should be, 'slow to anger, abundant in kindness' (*Hilchot De'ot* 1:6), 'teach the students in calm, without shouting' (*Hilchot De'ot* 2:5), and 'with

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<sup>82</sup> *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 2:2, "Children should be brought to study at the age of six or seven, according to strength of the child and the maturity of his body.

<sup>83</sup> Cory Chargo and Tobi R. Innerfield, "Teaching Hebrew to Special Needs Children in a Supplementary Religious School," (Presentation, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1998).

love and are joyous' (*Hilchot De'ot* 2:3). It is these attributes which set the tone of the class. Through the gentle direction of the teacher, the students will learn. It is important for the teacher to place an emphasis on what the special needs child can do. Additionally, if the teacher believes the students will be successful, whether socially or academically, then the students usually will.

The teacher must constantly be attuned to the student and work for the benefit of the student. In doing so, the teacher must also be self-aware; it is essential that the teachers of the students receive continued training. In Rabbinic literature we read of those who are both the ones who teach and the ones who are taught.

היו עוסקין בתלמוד תורה ביום ובלילה. והם מכלל מעתיקי השמועה  
...they were occupied with Torah study day and night and were included  
among those who transmitted the Torah's teachings....

(Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 1: 9)

כל איש מישראל חייב בתלמוד תורה -- בין עני בין עשיר. בין שלם בגופו בין בעל יסורים.  
בין בחור בין שהיה זקן גדול שתשש כחו

Every Jewish man is obligated to study Torah, whether poor or rich,  
whether healthy in body or afflicted, whether young or aged (to the extent  
that) his strength is diminished.

(Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 1:8)

We have an obligation to teach our children and we are equally obligated to continue with our own education. We must be willing to expand our own knowledge and ourselves. Ongoing in-service training and continuing education courses keep the teachers abreast of the latest methodologies in dealing with their students. It provides

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teachers with the chance to interact with their peers and allows them opportunity for self-evaluation. During training it is possible for the teachers to discuss classroom situations and receive feedback. This can only be a benefit for the school and the students' education.

Many times the self-image of special needs students is not positive. In the Tanakh we read, ראה-עניי וחלצני, "See my affliction and rescue me." We must respond to the calls of the special needs students, though their words may not be spoken out loud. It is crucial that the entire congregational staff including teachers, administrators, clergy and custodial be aware of the students' feelings. It is part of the role of the congregation to create an environment where the students feel personally and socially accepted. The actions of the congregational school and interactions with the students play a role in the students' self-esteem and Jewish development. Often times children with special needs have low self-esteem and have a multitude of negative experiences related to how their educational needs have or have not been met in their day school environment. We have a moral and ethical obligation to ensure that the congregational school is a place where the educational and emotional needs of all students are met for the sake of these students' Jewish futures.

We have no choice as to whether or not we are to teach one particular child or another. We have learned from our sacred texts that we are obligated to teach every child, and that every child is entitled to a Jewish education. The key in teaching students with special needs in the congregational schools is that of openness and flexibility. We must open our hearts to teach our children in love. We must open our doors, so that no one ever feels unwelcome. We must open minds. Open our own minds so that we will not be

blinded and unable to see a child who needs our help, and we must be there to help open the minds of our students to all aspects of Judaism. We must be flexible in our programming, requirements and in our instruction. We must be flexible, treating each child as an individual. For each child that we are blessed to encounter, our schools must create an education which is personal and relevant. It is then that we are truly providing an education for all. This is our holy task.

## Appendix A

### Sources in the Tanakh by Category

#### ♦ Inclusiveness

|  |                       |
|--|-----------------------|
| King read text to all inhabitants.....                 | 2 Kings 23:2          |
| Moses read book of Covenant to the people.....         | Exodus 24:7           |
| YHWH said, "Speak to the children of Israel..." .....  | Exodus 25: 1-2        |
| Moses spoke all the words to all Israel .....          | Deuteronomy 32:44- 45 |
| All Israel learn and guard the laws .....              | Deuteronomy 5:1       |
| All Israel learn and guard the laws .....              | Deuteronomy 4:1       |
| Moses commanded the people.....                        | Deuteronomy 27:1      |
| Moses spoke to all Israel, do God's commandments ..... | Deuteronomy 27:9- 10  |
| Samuel spoke to all Israel .....                       | I Samuel 4:1          |
| Teaching from men to woman and all between .....       | Nehemiah 8:2- 3       |
| I have walked with all Israel .....                    | I Chronicles 17:6     |
| House of Prayer for all people .....                   | Isaiah 56:7           |

#### ♦ Teach the children

|  |                   |
|--|-------------------|
| Sharply impress upon your children .....                     | Deuteronomy 6:7   |
| Make them known to your children .....                       | Deuteronomy 4:9   |
| Teach them, your children .....                              | Deuteronomy 11:19 |
| All children will learn of YHWH .....                        | Isaiah 54:13      |
| Their children who do not know will hear and learn .....     | Deuteronomy 31:13 |
| Teach children of Israel, put in their mouth.....            | Deuteronomy 31:19 |
| Teach you what you will speak (directed to Moses).....       | Exodus 4:12       |
| Teach you what you will speak (directed to Moses).....       | Exodus 4:15       |
| Assemble people, hear words, learn, and teach children ..... | Deuteronomy 4:10  |
| YHWH commanded me to teach you .....                         | Deuteronomy 4:14  |
| YHWH commanded to teach you .....                            | Deuteronomy 6:1   |

#### ♦ God created man/ mankind

|  |                 |
|--|-----------------|
| YHWH makes man's mouth, made dumb, deaf, seeing, blind ..... | Exodus 4:10- 11 |
| YHWH formed the human being.....                             | Genesis 2:7     |

God created mankind in God's image .....Genesis 1:27

♦ Treatment of others

Do not curse deaf, put stumbling block before blind.....Leviticus 19:14

Eyes to blind, feet to lame, father to needy..... Job 29:15- 16

Do not toughen heart or shut hand to needy ..... Deuteronomy 15:7- 8

Open hand to poor and needy in your land.....Deuteronomy 15:11

Cursed be he that makes the blind go astray.....Deuteronomy 27:18

Saves the needy; cares about poor and needy.....Psalms 72:12- 13

See my affliction and rescue me ..... Psalms 119:153

Light to nations, to open blind eyes .....Isaiah 42:6- 7

♦ Give each what they need

Jacob's blessings addressed appropriate parting word.....Genesis 49:28

Educate each child according to his [own] way..... Proverbs 22:6

Tell child when asked about meaning.....Deuteronomy 6:20

Tell child when asked about meaning.....Joshua 4:6- 7, 21-22

YHWH calls to Samuel, speak your servant is hearing ..... I Samuel 3:4 -10

Make known the teaching .....Psalms 78:1, 4 - 6

Levites gave understanding, explaining explicitly.....Nehemiah 8:7- 8

Deaf shall hear, blind shall see ..... Isaiah 29:18

Eyes of blind opened, ears of deaf unclogged ..... Isaiah 35:5

Make darkness light before them..... Isaiah 42:16

YHWH opens the eyes of the blind ..... Psalms 146:8

Misc.:

"At a time when it is necessary to work for YHWH, make void your law.", (When there  
is a rule that keeps you from doing the right thing, disregard it) ..... Psalms 119:16

## Appendix B

### Sources in Rabbinic Literature by Category

- ♦ Inclusiveness, Study of Torah for all:

Man was created for the study of Torah ..... *Sanhedrin* 99b

Whoever withholds a teaching from his student, it is as though he had robbed him of his ancestral heritage, it is an inheritance for all Israel..... *Sanhedrin* 91b

Every man obligated to study Torah... whether healthy in body or afflicted, whether young or aged (to the extent that) his strength is diminished  
..... Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 1:8

- ♦ Starting Age of Education:

With whom do you find the cream of the Torah? With him who spits out upon it the milk which he has sucked from the breasts of his mother..... *Berakhot* 63a

R' Avadiah Bartenura comments that, from the day he was born, his mother never took his crib out of the *bet midrash*, the study hall, so that all his ears should hear would be Torah thoughts ..... *Melo Ha-Omer*

From what time does he begin teaching his son, from the time he begins to speak  
..... *Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah* 245:5

When is a father obligated to teach [his child] Torah? From when he begins to speak, he should teach him "Torah *tzivah lanu Moshe*" and "*Shema Yisrael*"  
..... Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 1:6

When a child knows how to speak, his parent should teach him the Shema, Torah, and Hebrew, if he does not do so, it were better that the child were not even born  
..... *Tosefta Hagigah* 1:1

A father is bound in respect of his son, to circumcise, redeem, teach him Torah, take a wife for him, teach him a craft ..... *Kiddushin* 29b

When child is three years old we teach him the letters of the aleph-bet  
..... *Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah* 245:8

After age 6 or 7, take child to a teacher ..... *Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah* 245:5

Teach him, little by little, until 6 or 7, depending on health

..... Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 1:6

Brought to study at age 6 or 7, according to strength of age and form of body

..... Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 2:2

Enter a child after they have completed 5 years. If he is puny, enter him when he has completed 6 yrs. .... *Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah* 245:8

Age 5, Bible; 10 Mishnah; etc. .... *Pirkei Avot* 5:21

Turn it [Torah] over and over again, contemplate it, until you turn grey and old

..... *Pirkei Avot* 5:22

♦ Hiring a Teacher:

Mitzvah for all wise to teach students..... *Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah* 245:3

Mitzvah for every wise to teach all students..... Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 1:2

Just as a person is obligated to teach his son, so too, is he obligated to teach his

grandson ..... Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 1:2

Obligated to hire teacher for son, if not instructed by father, hire own teacher

..... Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 1:3

Hire teacher for self, when can understand..... Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 1:3

A man who studies on his own is no match for one who studies with a teacher

..... *Ecclesiastics Rabbah* 7:28

Joshua ben Peraiah said: Provide yourself with a teacher and get yourself a companion

[to study with] ..... *Avot* 1:6

If he should study, and has a son that needs to study... *Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah* 245:2

It is a mitzvah to teach children ..... *Nazir* 29a

It is a mitzvah for the man to teach his son Torah ..... *Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah* 245:1

♦ The Teacher: Qualifications and Characteristics:

An unmarried man may not teach young children, and a woman may not be a teacher of

young children..... *Kiddushin* 4:13



An unmarried man may not teach young children.....*Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 245:20*  
 Woman may not be a teacher of young children .....*Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 245:21*  
 Teacher needs to take care of himself.....*Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 245:17*  
 You shall walk in his (God's) ways. ....*Maimonides, Hilchot De'ot 1:5*  
 Slow to anger, abundant in kindness, righteous.....*Maimonides, Hilchot De'ot 1:6*  
 With love and are joyous .....*Maimonides, Hilchot De'ot 2:3*  
 Teach his students in calm ...without shouting.....*Maimonides, Hilchot De'ot 2:5*  
 Not become upset with them and display anger ... *Maimonides, Hilchot Talmud Torah 4:4*  
 Not hit him with the blows of the enemy .....*Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 245:10*  
 One becomes angry, ...his wisdom leaves him. ....*Maimonides, Hilchot De'ot 2:3*  
 If you see a student whose Torah-study is as hard as iron to him, the reason must be that  
     the teacher was not gentle enough with him. .... *Ta'anit 8a*  
 Students eyes light up from an explanation .....*Bava Metzia 33a*

♦ The Teacher and the School:

Choose the teacher that analyzes with them [the students] in order that they understand  
     .....*Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 245:19*  
 Teacher who teaches children and another comes who is better... you get rid of the first  
     in place of the second.....*Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 245:18*  
 Teacher who is slower and does not make mistakes is the better teacher, for once a  
     mistake is made it is implanted ...it cannot be eradicated ..... *Bava Bathra 21a*  
 A teacher of children who leaves them and goes out, or who is negligent in his teaching  
     of them, this one is altogether [as one who is] cursed  
     .....*Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 245:17*  
 Rabbi Yossi says: Anyone that teaches Torah in public and does not make the words as  
     pleasant as honey from the honeycomb for those who are listening - it were better that  
     he not teach the words at all.....*Song of Songs Rabbah 4:11*

- 1 Teacher for 25 students, 2 teachers for more than 40 students, assistant for 25-40 students..... Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 2:5  
 .....*Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah* 245:15
- 1 Teacher for 25 students, 2 teachers for more than 50 students, assistant for 40 students  
 ..... *Bava Bathra* 21a
- If the teacher comes and opens a school next door, ...they cannot stop him.  
 .....*Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah* 245:22
- Place a teacher of children in every city, ...if they don't ... you destroy that city, because the world only exists on the breath of the children who are learning in the house of study. .... *Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah* 245:7
- They asked the head of the community to summon the town's watchmen. The night watchers were brought..."And who do you call watchmen?" "The schoolmasters,"  
 ..... *Y. Hagigah*, 1
- The teacher sits and teaches them all day and a little of the night, in order to educate them to study day and night. ....*Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah* 245:11
- He will not stop teaching them at all except for Shabbat and Yom Tov.  
 .....*Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah* 245:12
- Don't teach something new on Shabbat, ask them to read something they have already learned.....*Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah* 245:14
- ♦ The Special Needs Student:
- The 'Four Sons': one who is wise חכם, one who is wicked רשע, one who is naïve תם, and one who is unable to ask שאינו יודע לשאול. ....*Haggadah shel Pesach*
- Four types of students: quick to understand, quick to forget; slow to understand, slow to forget; quick to understand, slow to forget; slow to understand, quick to forget  
 ..... *Avot* 5:12
- Four types of those who go to the house of study: goes, does not practice; practices, does not go; goes and practices; does not go, does not practice ..... *Avot* 5:14

Four types of those who sit before the wise: a sponge, a funnel, a strainer, and a sieve  
..... *Avot* 5:15

None of the other mitzvot can be equated to the study of Torah....study leads to deed.  
Study takes precedence over deed..... Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 3:3

The prayer of a scholar who studies under handicaps is answered..... *Sotah* 49

A person should always study texts, even though he may forget, even though he not  
understand what he is reciting.....*Avodah Zara* 19a

My teacher, this is Torah. It is necessary that I study and my comprehension is weak.  
..... Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 4:4

Each of the forty days that Moses was on Mount Sinai he learned the entire Torah and  
then forgot it. ...Why ...? To bring students who experience learning difficulty closer  
to Torah. .... *Y. Horiot*, page 36

It should never be said in the Jewish community, "Why do we teach certain children who  
appear not able to comprehend the material?" .....*Y. Horiot, Pnei Moshe*

A student should not be embarrassed if a fellow student has understood something on the  
first or second time and he has not grasped it even after a number of attempts.  
.....*Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah* 246:11

One should always study Torah and then, afterwards, one may figure it out more  
completely .....*Avodah Zara* 19a

A person should ask about the meaning of a verse or a law even if everyone will laugh at  
him ..... *Seder Eliahu Rabba* 13:6

Student should not be embarrassed because his colleagues grasped the subject matter the  
first or second time, while he did not understand until it was repeated a number of  
times ..... Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah*, 4:5

The student should not say, "I understood" when he did not understand. He should ask  
again and again,..... Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah*, 4:4

Every man possesses many traits. Each very different and distinct from the others.  
.....Maimonides, *Hilchot De'ot* 1:1

God stamps all mankind in a sign of the first man, and not one from them is like to his fellow..... *Sanhedrin 4:5*

God created nothing in vain..... *Shabbat 77*

Initiate the child ...in accordance with his level of intelligence, whether great or limited  
..... *Mekorot Gedolot, Proverbs 22, Metzudat David*

He is not obligated to teach him for pay *Mishnah* or *Gemora*, because there is not sufficient time [to do it right].....*Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 245:6*

The scholar should be willing to teach any one who desires to profit by his learning.  
..... *Erubin 54*

If it is possible to teach him, it is a mitzvah to teach *Mishnah, Gemora, Halachot*, and *Aggadah*. .....*Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 245:6*

♦ Teaching Methodologies

He should perform - repeat - and perform a third time... until these acts are easy for him and do not present any difficulty.....*Maimonides, Hilchot De'ot 1:7*

He accustomed himself to it until it became a part of himself  
..... *Maimonides, Hilchot De'ot 1:7*

R. Akiva said: how do we know that a man must keep repeating a lesson to his pupil until he has taught it to him? From the verse "And *teach* thou it to the children of Israel" (Deut. 31:19) .....*Eruvin 54b*

He who repeats his chapter one hundred times does not compare to him who repeats it one hundred and one times.....*Hagigah 9b*

Moses taught Aaron... Aaron heard the lesson four times,...his sons heard the lesson four times... the elders heard the lesson four times.....*Eruvin 54b*

It is a man's duty to teach his pupil four times.....*Eruvin 54b*

R. Pereda had a pupil whom he taught his lesson four hundred times before the latter could master it.... I could not concentrate my thoughts... so he taught him another four hundred times .....*Eruvin 54b*

If the teacher taught and it was not grasped by the students, he should not become upset with them... he should repeat and review the matter, even if he must do so many times. .... Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 4:4

He who studies and does not repeat his lessons is as one who plants and does not enjoy the fruit. .... *Sanhedrin* 99

One should teach his students in calm and tranquility without shouting or wordiness  
..... Maimonides, *Hilchot De'ot* 2:5

If speaking about matters of Torah or knowledge, one's words should be brief, but rich in content. .... Maimonides, *Hilchot De'ot* 2:4

Rabbi Eliezer had a student who used to study silently, after three years he forgot what he had learned. .... *Eruvin* 54a

A person should ask concerning only three *halachot* of the same subject  
..... Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 4:7

When a man acquires his Torah bundle by bundle [much at a time], his learning diminishes, but if little by little, it increases ..... *Eruvin* 54b

R. Tanhum said: He who thinks through what he studies will not quickly forget it.  
..... Y. *Berakhot* 5:1, 9a

R. Hisda stated: The Torah can only be acquired with [the aid of] mnemonic signs  
..... *Eruvin* 54b

Teach mnemonics by symbolic sign, and explain by the method of parallels (or analogies) ..... *Eruvin*, 21

Why two letters - *mem mem*, *nun nun*, *tzade tzade*, *pe pe*, and *kaph kaph*? From word (*ma'amer*) to word,... and from the hand (*kaph*) of God to the had of Moses.  
..... Y. *Megillah* 1, 11-71d  
..... *Genesis Rabbah* 1

The children came today to the House of Study and said things... *Aleph bet* - *elaph binah* (learn understanding), *gimmel dalet* - *gemol dallim* (deal kindly with the poor). Why is the foot of the *gimmel* stretched towards the *dalet*?... ..... *Shabbat* 104a

"See and Remember" (Numbers 15:39) Seeing answers questions..... *Menahot* 43b

The teacher sits at the head and the students sit around him, so that all can see the teacher and hear his words..... Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 4:2

[A student] who follows bad ways should be influenced to correct his behavior ..... Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 4:1

If a child does not comprehend this good... it is necessary for the teacher... to motivate him to his studies with things that he loves.. Maimonides, Introduction to *Sanhedrin* 10

"I also have a fishing pond, and the boy who is unwilling to learn, I bribe with these and coax him until he comes and learns" ..... *Taanit* 24a

A man should learn Torah at the place (or, in the subject) which his heart desires most. ....*Avodah Zara* 19

Even a child who doesn't understand to read you don't throw him out from there, but you sit him with others..... *Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah* 245:9

The attentive one will read [of himself], and if one is inattentive, put him next to a diligent one ..... *Bava Bathra* 21a

One student is sharpened by a fellow-student.....*Bereshit Rabbah*, 69,2

Even if he did no more than make his eyes light up from an explanation of a single selection from the Oral Torah -- he is still considered to be his Rabbi. ....*Bava Metzia* 33a

#### ♦ The Gifted Student

And [if] he has a son that needs to study, ...if his son is smart and understanding with good intellectual capabilities... son comes first.....*Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah* 245:2

If he has himself to teach and his son to teach... if his son is industrious, bright, and retentive, his son takes precedence over him. ....*Kiddushin* 29b

A child may be transferred from one teacher to another teacher, who is capable of teaching him at a faster pace ..... Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 2:6

- ♦ Blessings

If one sees a multitude of Jews he says, "Blessed is ...the wise who knows the hidden secrets," because just as their minds are not similar to each other, their faces are not similar to each other..... *Berachot* 58a

One who sees, a lame person, or one without hands or legs, or a blind person,...if this has been their condition from birth, we recite the blessing, "Blessed are You, O Lord, our God, Ruler of the universe, Who creates a variety of creations." But if these to occurred after birth, we recite the blessing, "Blessed are You, O Lord, our God, Ruler of the universe, the True Judge." ..... *Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chaim* 225:9

On seeing...anyone unusual in facial appearance or conformation of his limbs, one says, "Blessed are You, O Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, who varies the forms of creatures." On seeing a blind person, a cripple, or one afflicted with boils or tetters, etc. the blessing is "Blessed are You, O Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, the True Judge." If the affliction is congenital, the blessing is "Who varies the forms of creatures." ..... *Maimonides, Hilchot B'rachot* 10:12

- ♦ Physical Disabilities

The greatest Sages of Israel included woodchoppers, water drawers and blind men.

Despite these they were occupied with Torah day and night and were included among those who transmitted the Torah's teachings.. *Maimonides, Hilchot Talmud Torah* 1:9

There were two mute men in Rabbi's neighborhood...who would go into the House of Study whenever Rabbi was there, they would nod their heads and move their lips.

Rabbi prayed for them and they were healed...they knew *Halachah, Sifra, Sifre* and the Talmud. .... *Hagigah* 3a

Do not look at the container, but what is in it..... *Pirkei Avot* 4:27

- ♦ Misc.

Show not partiality among your sons, treat them all alike ..... *Shabbat* 10a

All Israel is responsible for one another ..... *Shavuot* 39a

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