



SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

MASEI / מסעי

HOW WAS THE FIRST CHEDER ESTABLISHED?

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ר' מנחם זאב בן פנחס ז"ל
Emil W. Herman אה who loved and supported Torah learning.



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Yesterday, the 29th of Tammuz marked the passing of Rashi. Every Jew who has studied a little Torah has heard of Rashi. There is no child learning in a Jewish school who has not heard of him. Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki; Shlomo was his given name and Yitzchak was his father's name. Rashi lived in France, in the city of Troyes. He had daughters but no sons. He made a living off a vineyard that he owned but most of his time was dedicated to Torah.

Rashi wrote a commentary on all of Tanach and most of the Talmud and he only lived for 65 years! If we consider that he did not have the tools we have today, a computer or even a typewriter, it is difficult to understand how he managed to accomplish so much in his lifetime.

Equally interesting is the fact that many greats before and after Rashi's time wrote commentaries on the Tanach and the Talmud but all Jews throughout all the generation, no matter where they were dispersed, accepted only Rashi's. What was so special about his work that it was accepted and even now, 900 years later, every Jewish child recognizes his name?

In these days called the Three Weeks, during which we mourn the destruction of the Temple, the Rebbe instructed that we study about the building of the Temple. This is based on the Midrash that says that when a Jew studies about the



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construction of the Temple, G-d considers it as though he had actually built it. In the words of the Midrash: "G-d said to him (Yechezkel) 'Reading it in the Torah is as great as building it. Go tell them to occupy themselves with studying the appearance of the Temple in the Torah and in the merit of occupying themselves with studying it, I will consider them to have occupied themselves with the actual building of it.'"

One of the interesting laws that we find regarding the building of the Temple is "Everyone is obligated to build and help in person and with money, men and women, like with the Tabernacle in the desert, but we do not stop the children from learning in order to help build.

The Rambam says everyone is obligated to build from sunrise till nightfall, but it is forbidden to take children away from studying Torah, even for the building of the Temple. Why is it so strongly forbidden?

The Gemoro tells us the reason is that the world only exists because of the studying of the children. Rav Puppa says to Abaye "What is the difference between our Torah and the Torah of the children? He answers; you cannot compare the learning of one who has sins to the learning of one who has no sins."

What is the meaning of "the studying of one who has no sins"? Every person, even in middle of praying, has a curtain that separates him from G-d, as is written in Yeshayahu "For your sins were separating you from your G-d." A person's sins separate him from G-d and lessen the warm and loving connection he has with G-d.



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A child, on the other hand, before the age of Bar Mitzvah, while he is not obligated to fulfill mitzvos and therefore has no sins, has nothing separating him from G-d. Therefore, when he prays, he has an "open line" - there are no problems or static on the phone, so to speak. A child has a direct and clear line and never loses the connection, the best kind of connection possible.

This is why, in the story of Esther, when Haman's decree to annihilate the Jews was publicized, what did Mordechai do? He didn't try using his influence in the palace or anything like that, but instead went and gathered 22,000 children and studied and prayed with them.

The Midrash tells us that G-d heard their prayers and "G-d's mercy was immediately awakened and He took the decree which was sealed with mortar and tore it." Specifically the voices of the young children, "the learning of one without sins" was able to annul the wicked decree in the days of Mordechai and Esther.

This was customary by Jews whenever they were faced with an illness or trouble. They would go to the local Cheder and ask the children to pray for that specific person, for the prayers of children break the heavens. On the same note, there is the custom that the night before a baby's bris, children are brought to his bedside to recite prayers for his well-being.

For this same reason, before the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War, the Rebbe instructed that children be gathered at the Western Wall for prayers, charity and learning Torah. This was based on the verse which says, "From the mouths of



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children and babies You established might to stop the enemy and take revenge”
How do we stop the enemy? Specifically through the little children involved with
might and there is no might other than Torah.

This importance of teaching Torah to children we find all the way back in the
times of the Temple. The Gemoro tells of a High Priest who lived towards the end of
the era of the Second Temple named Yehoshua ben Gamla. It says of him
“Remembered will be this person for good, and Yehoshua ben Gamla is his name,
for if not for him, Torah would have been forgotten from the Jewish people, for at
first, one who had a father learned Torah and one who had no father did not.”

In other words, children learned Torah at home with their fathers, and for the
orphans there was a Yeshiva set up in Jerusalem so that any child who had no father
was sent there and taught the Torah.

It is understandable that young children could not be sent away out of town
and that only older children who could take care of themselves were sent. At times it
happened that an older child already had no interest in learning Torah, like the
Gemoro says - he would resent it and leave -“until Yehoshua ben Gamla came and
instituted yeshivos in every country and every city.”

Yehoshua ben Gamla introduced the idea of schools for young children. He
understood that it was impossible to rely on every father to teach Torah to his
children, whether he is too busy, too restless or doesn't teach well, or simply
because he doesn't know enough himself to teach his children. That is why he



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instituted these schools for young children and about him is said "remembered will be this man for good."

This is the source of the Halacha in the Shulchan Aruch of the Alter Rebbe that for the education of children, we force everyone in the city to pay for a teacher, even those who do not have young children: "For paying teachers of young children, the Rabbis instituted using communal funds..."

We can also say that the reason Rashi is "remembered for good" amongst Jewish children is because he wrote his commentaries for 'a five year old in school'. He taught children how to learn Torah according to the Oral Torah. He took all of Tanach and Talmud and Midrash and made it accessible for a five year old to understand it like the greats understood it. Rashi condensed the huge ocean of Talmud into short and understandable sentences for children and therefore he is remembered for good. He worried about the education of children, just like Yehoshua ben Gamla. That's why hundreds of years later, every child knows him and feels as though Rashi is his own personal teacher.

Right now, we are approaching the new school year. Every person needs to do all in his power to make sure that his children receive a Jewish education. Each needs to worry, in addition to his own children, about the children of his friends, and do all he can to make sure they are receiving a Jewish education, or at least attending Hebrew School and to help with money if necessary. Anyone who does



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this and because of him another child is enrolled in a Jewish school he too will be "remembered for good."