

'Avram Avinu Padre Querido': Training a Generation that could 'Turn the World Upside Down'

When Avram heard that his brother (that is, Lot; Hebrew, achaiiv) had been taken captive, he led out his trained men (וירק את־חניכיו ילידי), who had been born in his house, 318 of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. (Gen 14:14)

Both the ArtScroll *Tanach* and the KJV translate the Hebrew word וירק (*vayarek*) as “he armed” instead of “he led” in the CJB. The next two words should be translated “trained youth” (*et-chanichaiv yelidei*) rather than “men.” Our father *Avraham* was into the training young people business—youths grow up to do adult things and become the spiritual leaders of tomorrow. The *Torah* gives us the count, 318 of them! It is not hard to imagine that our father *Avraham* had a home *Yeshiva* to accomplish this training. These were a lot of boys! In the *Torah* ירוה gives us the reason why He (G-d) says He (G-d) will not hide His (G-d's) future plans from him (*Avram Avinu*): “*And ירוה said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of ירוה, to do justice and judgment; that ירוה may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.*” (Gen 18:17-19) The Hebrew text of Genesis 18:19 gives us greater insight into *Adonai's* reasoning:

כי ידעתיו למען אשר יצוה את־בניו ואת־ביתו אחריו ושמרו דרך יהוה
לעשות צדקה ומשפט למען הביא יהוה על־אברהם את אשר־דבר עליו

“Because (*Ki*) I know him (*Yeda'tiv*).” The Hebrew verb *yodea* means “to know intimately.” There already existed intimacy between *Avraham* and *Adonai*. No wonder the CJB translates this phrase as “*For I have made myself known to him*” and the ASV translates it as “*For I have known him to the end.*” The L-rd has intimate knowledge about *Avraham*, and *Adonai* knows intimately how he will behave all the way to the end of his days on the earth. According to ירוה he “will command to the end” (*yetzaveh* from the same root where we get *mitzvah*) them in “*veshamru derech יהוה*” (ירוה דרך יהוה) to guard (*shomer*) the *Way of Adonai* and to do what is right and just “*Laasot tzedakah u'mishpat*” (לעשות צדקה ומשפט) (in modern Hebrew, benevolence & judgment), i.e., to protect/keep/guard the ways of *Adonai* to do good works and have righteousness deeds which are found in *Torah*! Both in the *Torah* and the *B'rit Chadasha* (in Hebrews and in Romans) we are told about our father *Avraham's* trust and faith and how it was counted unto him as righteousness. Here we are also informed by ירוה that what counts in terms of bringing about the desired results that *Adonai* has Himself promised in *Avraham's* life (“*that ירוה may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him*”), is that he will *mitzvah* his children in *derech Adonai*, the path (the way) of *Adonai*, that is *Yeshua*.

The word חניכיו (*chanichaiv*) in Gen. 14:14 comes from the root חנך (*chanak*) from which we get the word (you guessed it) *chanukah* (חנכה)! There are only two uses of this root in the *Tanach*, Gen. 14:14 and Prov. 22:6: “*Train (חנך, chanoch) up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*” How did he arm them? He dedicated, trained up, directed, commanded, and lead them in works of righteousness.

Last week we talked about the beginning of *Yeshua's* public ministry, what happened at His *mikvah*. *Yeshua* is led into the desert by the Spirit where He is tested. He comes back from the desert to begin His very important work on the earth. What does He do next? We could say He begins by preaching to the crowds. We could say He activates Isaiah 61. Those are true statements. In fact, Matt. 4:13-16 tells us that He begins His ministry in Galilee to fulfill Isaiah 9:1,2. But we also see that in Matt. 4:18 He calls *Shim'on*, known as *Kefa*, and his brother *Andrew*, and in Matt. 4:21 He calls *Ya'akov Ben-Zavdai* and *Yochanan* his brother. He begins a *chanak*

process in His own neighborhood, from his own brethren. *Yeshua* begins early in His ministry to train *talmidim* (תלמידים), that is, disciples. In Matt. 4:25 we read: “*Huge crowds followed him from the Galil, the Ten Towns, Yerushalayim, Y’hudah, and ‘Ever-HaYarden.*” And in Matt. 5:1-2: “*Seeing the crowds, Yeshua walked up the hill. After he sat down, his talmidim came to him, and he began to speak. This is what he taught them.*” *Yeshua* was not really seeking large crowds, He was seeking *talmidim* (disciples). Scripture confirms for us that “*talmidim came to him.*”

Our image of a disciple may be a flannel-graph picture of a bearded man in a robe and sandals, or it may be simply an image of one of the Twelve that followed *Yeshua*. We tend to think of discipleship as a *B’rit Chadasha*, or Gospel phenomenon, perhaps something *Yeshua* introduced when He chose his twelve disciples. This is wrong. We are also to train our youths like He did!

Long before the days of the Master, discipleship was already a well-established institution within Jewish culture. All the great Sages, the rabbis, sages among the Pharisees and the teachers of the Torah had disciples. The Hebrew word for disciple is תלמיד, *talmid*. *Talmid* means student. The plural is תלמידים, *talmidim*: students. Scripture renders *talmidim* as disciples. A *talmid*’s job was to learn everything that his Master had to teach.

They learned the stories that the teacher told and the lessons that their teacher taught. They learned to eat the foods that their teacher ate and the way their teacher ate them. They learned to keep *Shabbat* the way their teacher kept Sabbath and to do *tzedakah* the way their teacher did *tzedakah*. They learned how to keep (*shomer*) God’s commands the way their teacher kept them. A disciple’s job was to become like his or her teacher. So it is written for us in the Gospel, “*Every disciple fully trained will be like his teacher.*” (Luke 6:40) When the disciple was fully trained, he became the teacher and passed on the teaching to disciples of his own, who in turn, when they became fully trained, would become teachers and raised up disciples of their own. From the days of *Avraham Avinu*, this was the method! The ultimate goal of *Yeshua*’s *talmidim* was that they would “turn the known world upside down!”

The Three Charges to Disciples

The process of handing on teaching from generation to generation stretches back in time. It forms a long continuous chain, all the way back to Mount Sinai. Through the teacher-disciple chain, the teaching of the Torah was passed on from generation to generation. The *Mishna in Pirkei Avot* begins with a description of how this transmission process carried the Torah from Moses to Ezra’s generation.

Moses received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua (his disciple), Joshua to the elders; the elders to the prophets, the prophets to the men of the Great Assembly. The Men of the Great Assembly said three things, “*Be deliberate in judgement, raise up many disciples, and make a fence (shomer) for the Torah.*” (*Avot 1:1,2*) Thus, the Men of the Great Assembly (Ezra’s generation, ≈500 BCE) issued three charges to their disciples.

1. **Be Deliberate in Judgment:** The Men of the Great Assembly warned the disciples to be careful when hearing law cases. They warned them to weigh all the evidence. When asked a question regarding Scripture, when making a legal ruling, when hearing court cases as elders or as judges sitting on a court of law or even when simply making a small decision on a point of law, they were to be careful and deliberate, studying the Scriptures seriously and diligently.
2. **Raise Up Many Disciples:** The Men of the Great Assembly told the disciples to raise up many students. Disciples were necessary to pass the teaching of *Torah* on to the next generation of students. If they did not, there could be no continuity of the faith. If the disciples would not raise up disciples who in turn became teachers raising up disciples, the teaching would be lost.

3. **Make a Fence (Shomer) for the Torah:** The Men of the Great Assembly told the disciples to protect the *Torah*. They were to protect the commandments by teaching their disciples to avoid even seemingly benign behaviors that might lead to sin. For example, the prohibition against husking grain in one's hands on the Sabbath was a fence meant to protect the prohibition against harvesting on *Shabbat*. If one does not even husk grain between his palms for fear of violating *Shabbat*, he will certainly never come near to actually harvesting and winnowing on *Shabbat*. The Scriptural word that best describes this activity is to be a “*shomer*” (erecting safe boundaries) for the *Torah*.

The Four jobs of a Disciple

In the first century, the disciples of the Sages had four major tasks to perform. These tasks describe the cultural context of the institution of discipleship in the Gospels.

1. **To memorize their teacher's words.** it was the job of a disciple to memorize his teacher's words. The oral transmission process was the only intergenerational communication practiced among the Sages. The great rabbis and Torah scholars of First Century Judaism did not write scrolls or compose books for their students to read and study. Instead, they taught orally and their disciples studied by memorizing their words. Through constant repetition, disciples memorized their teacher's words verbatim and were able to repeat them to subsequent generations.
2. **To learn their teacher's traditions and interpretations.** It was a disciple's job to learn the tradition of how his teacher kept the commands of God and interpreted the Scriptures. Every detail about the teacher was important to the disciple. The disciple needed to learn how the teacher washed his hands, how he kept the Sabbath, how he fasted, how he prayed, how he gave charity, how he affixed a *mezuzah*, how he said the blessings over food, etc. Furthermore, the way the teacher interpreted passages of scriptures, the meanings he drew out, the parables with which he elucidated, the way he explained a verse or understood a concept, each of these was of utmost importance to the disciple. Details of this sort were not just trivia. To a disciple, these were like gems and pearls meant to be gathered and treasured.
3. **To imitate their teacher's actions.** A disciple's highest calling was to be a reflection of his teacher. A disciple studied to learn, to act, to speak and to respond the same way his Master would act and speak and respond. A disciple studied to do the things his Master did. “*Every disciple fully trained will be like his master.*”
4. **To raise up disciples.** It was the job of a disciple, when finally trained, to raise up his own disciples. He was to create a new generation of students and to transmit to them the memorized words of his Master, the traditions and the interpretations of his Master, the actions and behaviors of his Master. The goal was to pass the torch of discipleship from generation to generation.

Thus, we see *Yeshua* doing the Jewish Rabbi thing, raising *talmidim*, training them in *derech HaTorah*, doing *Naase V’Nishma*, and establishing that the fact that at that time, because *The Melech* was present, *talmidim* could start receiving the benefits of the *malchut* (The Kingdom). No matter how contrary to our human ways it may seem (remember that is written “*my ways are not your ways...*”), He begins teaching them the benefits of the Kingdom of G-d which is at hand. Thoroughly Jewish *Yeshua* is not doing a Christian thing, He is doing a thoroughly Jewish thing. He is “commanding His children after Him” to keep *derech Adonai* by doing *tzedakah u’ mishpat*. We ought to be doing the very same thing...