

TALMUD TORAH 2:3

by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

3: A teacher who leaves the children and goes out or does other work with them or who is lax in his teaching them is included in the verse: "Accursed is the one who is slack in doing the work of the LORD" (Yirmiya [Jeremiah] 48:10). Therefore, it is only proper to hire as a teacher someone who has fear [of Heaven] and is quick to read and to be exacting.

Q1: Why does R quote this particular verse?

JB (Jay Bailey): There's an interesting story about this quote from Yirmiya. It's found on Bava Batra 21b...It seems David sent his commander Yoav to fight Edom, and Yoav killed all the males. David asked why he did that, and Yoav answered because of the pasuk *Timche et Zachar Amalek* (you shall wipe out all of the MALES of Amalek - Devarim [Deuteronomy] 25:19). David must have slapped his forehead at this point and explained that it's Zecher Amalek (...the MEMORY of Amalek) , not Zachar. At which time Yoav cursed his Rebbe with this particular verse...

Q2: Isn't there also a problem of Gezela (stealing), in that this teacher is getting paid, and a problem of Bittul Torah deRabbim (wasting the public's time from Torah studies)?

YE (Yitz Etshalom): In Seder Eliyahu Rabbah (16:15), the Midrash states that a worker is obligated to do the work exactly the way the *Ba'al haBayit* (owner who hired him) wants it - and if not, he is included in the verse "Accursed is the one who is slack in donig the work of the LORD." Perhaps the problem here is not just that the teacher, who is entrusted with the most important job in the community is not doing it properly - but anytime that someone is entrusted to do a job, he is obligated to do it according to the directions of the ones who hired him. As to the issue of *Bittul Torah* (wasting time from Torah study) - I believe that R addresses this issue in the next perek (chapter 3).

Q3: R's conclusion does not seem to follow from his premise. It is clear why he concludes that we need a God-fearing individual; but why the other two qualities?

YE: Several reasons: first of all, the term "to be exacting" (*ul'dakdek*) may not refer only to care in teaching and catching even the smallest mistakes, it may also refer to personal exactness - care with everything one does. As an example, in BT Hullin 94, we are told that righteous people are very careful about their money, because they never benefit (even in the slightest way) from illicit gains. (See also Makkot 24a - the story of Rav Safra). Since this teacher is *m'dakdek* - that may indicate that he is careful about the ethics of his own time-usage. Second, if someone is successful at what

he does, he will enjoy doing it and will be less likely to ignore his responsibilities to do something he enjoys more - because he enjoys his responsibilities! Someone who is *quick to read* and *to be exacting* is someone who is a successful learner - and, hopefully, (with the addition of Fear of Heaven) - will not even be tempted to leave his students or to engage them in other work.

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