

Parashat Ekev – August 11, 2012

When we read the first Parashot of the Book of Devarim we realize that the major part of its content is devoted to the subject of education. In fact, Moshe is in front of a new generation of Israelites, the ones that weren't part of the Exodus and the revelation at Mount Sinai, and that's why he is so concerned about transmitting faith in G-d and the importance of the Mitzvot.

Last week when we were reading Parshat Vaetchanan, we read about the essential passage for the tradition that we call the "Shema" and which we read three times a day. There the main subject was education as well. The Torah was saying "Veshinantam lebaneicha vedibarta bam. Veshivtecha veveiteja ubelchtecha vaderech" – You must teach your children and speak about the precepts, when you are awake and when you are going to sleep, and also in every place: No matter where you are, educating our children is something that we do permanently.

And then we arrive to this Parasha, Ekev, and here we will also find a paragraph about the Shema. This is the second one that speaks about education, but curiously, now the Torah understands education in a completely different way: "Velimadtem et beneichem ledaber vam", and that means: "And you will teach your children to speak about the precepts".

If we pay attention, we will realize that even though both paragraphs are speaking about the same subject, they actually do it differently: While the first says: "vedibarta bam" – "You must speak to you children about the precepts", the second one says "You must teach your children to speak about the precepts". While in the first case, the father is the one who must speak, in the second it is the children who will finally speak, after being educated about the precepts.

So what's the difference here? While in the first paragraph of the Shema it is the parents who have an active role in the process and the children a passive one, but in the second paragraph it is completely the opposite: The role of the children is not only to hear about tradition, but to learn from their parents until they are able to speak by themselves about Judaism.

And I think this is a very important message about how we understand our role in educating our children, and, why not, also our grandchildren: All of us start educating them through that first method: When they are small we speak to them about G-d, about synagogue, tzedaka and tradition. But the problem is that most of the Jewish

parents are not able to achieve that second goal of making their children to speak by themselves about Judaism, so in the end, the children will think that Judaism is something that belongs to their parents because their only memories will be how their mom and dad's spoke about tradition and the importance of being Jews.

And the question here is what do we need to do in order to fulfill that second goal? How can we assure that our children will be able to speak for themselves about their Jewish tradition?

I think the answer may be in trying to start putting the emphasis not only in what we SAY to our children about Judaism, but mainly in what we do with them.

When we think about education in general and we ask ourselves what is the best approach in assuring that our children will behave in a specific way – how to be honest, how to respect others and also as Jews, for example, what we can eat, what we have to do every Friday night, etc., – I think we will be making a mistake if we think that the answer is telling them what to do. We need to show them, with our own example, what we want them to become, practicing our traditions together as a family.

If we think it is enough to only speak, our children's future identity will probably be based only in memories about us speaking about our Jewish tradition. But if we are willing to put the emphasis in having a Jewish home, in coming to the synagogue for Shabbat and opening our hearts and minds to a more committed Jewish life, I am sure we will see our sons and daughters with a strong Jewish identity, who are able to speak for themselves about Judaism and about how proud and blessed they are for being Jews.

Shabbat Shalom!