



TEACH WITH THE RABBI

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Topic: Torah/Talmud
Grades 3 and up

Lil'mod u'le'lamed – to learn and to teach

One of the elusive goals of the teacher is to be sure that the student not only shows competence with the material, but has internalized it to such an extent that he or she can say it over in his or her own words. One method used to demonstrate knowledge of the issue is the oral report. But this medium has its own flaws – the student may feel pressure about the presentation itself, and lose touch with the significance of the material. People who get nervous in front of crowds may deal with their stage fright more than anything else.

Another potential flaw in the oral report model is the possibility, or likelihood, that some of the material will be inaccurate.

Can we find a model that will stimulate a personal response from the student about the material, as demonstrated by the student presenting the material, without having to work through issues of nervousness or stage fright? And can it be done in such a way that the accuracy of the material will be guaranteed?

On the positive side, how can we create an exciting encounter between the student and the teacher over a primary text?

These questions can be solved with the ‘teach with the rabbi’ or ‘teach with the teacher model’. The emphasis is on the word ‘with’. The premise is that a general topic is introduced. The student tells the teacher what aspects of that topic are of interest, and the teacher locates one or more primary texts that address the issue. The teacher and the student sit together and learn through it to the point where the student has internalized the meaning of the text and can communicate its general gist in his or her own words. When it comes time to present the text, the format will be the same as when he teacher and student learned privately: the teacher and student will sit across from each other and learn the text together. The teacher will encourage the student to take the lead in presenting the text, and will offer support throughout, while also reminding the student with key words and phrases about some of the points they had discussed in previous learning sessions. The audience has the text in front of them as well, and is able to ‘witness’ the *chavruta* between teacher and student.

I believe this is appropriate for students ages 7 and up, and is especially potent for use with adult learners. It includes aspects of text learning, *chavruta* skills, and teaching in front of a group. It gives value to the student’s thoughts about an ancient text, showing that the text is still alive and impacting, as well as subject to a variety of readings. The student will be challenged by the teacher (assuming the teacher is effective) in finding personal meaning in the text.