

הלכות תלמוד תורה • פרק שני

Learned like the daf, the literal words in bold, flowing with the elucidation

CHAPTER PREVIEW

In this chapter, we learn about the vital communal obligation to establish schools and hire teachers for young children in every single town and region. We will see how the Sages, led by the great Yehoshua ben Gamla, instituted this system to ensure that Torah would never be forgotten by the Jewish people, establishing that even the smallest village must support the education of its youth.

We will also learn the practical halachos of how a cheder must be run. This includes the proper age to start a child in school, the delicate balance a teacher must maintain when disciplining students, and the rigorous schedule of study that must be kept day and night, showing how we must never interrupt the holy breath of children learning Torah.

All introductions, summaries, and contextual notes are the editor's commentary and are not part of the original text.

הלכה א

Halacha 1 • The Obligation to Appoint Teachers of Young Children in Every City

מושיבין מלמדי תינוקות

We appoint teachers of children

בכל מדינה ומדינה

in every province and province,

ובכל פלגה ופלגה

and in every district and district,

ובכל עיר ועיר.

and in every city and city.

וכל עיר שאין בה תינוקות של בית רבן

And any city that does not have in it children of the house of their teacher studying Torah,

מחרימין את אנשי העיר

we place under ban — the people of the city

עד שמושיבין מלמדי תינוקות.

until they appoint teachers of children.

ואם לא הושיבו

And if they did not appoint them even after being placed under ban,

מְחַרְמִין אֶת הָעִיר.

we destroy — the city, by placing the entire city under a severe ban and isolating it.

שְׂאִין הָעוֹלָם מִתְקַיִּים

For the world exists only

אֶלָּא בְּהֶבֶל פִּיהֶם שֶׁל תִּינוּקוֹת שֶׁל בֵּית רַבֵּן:

by the breath of their mouth of children of the house of their teacher, whose pure Torah study has no sin.

הִלְכָּה ב

Halacha 2: The Age of School Entry and the Schedule and Discipline of Young Students

מְכַנְיִסִין אֶת הַתִּינוּקוֹת לְהִתְלַמֵּד כִּבּוֹן שֵׁשׁ כִּבּוֹן שָׁבַע

We bring in the children to study in cheder at about the age of six or at about the age of seven,

לְפִי כַחַּת הַבֶּן וּבְנֵי גוֹפּוֹ.

according to the strength of the child and the build of his body.

וּפְחוֹת מִכּוֹן שֵׁשׁ אֵין מְכַנְיִסִים אוֹתוֹ.

And a child who is less than the age of six, we do not bring him in to study.

וּמַכֵּה אוֹתוֹ הַמְלַמֵּד לְהַטִּיל עֲלֵיהֶם אֵימָה.

And the teacher strikes them occasionally to cast upon them fear so they will pay attention,

וְאֵינוֹ מַכֵּה אוֹתָם מַכַּת אוֹיֵב מַכַּת אַכְזָרִי.

but he does not strike them the blow of an enemy, the blow of a cruel person.

לְפִיכָּה לֹא יַכֵּה אוֹתָם בְּשׁוּטִים וְלֹא בְּמַקְלוֹת אֶלָּא בְּרִצּוּעָה קְטַנָּה.

Therefore, he shall not strike them with whips and not with sticks, but only with a small strap.

וְיֹשֵׁב וּמְלַמֵּדוֹ כָּל הַיּוֹם כָּלוּ וּמִקְצַת מִן הַלַּיְלָה

And the teacher sits and teaches them all of the day entirely, and a portion of the night,

כְּדֵי לְחַנּוּכָן לְלַמֵּד בַּיּוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה.

in order to train them to study by day and by night.

וְלֹא יִבְטְלוּ הַתִּינוּקוֹת כָּלֵל

And the children shall not be idle from Torah study at all,

חוץ מערכי שבתות וימים טובים בסוף הימים ובנמים טובים.

except from the eves of Shabbos and Yom Tov at the end of the days, and on Yom Tov itself.

אבל בשבת אין קורין בתורה אבל שונים בראשון.

But on Shabbos, they do not read new material at the beginning, but they review what they learned first.

ואין מבטלין התינוקות ואפלו לבנין בית המקדש:

And we do not interrupt the children from their Torah study, and even for the building of the Beis HaMikdash.

הלכה ג

Halacha 3: The Proper Conduct of a Children's Teacher and the Prohibition of Negligence

מלמד התינוקות שהוא מניח התינוקות ויוצא

A teacher of the children who leaves the children and goes out during the hours of learning,

או שהוא עושה מלאכה אחרת עמהן

or who does other work with them while he is supposed to be teaching,

או שהוא מתרשל בלמודן

or who is lazy in their instruction and does not teach them properly,

הרי זה בכלל "ארור עושה מלאכה ה' רמיה".

behold, this one is included in the curse of the verse, "Cursed is he who does the work of Hashem deceitfully."

לפיכך אין ראוי להושיב מלמד

Therefore, it is not proper to appoint a teacher for Jewish children

אלא בעל יראה מהיר לקרות ולדקדק:

unless he is a possessor of fear of Heaven, who is quick to read and to be precise in his teaching.

הלכה ד

Halacha 4: Prohibition of an Unmarried Man or a Woman Teaching Young Children

ומי שאין לו אשה

And one who does not have a wife

לא ילמד תינוקות

should not teach children,

מפני אמותיהם הבאות אצל בניהם.

because of their mothers who come to visit their sons, which could lead to inappropriate mingling.

וְכָל אִשָּׁה

And any woman

לֹא תִלְמַד תִּינוּקוֹת

should not teach children,

מִפְּנֵי אֲבוֹתֵיהֶם שֶׁהֵם בָּאִים אֶצֶל הַבָּנִים:

because of their fathers who come to visit the sons, which could likewise lead to inappropriate mingling.

הַלָּכָה הַ

Halacha 5 - The Maximum Number of Students for Each Teacher

עֲשָׂרִים וְחֲמִשָּׁה תִּינוּקוֹת

Twenty and five children

לְמִדִּים אֶצֶל מְלַמֵּד אֶחָד.

may learn with one teacher.

הֵיוּ יוֹתֵר עַל עֲשָׂרִים וְחֲמִשָּׁה

If they were more than twenty and five,

עַד אַרְבָּעִים

up to forty,

מוֹשִׁיבִין עִמּוֹ אֲחֵר

we place with him another assistant

לְסִיעוּ בְּלִמּוּדָם.

to assist him in their teaching.

הֵיוּ יוֹתֵר עַל אַרְבָּעִים

If they were more than forty,

מַעֲמִידִין לָהֶם שְׁנֵי מְלַמְּדֵי תִּינוּקוֹת:

we appoint for them two teachers of children.

מוֹלִיכִין אֶת הַקָּטָן מִמֵּלֶמֶד לְמֵלֶמֶד אֲחֵר

We may lead the child from one teacher to another

שְׁהוּא מְהִיר מִמֶּנּוּ

who is faster and more diligent than him,

בֵּין בְּמִקְרָא בֵּין בְּדִקְדּוּק.

whether in Scripture or whether in grammar.

בְּמָה דְּבָרִים אֲמוּרִים

In what case are these words said?

כְּשֶׁהָיוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם בְּעִיר אַחַת

When both of them were in one city,

וְלֹא הָיָה הַנָּהָר מַפְסִיק בֵּינֵיהֶם.

and the river was not separating between them.

אֲבָל מֵעִיר לְעִיר

But from city to city,

אוּ מִצַּד הַנָּהָר לְצִדּוֹ אֲפִלּוּ בְּאוֹתָהּ הָעִיר

or from one side of the river to its other side, even in that same city,

אֵין מוֹלִיכִין אֶת הַקָּטָן

we do not lead the child there to learn,

אֲלָא אִם כֵּן הָיָה בִּנְיָן בְּרִיא עַל גְּבִי הַנָּהָר

unless there was a strong structure serving as a bridge upon the back of the river,

בִּנְיָן שְׁאֵינוֹ רָאוּי לִפֹּל בְּמַהֲרָה:

a structure that is not likely to fall quickly, so that there is no danger to the child.

אֶחָד מִבְּנֵי מְבוֹי שֶׁבִקֵּשׁ לְהַעֲשׂוֹת מֵלֶמֶד,

If one of the residents of an alleyway wished to become a teacher of children,

אִפְּלוּ אֶחָד מִבְּנֵי הַחֲצֵר,

and **even** if he is **one of the residents of the** shared courtyard itself,

אִין יְכוּלִין שְׂכָנָיו לְמַחֲוֹת בִּידּוֹ.

his neighbors are not able to protest against him and prevent him from teaching, because the noise of children learning Torah is never considered a nuisance.

וְכֵן מִלְּמַד תִּינוּקוֹת שֶׁבָּא חֲבֵירוֹ וּפָתַח בֵּית לְלִמּוֹד תִּינוּקוֹת בְּצִדּוֹ

And likewise, in the case of a **teacher of children whose colleague came and opened a house to teach children at his side**, right next door to him,

כְּדֵי שְׂיָבֹאוּ תִינוּקוֹת אֲחֵרִים לוֹ

in order that other children will come to him,

אוֹ כְּדֵי שְׂיָבֹאוּ מִתִּינוּקוֹת שֶׁל זֶה אֶצְלוֹ,

or in order that some of the children of this first teacher **will come to this** new teacher,

אִינוּ יְכוּל לְמַחֲוֹת בִּידּוֹ,

the first teacher **is not able to protest against him** on the grounds of competition,

שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "ה' חָפֵץ לְמַעַן צִדְקוֹ יַגְדִּיל תּוֹרָה וַיִּאֲדִיר":

as it is said in the Navi, "**Hashem desired, for the sake of His righteousness, to make Torah great and make it glorious**" through healthy competition that increases the quality of learning.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter outlines the essential laws of communal education, beginning with the historical enactment of Yehoshua ben Gamla to place teachers in every region and village, and the severe communal ban or destruction decreed upon any town that neglects this duty. The Rambam rules that children should begin formal study at age six or seven, depending on their health, and details the guidelines for teachers, who may use only a gentle strap for discipline rather than cruel beatings. Finally, the halachos establish a continuous schedule of learning throughout the day and into the night, which is never interrupted—even for the building of the Beis HaMikdash—allowing only for review on Shabbos and brief breaks on Erev Shabbos and Yom Tov.

The foundation of our entire existence does not rest on the grand, sophisticated achievements of adults, but on the pure, uninterrupted breath of children learning Torah. Chazal teach us that the world itself is sustained by this pure breath, which is why we never disrupt their learning, not even to rebuild the Beis HaMikdash. This teaches us a profound lesson about our own priorities: the spiritual growth and Torah education of the next generation must come before any other project, no matter how holy or important it seems.

Because this work is so sacred, the Torah demands absolute integrity from anyone who teaches or guides children. A melammed who is lazy or distracted is described with the chilling words, 'Cursed is he who does the work of Hashem deceitfully.' When we teach our children, we cannot do it halfway or with a divided mind. It requires our full presence, patience, and a gentle hand, using only a small strap to guide, never a harsh rod, to ensure that the sweetness of Torah is never associated with cruelty.

Furthermore, the halachah rules that we do not prevent a new teacher from opening a school next to an existing one, because 'the jealousy of scribes increases wisdom.' We do not look at Torah education through the lens of business competition or personal honor. Our only goal is that Torah should be magnified and made glorious.

Today, show a child in your life, whether your own child, a grandchild, or a student, that their Torah learning is the most important thing in your world. Ask them what they learned today, listen with your full attention without looking at your phone, and let them see the joy and pride in your eyes as they speak.