

Rabbi Hanina and Rabbi Hiyya

After saying the blessing before study, read the following text and discuss the questions that follow in small groups.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת בבא מציעא דף פה עמוד ב

כי הוו מינצו רבי חנינא ורבי חייא, אמר ליה רבי חנינא לרבי חייא: בהדי דידי קא מינצית? חס וחלילה, אי משתכחא תורה מישראל מהדרנא לה מפילפול! - אמר ליה רבי חייא לרבי חנינא: בהדי דידי קא מינצית? דעבדי לתורה דלא תשתכח מישראל? מאי עבידנא, אזלינא ושדינא כיתנא, וגדילנא נישבי, וציידנא טבי ומאכילנא בשרייהו ליתמי, ואריכנא מגילתא וכתבנא חמשה חומשי, וסליקנא למתא ומקרינא חמשה ינוקי בחמשה חומשי, ומתנינא שיתא ינוקי שיתא סדרי, ואמרנא להו: עד דהדרנא ואתינא - אקרו אהדדי ואתנו אהדדי, ועבדי לה לתורה דלא תשתכח מישראל

When Rabbi Hanina and Rabbi Hiyya used to quarrel...Rabbi Hanina would say: Do you dare to quarrel with me? Even if, God forbid, the entire Torah were to be forgotten, I would be able to restore it by myself, relying on my powers of argumentation.

Rabbi Hiyya would respond: Do you dare to argue with me? Consider what I have done to ensure that the Torah will not be forgotten. What do I do? I go out and plant flax, and after the flax is processed I proceed to weave nets from it. When the nets are ready, I go out and catch a deer and give the meat to needy orphans. From the skins of those deer I prepare scrolls, upon which I write the Five Books of the Torah. Then I go to a town where there are no other teachers and teach the Torah to five children, one book to each child. Then I teach the six orders of the Mishnah to six children, one order to each child. And I say to each of the children, "Now I have to leave to teach elsewhere; until I return, teach one another Torah and teach one another Mishnah. Thus my efforts ensure that the Torah is not forgotten in Israel.

Talmud, Bava Metzia 85b

Questions for Discussion

1. Both Rabbi Hiyya and Rabbi Hanina seem to have the same goal for Jewish education in mind. How would you describe their goal?
2. Though they have the same goal, their methods are different. How would you describe each of their methods?
3. With which rabbi's method do you agree? Why?
4. Why do you think the *Talmud* includes both of their statements?
5. From the text, what can you infer about the problems of Jewish education in Talmudic times?
6. How are the problems we face today:
 - Similar to the problems faced by the rabbis of the *Talmud*?
 - Different from the ones that the rabbis of the *Talmud* faced?

Background

Rabbi Hanina – A sandal maker by trade, Rabbi Hanina lived at the end of the 3rd century and the beginning of the 4th century CE and was Babylonian-born, though he migrated to *Eretz Yisrael*.

Rabbi Hiyya – Another Babylonian immigrant to *Eretz Yisrael*, Rabbi Hiyya was considered second in learning only to Judah HaNasi. Because of this he was also called Rabbah, “The Great.”

Bava Metzia – A tractate of the *Talmud* that deals primarily with civil law, hiring, leasing and ownership.