

Fostering (Jewish) Independence

The Talmud lists a series of actions that a parent is required to perform for their child, to instill in them independence. If a parent is not suited to perform these tasks, a substitute tutor can fill in.

[Note that in this text the Talmud is going to speak about fathers and their obligations to their sons. Later on the Talmud goes into a long discussion about the extent to which this applies to mothers and daughters. For our purposes, however, we think that this text has something interesting to say about all parents and how they bring all children to independence, and we are reading it with that in mind.]



Talmud Kiddushin 29a

The Gemara comments: According to this interpretation, **we learn** in this mishna **that which the Sages taught** in a *baraita*: **A father is obligated with regard to his son to circumcise him, and to redeem him** if he is a firstborn son who must be redeemed by payment to a priest, **and to teach him Torah, and to marry him to a woman, and to teach him a trade. And some say:** A father is **also** obligated **to teach** his son **to swim. Rabbi Yehuda says: Any father who does not teach his son a trade teaches him banditry [listut].** The Gemara expresses surprise at this statement: Can it **enter your mind** that he actually teaches him **banditry? Rather,** the *baraita* means that it is **as though he teaches him banditry.** Since the son has no profession with which to support himself, he is likely to turn to theft for a livelihood. This *Baraita* accords with Rav Yehuda's interpretation of the mishna.

תלמוד קידושין כט

תנינא להא דת"ר האב חייב
בבנו למולו ולפדותו וללמדו
תורה ולהשיאו אשה וללמדו
אומנות וי"א אף להשיטו במים
רבי יהודה אומר כל שאינו
מלמד את בנו אומנות מלמדו
ליסטות ליסטות ס"ד אלא
כאילו מלמדו ליסטות:

? Look at each action a parent is obligated to do. In the boxes below, you'll find some interpretations about what each obligation could signify. Write down what else the action could signify, then reflect on why these obligations appear in this list.

<p>Circumcision (<i>Brit Milah</i>) could signify belonging</p>	<p>Redemption (<i>Pidyon HaBen</i>) could signify devotion</p>	<p>Marriage could signify commitment</p>
<p>Torah Study could signify education</p>	<p>Trade could signify responsibility</p>	<p>Swimming could signify survival</p>

On “Jewish Independence”



The Talmud seems to outline skills that are associated with life in general, such as learning a trade and being able to swim. Yet it's clear that they all contribute to one's ability to be independent in this world. If you were to rewrite this text to address skills specifically connected to “Jewish independence” — the ability to navigate, embody, and represent Jewish ideas and life — what would be included? What would you put on the list so you could be more “Jewishly independent”?

A _____ (parent, teacher, friend, other) is obligated with regard to their
 _____ (child/student/self) to teach them _____ (action #1), and to
 _____ (action #2), and to teach them _____ (action
 #3). And some say: A _____ (parent, teacher, friend, other) is also obligated to
 teach them to _____ (action #4).
 _____ (Person) says: Anyone who does not teach them _____ (repeat action #4)
 teaches them _____ (bad action).