



by HARAV AHRON LOPIANSKY

V'higadeta L'vincha Answer Their Questions; Make It Theirs

The Torah imposes on us the obligation of teaching our children in two different ways. Three hundred and sixty-four days a year, we are bidden *v'shinantam l'vanecha* – to teach them Torah. And then, one night a year, we are told, “*v'higadeta l'vincha* – and you will tell your son.” Technically, all information included in the teachings of the night of Pesach are also in the “*v'shinantam*” imperative, which certainly includes learning all of *Sefer Shemos* with the various *Chazals* associated with *Yetzias Mitzrayim*. Is the *mitzvah* of “*v'higadeta*” then simply an obligation to teach those specific *parshiyos* on that specific evening? That hardly seems a satisfactory explanation. After all, two very different terms are used to describe the act of teaching.

Let us take a closer look at these two terms: “*V'shinantam*” is taken to mean that the words of Torah shall be fluent on their lips. It implies a drilling of information and material into one’s children (and self). It is essentially a one-way street, where the parent/teacher imparts instruction to a passive listener. “*V'higadeta*,” on the other hand, is the term used to describe the testimony of witnesses. When witnesses testify, they have to present a story that is *credible* and *acceptable* to the court. If it is not, then the court does not accept it and it has not functioned as testimony. Therefore, “*v'higadeta l'vincha*” includes the obligation of expressing it in a way that it falls on receptive ears.

This starts not with a lecture, but with a question by the child. An unsolicited sermon leaves little mark on the listener. When a question has been framed, an emptiness waiting to be filled has been created. If the answer fits, then it will fill that expressed void and become a permanent part of the child. For the child who has not asked any questions, it says “*at pesach lo*,” meaning to provoke him to ask.

The second critical element of “*v'higadeta*” is that the father teaches him “in accordance with the *daas* of the child” (*Pesachim* 116a). This does not mean merely to measure his I.Q. The word “*daas*” is probably best translated as “mindset” – speak to him in terms that are meaningful to him.

A similar arrangement is found in the Rambam’s description of Avraham Avinu’s journey to spread the belief of Hashem worldwide. The Rambam writes that after Avraham came to the realization of Hashem, he began traveling all over, gathering groups of people and speaking about the fundamentals of faith. Rambam continues, “When the people would gather around and ask [Avraham] questions on what he had stated, he would instruct each person based on his *daas*.”



The similarity is striking. First, there is a phase of straight teaching. Then there are questions with answers given based on the *daas* of each questioner.

We now realize that these two *mitzvos* of teaching our children are profoundly different. “*V’shinantam*” is an obligation to drill information and knowledge of the Divine into our children.

But “*v’higadeta*” means building the foundations of *emunah* in our children. It means making it “theirs,” something that they perceive as natural.

This means that to prepare for *Seder* night, it is not enough to come with stacks of *Haggados* and *pshetlach*. We need to start by thinking about each child and asking ourselves, “What really bothers this child? What are his or her questions? What language speaks to him or her?” The answer may be quite different from what speaks to us, but it is the only language in which they will understand it.

The Torah writes four different *parshiyos* to describe how to fulfill this *mitzvah*. If the *mitzvah* was recital on our part, only one *parashah* would have been necessary. But it is not our recitation that is the *mitzvah* per se. It is the realization that there are four sons (multiplied by many times four) who come to us with their questions — or lack thereof — and we don’t merely answer them — we reply to the questions each asks.

If we will, *im yirtzeh Hashem*, listen to our children, respond to *their* questions, in the language that is *theirs*, then, *im yirtzeh Hashem* — they will listen. ■



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Harav Aaron Lopiansky is the Rosh Hayeshivah of Greater Washington – Tiferes Gedaliah. Harav Lopiansky learned for decades at the Mir Yerushalayim and follows the mesorah of his Rebbeim, Harav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zt”l, Harav Nachum Partzovitz, zt”l, and his father-in-law, Harav Beinish Finkel, zt”l (the late Rosh Hayeshivah of the Mir). His approach to learning was also deeply influenced by his long association as a close talmid of Harav Moshe Shapiro, zt”l. Harav Lopiansky is a renowned speaker and the author of several Hebrew sefarim and English-language books, including Time Pieces, Golden Apples, Seed of Redemption and the widely acclaimed Orchos Chaim: Ben Torah for Life, published by Eshel Publications.