

# Rabbinic Judaism as a Paradigm for Best Practice in Education

## Role Modelling in Education

### Text 1: Talmud Bavli, Berakhot 62a

תניא, אמר רבי עקיבא: פעם אחת נכנסתי אחר רבי יהושע לבית הכסא, ולמדתי ממנו שלשה דברים: למדתי שאין נפנין מזרח ומערב אלא צפון ודרום, ולמדתי שאין נפרעין מעומד אלא מיושב ולמדתי שאין מקנחין בימין אלא בשמאל. אמר ליה בן עזאי: עד כאן העזת פנים ברבך! - אמר ליה: תורה היא וללמוד אני צריך. תניא, בן עזאי אומר: פעם אחת נכנסתי אחר רבי עקיבא לבית הכסא, ולמדתי ממנו שלשה דברים: למדתי שאין נפנין מזרח ומערב אלא צפון ודרום, ולמדתי שאין נפרעין מעומד אלא מיושב, ולמדתי שאין מקנחין בימין אלא בשמאל. אמר לו רבי יהודה: עד כאן העזת פניך ברבך! - אמר לו: תורה היא וללמוד אני צריך. רב כהנא על, גנא תותיה פורייה דרב. שמעיה דשח ושחק ועשה צרכיו, אמר ליה: דמי פומיה דאבא כדלא שריף תבשילא! אמר לו: כהנא, הכא את? פוק, דלאו ארח ארעא. אמר לו: תורה היא וללמוד אני צריך.

**It was taught: Rabbi Akiva said: I once entered the bathroom after my teacher Rabbi Yehoshua, and I learned three things from observing his behavior: I learned that one should not relieve oneself while facing east and west, but rather while facing north and south; I learned that one should not uncover himself while standing, but while sitting, in the interest of modesty; and I learned that one should not wipe with his right hand, but with his left. Ben Azzai, a student of Rabbi Akiva, said to him: You were disrespectful to your teacher to that extent that you observed that much? He replied: It is Torah, and I must learn!**

Similarly, **we learned: Ben Azzai said: I once entered a bathroom after Rabbi Akiva, and I learned three things from observing his behavior: I learned that one should not relieve oneself while facing east and west, but rather while facing north and south; I learned that one should not uncover himself while standing, but while sitting; and I learned that one should not wipe with his right hand, but with his left. Rabbi Yehuda said to him: You were disrespectful to your teacher to that extent? He replied: It is Torah, and I must learn!**

On a similar note, the Gemara relates that **Rav Kahana entered and lay beneath Rav's bed. He heard Rav chatting and laughing with his wife, and seeing to his needs, i.e., having relations with her. Rav Kahana said to Rav: The mouth of Abba (Rav), is like one whom has never eaten a cooked dish, i.e., his behavior was lustful. Rav said to him: Kahana, you are here? Leave, as this is an undesirable mode of behavior. Rav Kahana said to him: It is Torah, and I must learn!**

## Universal Education as a Jewish Value

### Text 2: Talmud Bavli, Bava Batra, 21a

דאמר רב יהודה אמר רב ברם זכור אותו האיש לטוב ויהושע בן גמלא שמו שאלמלא הוא נשתכח תורה מישראל שבתחלה מי שיש לו אב מלמדו תורה מי שאין לו אב לא היה למד תורה מאי דרוש (דברים יא, יט) ולמדתם אותם ולמדתם אתם התקינו שיהו מושיבין מלמדי תינוקות בירושלים מאי דרוש (ישעיהו

ב, ג) כי מציון תצא תורה ועדיין מי שיש לו אב היה מעלו ומלמדו מי שאין לו אב לא היה עולה ולמד התקינו שיהו מושיבין בכל פלך ופלך ומכניסין אותן כבן ט"ז כבן י"ז ומי שהיה רבו כועס עליו מבעיט בו ויצא עד שבא יהושע בן גמלא ותיקן שיהו מושיבין מלמדי תינוקות בכל מדינה ומדינה ובכל עיר ועיר ומכניסין אותן כבן שש כבן שבע

What was this ordinance? **As Rav Yehuda says that Rav says: Truly, that man is remembered for the good, and his name is Yehoshua ben Gamla. If not for him the Torah would have been forgotten from the Jewish people. Initially, whoever had a father would have his father teach him Torah, and whoever did not have a father would not learn Torah at all.**

The Gemara explains: **What** verse **did they interpret homiletically** that allowed them to conduct themselves in this manner? They interpreted the verse that states: **“And you shall teach them [otam] to your sons”** (Deuteronomy 11:19), to mean: **And you yourselves [atem] shall teach**, i.e., you fathers shall teach your sons.

When the Sages saw that not everyone was capable of teaching their children and Torah study was declining, **they instituted** an ordinance **that teachers of children should be established in Jerusalem**. The Gemara explains: **What** verse **did they interpret homiletically** that enabled them to do this? They interpreted the verse: **“For Torah emerges from Zion”** (Isaiah 2:3). **But still, whoever had a father, his father ascended with him to Jerusalem and had him taught, but whoever did not have a father, he did not ascend and learn**. Therefore, the Sages **instituted** an ordinance **that teachers of children should be established in one city in each and every region [pelekh]. And they brought** the students **in at the age of sixteen and at the age of seventeen**.

**But** as the students were old and had not yet had any formal education, a student **whose teacher grew angry at him** would **rebel against him and leave**. It was impossible to hold the youths there against their will. This state of affairs continued **until Yehoshua ben Gamla came and instituted** an ordinance **that teachers of children should be established in each and every province and in each and every town, and they would bring** the children **in** to learn **at the age of six and at the age of seven**.

### Text 3: Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, Letters to the Next Generation

For Jews, education is not just what we know. It's *who we are*. No people ever cared for education more. Our ancestors were the first to make education a religious command, and the first to create a compulsory universal system of schooling – eighteen centuries before Britain. The rabbis valued study as higher even than prayer. Almost 2,000 years ago, Josephus wrote: “Should anyone of our nation be asked about our laws, he will repeat them as readily as his own name. The result of our thorough education in our laws from the very dawn of intelligence is that they are, as it were, engraved on our souls.”

## Seder Night as a Paradigm for Experiential Education

### Text 4: Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Chametz and Matza, 7:1, 5, & 6

[א] מצות עשה של תורה **לספר** בניסים ונפלאות שנעשו לאבותינו במצריים, בליל חמישה עשר בניסן-- שנאמר "**זכור את היום הזה אשר יצאתם**" (שמות יג,ג), כמה שנאמר "**זכור את יום השבת**" (שמות כז). ומניין שבליל חמישה עשר--תלמוד לומר "והגדת לבנך, ביום ההוא לאמור: בעבור זה" (שמות יג,ח), בשעה שיש מצה ומרור מונחים לפניך. ואף על פי שאין לו בן, אפילו חכמים גדולים--חייבים לספר ביציאת מצריים; וכל המאריך בדברים שאירעו ושהיו, הרי זה משובח.

[1] It is a positive commandment of the Torah to **relate** the miracles and wonders wrought for our ancestors in Egypt on the night of the fifteenth of Nisan, as [Exodus 13:3] states: "**Remember** this day, on which you left Egypt," just as [Exodus 20:8] states: "**Remember the Sabbath day.**" From where [is it derived that this commandment is to be fulfilled on] the night of the fifteenth? The Torah teaches [Exodus 13:8]: "And you shall tell your son on that day, saying: 'It is because of this...'" [implying the commandment is to be fulfilled] when matzah (unleavened bread) and maror (bitter herbs) are placed before you. [The commandment applies] even though one does not have a son. Even great Sages are obligated to tell about the Exodus from Egypt. Whoever elaborates concerning the events which occurred and took place is worthy of praise.

[ה] כל מי שלא אמר שלושה דברים אלו בליל חמישה עשר, לא יצא ידי חובתו; ואלו הן--**פסח, מצה, ומרורים**: פסח, על שם שפסח המקום ברוך הוא על בתי אבותינו במצריים, שנאמר "ואמרתם זבח פסח הוא לה" (שמות יב,כז); מרורים, על שם שמיררו המצריים את חיי אבותינו במצריים; מצה, על שם שנגאלו. ודברים האלו כולן, הן הנקראין הגדה.

[5] Whoever does not mention these three matters on the night of the fifteenth has not fulfilled his obligation. They are: **the Paschal sacrifice, matzah, and maror**. The Paschal sacrifice: [It is eaten] because the omnipresent passed over the houses of our ancestors in Egypt as [Exodus 12:27] states: "And you shall say: 'It is the Paschal sacrifice to God.'" The maror (bitter herbs): [They are eaten] because the Egyptians embittered the lives of our ancestors in Egypt. The matzah: [It is eaten] because of the redemption. These statements are all referred to as the haggadah.

[ו] **בכל דור ודור, חייב אדם להראות את עצמו כאילו הוא בעצמו יצא עתה משיעבוד מצריים**, שנאמר "ואותנו, הוציא משם." (דברים 6:23). ועל דבר זה ציווה בתורה, "וזכרת, כי עבד היית" (דברים 5:15), לומר כאילו אתה בעצמך היית עבד, ויצאת לחירות ונפדית.

[6] **In each and every generation, a person must present himself as if he, himself, has now left the slavery of Egypt**, as [Deuteronomy 6:23] states: "He took us out from there." Regarding this manner, God commanded in the Torah: "Remember that you were a slave [Deuteronomy 5:15]" – i.e., as if you, yourself, were a slave and went out to freedom and were redeemed.

## Shabbat as Immersive Education

### Text 5: Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, *Radical Then, Radical Now*, p.130

The Sabbath (in Hebrew, Shabbat) is a religious institution, a memorial to creation, the day on which God Himself rested. But it is also and essentially a political institution. Shabbat is the greatest tutorial in liberty ever devised. Passover tells us how the Israelites won their freedom. Shabbat tells us how they kept it. One day in seven, Jews create a messianic society. It is the

day on which everyone, master and slave, employer and employee, even animals, experience unconditional freedom. We neither work nor get others to work, manipulate nor allow ourselves to be manipulated. We may neither buy nor be bought. It is the day on which all hierarchies, all relationships of power are suspended.

## Differentiation in Education

### Text 5: Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Chametz and Matza, 7:2

[ב] מצוה להודיע לבנים, ואפילו לא שאלו--שנאמר "והגדת לבנך" (שמות 13:8). לפי דעתו של בן, אביו מלמדו. כיצד: אם היה קטן או טיפש--אומר לו, בני, כולנו היינו עבדים כמו שפחה זו או כמו עבד זה במצריים, ובלילה הזו פדה אותנו הקדוש ברוך הוא, ויצאנו לחירות; ואם היה הבן גדול וחכם--מודיעו מה שאירע לנו במצריים, וניסים שנעשו לנו על ידי משה רבנו: לפי דעתו של בן.

[2] It is a commandment to inform one's children even if they do not ask, as [Exodus 13:8] states "you shall tell your son." **A parent should teach his child according to the child's knowledge/mindset.**

### Text 6: The Haggada

בְּרוּךְ הַמָּקוֹם, בְּרוּךְ הוּא, בְּרוּךְ שֶׁנָּתַן תּוֹרָה לְעַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּרוּךְ הוּא. כְּנֶגֶד אַרְבַּעַה בָּנִים דְּבָרָה תּוֹרָה: אֶחָד חָכָם, וְאֶחָד רָשָׁע, וְאֶחָד תָּם, וְאֶחָד שְׂאִינֵנו יוֹדֵעַ לְשֹׂאוֹל .

Blessed be the Place [of all], Blessed be He; Blessed be the One who Gave the Torah to His people Israel, Blessed be He. Corresponding to four sons did the Torah speak; one [who is] wise, one [who is] evil, one who is innocent and one who doesn't know to ask.

## The Teacher as Spiritual Hero

### Text 7: Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

רב איקלע לשהוא אתרא גזר תעניתא ולא אתא מיטרא נחית קמיה שליחא דצבורא אמר משיב הרוח ונשב זיקא אמר מוריד הגשם ואתא מיטרא אמר ליה מאי עובדך אמר ליה מיקרי דרדקי אנא ומקרינא לבני עניי כבני עתירי וכל דלא אפשר ליה לא שקלינא מיניה מידי ואית לי פירא דכוורי וכל מאן דפשע משחדינא ליה מינייהו ומסדרינן ליה ומפייסינן ליה עד דאתי וקרי

The Gemara relates a similar incident. **Rav happened** to come to **a certain place** where **he decreed a fast but rain did not come. The prayer leader descended** to lead the service **before him** and **recited: He Who makes the wind blow, and the wind blew.** He continued and **said: And Who makes the rain fall, and the rain came.** Rav **said to him: What are your good deeds? He said to him: I am a teacher of children, and I teach the Bible to the children of the poor as to the children of the rich, and if there is anyone who cannot pay, I do not take anything from him. And I have a fishpond, and any child who neglects his studies, I bribe him with the fish and calm him, and soothe him until he comes and reads.**