

Inculcate His Word to Your Children

“⁷And you shall teach them (Adonai’s Words) diligently to your children (VeShinántam levanécha), and shall talk of them (VeDibárta Bam) when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up” (Deut. 6:7).

The familiar translation of *VeShinántam levanécha* in Deuteronomy 6:7 is *you shall teach them (Adonai’s Words) diligently to your children*. I would have expected a form of the Hebrew verb *melamed* (to teach) in the passage, but the *Torah* uses the word *shinantam*. The *DavkaWriter* Hebrew Word Processor’s Dictionary translates *shinantam* to point, to sharpen, to whet (stimulate), to inculcate, and to memorize. Also, it can mean was sharpened, was inculcated, or was taught. The idea behind point, blade or sharpen is to hone in. Inculcate is a word often used in Spanish but rarely used in America. To inculcate is to teach and impress by frequent repetitions or admonitions. Its synonyms include endue, indue, imbue, infuse, ingrain, engrain, inoculate, invest, and suffuse. More specifically to inculcate is to implant, to instill, and to inseminate into the mind of the hearer. Implant implies teaching that makes for permanence of what is taught. Inculcate implies persistent or repeated efforts to impress on the mind. Instill stresses gradual, gentle imparting of knowledge over a long period of time. Inseminate applies to a sowing of ideas in many minds so that they spread through a class or nation. The *Torah* meaning can be summarized as to intentionally, continually and with a purpose teach *His Word* to our children or audience.

The *Torah* defines teaching for us. The primitive Hebrew root *lamad* (root *l.m.d.*, whose vocalization is obtained by placing the vowel *a* between the letters, which actually yields the past or prefect tense) means to *learn, teach* and *to cause to learn*. In its simple (*Paal*), active form, this verb has the meaning *to learn*. However, it is also found in a form giving the causative sense (*Piel*), *to cause to learn*, that is, *to teach*. The first occurrence of the word is in Deut. 4:1: *“Now, O Israel, listen (shema) to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching (melamed) you to do, so that you may live and go in and possess the land that Adonai the God of your fathers is giving you”*. In the very next chapter, we read: *“Moses called to all Israel and said to them, ‘Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the ordinances that I am speaking in your hearing today, learn them (lamad), keep them (shamar) and make sure to do (asah) them”*” (Deut. 5:1). About half the occurrences of *lamad* are found in the books of Deuteronomy and Psalms, underlining the teaching emphasis found in these books.

In beginning Hebrew, one of the first verbs one is introduced to is *l.m.d.*, which means to learn. We hear such simple phrases as *Ani lomed ibrit* (I learn Hebrew) and simple questions *Atah lomed ibrit?* (masc.) or *At lomedet ibrit?* (fem.) asking *Do you learn Hebrew?* The simple response is *ken* (yes), but we can also say *Ken, ani lomed ibrit* (Yes, I learn or am learning Hebrew). At the beginning, emphasis is given to simple action verbs whose present tense is formed by taking the three-letter root and adding an *o* vowel between the first and second letter of the root and an *e* vowel between the second and third letter of the root. The root for the verb to learn is *l.m.d.*, and thus, we get the present tense form *lomed*. Another example, the root for to keep/guard is *sh.m.r* so the present tense form becomes *shomer*.

In Deuteronomy 4:14 we are told: *“¹⁴Adonai commanded me at that time to teach (lelamed, the infinitive of melamed) you statutes and ordinances, so that you might do them in the land you are crossing over to possess.”* In verse 1 and 13 of Deut. 4 we see clearly the *Piel* or causative form of *lamad*, which is *melamed* (formed by adding a *mem* in front of the first letter of the root). In Deut. 5:1 *Adonai* used *lamad* to express learning but used *melamed* in Deut. 4 to express teaching. These are the *same* Hebrew verb roots! Evidently in *Adonai’s* mind, to teach is to cause to learn. This places an extraordinary responsibility on the teacher to *cause the students to learn* (the students are your children or your audience) and this is what teaching means to *Adonai*. In other words, **to teach** in *Adonai’s Mind* is **to inculcate**.

What an awesome responsibility we have when we teach *His Word*. I have that responsibility teaching you as your rabbi (*Torah* teacher) and this is a responsibility I take very seriously! *Shabbat Shalom!*