

TALMUD TORAH 1:04

by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

4: If he wished to study Torah and he had a son [who wants] to study Torah, he takes precedence over his son. If his son was more perceptive and brighter than he was, his son takes precedence. Even though his son takes precedence, he should not ignore [TT]. For just as he is commanded to teach his son, similarly he is commanded to teach himself.

Q1: The rule of precedence here undoubtedly refers to financial decision-making; but why is there a brain-valuating mechanism here? Why does the son's ability change the value ruling?

Keith Bierman ([KB](#)): Can't it also refer to time investment? I'd say that the talent evaluation may be related to a overarching societal goal, the society needs the best scholars, and the good of the community overrides the good of the individual. Also, if the child is the better student, the child can eventually teach the father.

Q2: The second half of this Halakha is worded strangely: obviously, everyone is obligated to learn. We assume that the *din kedima* - (law of precedence) discussed in this Halakha is not for the absolute Mitzva of TT; rather it is for the concentration of time and resources and devotion to study - why would we think that the father would not be obligated to study, just because his son was brighter?

KB: We might think that the child is acting, in a sense, as "shaliach" [agent] and that the parent is thereby yotsay [fulfills his obligation].

YE ([Yitz Etshalom](#)): Perhaps the statement is exhortative - that a father whose son outshines him may feel embarrassed about study. Alternatively, R may be commenting on the dialectic: on one hand, we have a great concern for the good of society (as KB proposes) and that is why the bright son takes precedence; yet each individual must reach his or her greatest potential and must not "waste" his time and life. In other words, there is a communal need for great scholars; yet there is a human need for growth and wisdom.

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