

## Parashat Vayigash

### Do We Need Full-time Learning Yeshiva Boys?

#### Do all Jewish Bus Drivers belong in Yeshiva?

Torah learning has always been the most central part of an authentic Torah lifestyle. Without learning the wisdom of the Torah – the blueprint of creation – (*Midrash Bereishit Rabbah* 1:1), it is impossible to know all the intricacies of how to keep the mitzvot. I thank G-d that in place of a T.V. our dining room is lined with Torah books and my husband spends a great part of his days learning Torah with various study partners. He is fortunate to live a lifestyle that seems to balance perfectly between Torah learning and working, so that we have what we need to live a simple life without going into debt. Our lives were not always like this. The outlook of the *litvish* yeshiva, that opened the Torah world for both of us, is that ideally every Jewish male should be learning Torah 24/7. All the men, young and old were encouraged to do so, and if they were unable they were considered second raters. Anyone who would work on a steady basis was looked down upon. I remember sitting in a Jerusalem bus, as a newly religious *ba'alat teshuva*, barely 20 years old, trying to figure out my own weltanschauung. I was sitting at the front row with a good view of the bus-driver. He was a middle-aged simple Jewish man. When I tried to visualize him full-time learning in yeshiva, it dawned on me that Hashem didn't create him suitable for round-the-clock Torah learning. I had a clear revelation then that this bus-driver was not alone. He may even be part of the majority of Jewish men who just aren't cut out to become Torah scholars. Since then I do not condone the social pressure put upon boys and young men in certain circles to learn Torah full time. On the other hand, I very much believe in the importance of intensive Torah learning for those who are suitable. The teachings of Rav Chaim Volozhin, from our very first yeshiva days, still reverberate in our lives. He taught that the reason Hashem created the world round is in order that at each hour there will always be someone learning Torah, keeping the world going. "The blessing we say [after reading from the Torah]: '[G-d] implanted eternal life within us,' teaches us that the Torah is like a plant that produces fruit and thereby brings goodness to the world. When we uphold the holy Torah with all our might as is required, we will bring an abundance of holiness, blessing, and light to all the worlds" (*Nefesh HaChaim* 4:11).

#### "Educate the Youth According to His Own Way..."

Chanukah shares the same Hebrew root as the word "education" – חִינוּךְ/*chinuch*, because it is the holiday of education. King Solomon, the wisest of all men, teaches us a very important principle in education:

ספר משלי פרק כב (ו) חִנֵּךְ לְנֶעַר עַל פִּי דַרְכּוֹ גַם כִּי יִזְקֵן לֹא יִסוּר מִמֶּנָּה:

"Educate the youth according to his own way, then also when he grows old, he will not depart from it" (*Mishlei* 22:6).

Rather than giving in to social pressure of what society expects from our children, it is the parental wisdom to tune into the potential of each of their children, and encourage them on the path suitable for their personalities and talents.

## Life Lessons from Rebbetzin's Heart

I have often seen boys suffer and going “off the *derech*” – (Torah path), because they were pushed into a path to become a *talmid chacham* (Torah scholar), whereas they may have been much more fulfilled becoming an electrician and a carpenter, learning Torah on the side. On the other hand, there are children who exhibit a predisposition for deep Torah learning at a young age. Their path of becoming fulltime yeshiva students are no less essential than becoming a doctor or a lawyer. Before the ‘enlightenment’ period, Torah scholars were looked upon with the utmost reverence. Each Jewish community would have their handpicked respected Torah students who they supported, just as today western society supports university professors spending hours doing all kinds of research that doesn’t always has a direct benefit for society. Today, many people do not have a proper understanding of the importance of Torah study. They may feel resentment towards the yeshiva students who don’t make a living or join the Israeli army. Their claim may apply to those who are just placed in the yeshiva because of social pressure without truly learning. However, there are numerous teachings about the indispensable contribution of the yeshiva students who throw themselves wholehearted into the depth of the Talmudic sea. “Rabbi Elazar said, in the name of Rabbi Chaninah: Torah scholars increase peace in the world, as it says, ‘and all your children shall be taught about Hashem, and great shall be the peace of your children’” (*Babylonian Talmud, Yevamot 122b*). Having a son who is learning Torah full time is a special merit. Since the Torah is the blueprint and origin of this world, continued involvement in Torah is necessary to keep the world going. Therefore, the primary source of life, light, and existence of all the worlds is the involvement of the Jewish people in Torah study (Rabbi Chaim Volozhin, *Nefesh HaChaim 4:11*).

### Essential for Jewish Survival in Exile

Ya’acov *Avinu*, who himself had been a fulltime yeshiva student for 14 years (Rashi, *Bereishit 28:9*), understood the importance of fulltime Torah learning. Therefore, he sent his son, Yehuda ahead of himself to establish a Yeshiva before the rest of the family would go down to Egyptian exile.

**ספר בראשית פרק מו (כח) וְאֵת יְהוּדָה שָׁלַח לְפָנָיו אֶל יוֹסֵף לְהוֹרֹת לְפָנָיו גִּשְׁנָה וַיָּבֵאוּ אֶרְצָה גִּשְׁן:**  
 “He sent Yehuda before him to Yosef to teach before him in Goshen...” (*Bereishit 46:28*).

Rashi explains that Ya’acov sent Yehuda to establish for him a house of study (yeshiva) from which Torah teaching would go forth. Note that the word הורֹת/*horot* – “teach” is missing a letter *vav*, thus, it has the exact same letters as תוֹרָה/Torah (*Siftei Chachamim*). The high regard that Ya’acov had for the establishment of the Yeshiva is alluded to in the word לְפָנָיו/*lefanav* – before him, which is repeated twice. Ya’acov placed Torah learning before himself, as he understood that the yeshiva is vital for Jewish survival especially in exile. Therefore, he ensured to create an establishment that would facilitate all the tribes’ involvement in perpetual Torah learning.

### Gathering Grain versus Learning Torah

Whereas Jewish survival in exile depends on the strength of the Torah learning, and there is no lack of gentiles to become lawyers and doctors, in the land of Israel it is not ideal for every Jew to be a fulltime yeshiva student, leaving the Arabs to fulfill the roles of doctors, lawyers, police, builders, farmers etc. “Our Rabbis taught: ‘You shall gather your grain’ (*Devarim 11:14*). What do we learn from these words? Since it says, ‘This Torah book shall not depart out of your mouth’ (*Yehoshua 1:8*), I might think that this injunction is to be taken literally. Therefore, it says, ‘you

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shall gather your grain,' which implies that you are to combine Torah study with a worldly occupation. This is the view of Rabbi Yishmael. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai says: 'Is that possible? If a man ploughs in the ploughing season, and sows in the sowing season, and reaps in the reaping season, and threshes in the threshing season, and winnows in the season of wind, what is to become of the Torah? No; but when Israel perform the will of the Omnipresent, their work is performed by others...' (*Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 35b*). According to Rabbi Yishmael, the mitzvah to gather your grain applied only in the Land of Israel, as working the land of *Eretz Yisrael* is included in the mitzvah of settling the land. Boaz who was the greatest Torah scholar of his time, the head judge of the Rabbinical court, would winnow his barley the entire night without concern that this may be *bitul Torah* (wasting time from learning Torah) (*Ruth 3:2*). Just as we cannot say, "I won't lay *tefillin* because of the mitzvah to learn Torah," we cannot neglect the mitzvah to settle the land of Israel, engaging in any of the crafts needed to establish the land. Therefore, whoever helps develop the Israeli economy is participating in the mitzvah of settling the land. For the Land of Israel is the Holy Land, meaning, even its physical manifestation is holy. However, when we are dispersed among the nations of the world then, "The more the land was settled, the more did their understanding deteriorate," this Rabbi Yishmael will agree with Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai (*Chatam Sofer, Chidushim for Mesechet Sukah 36*). I thank Hashem for the privilege that our little family living in the Land of Israel are engaged in both gathering our grain and learning our holy Torah. Whereas, it is suitable for some Jews to study Torah fulltime and just work a little on the side, others are meant to mainly work while setting aside times for Torah learning. In between is a spectrum of various combinations of Torah learning and earning a livelihood. May we all find our perfect balance of Torah learning and worldly occupation while respecting those whose path may differ from ours!