

Yearning to Learn

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

Knowing where to find information is not the same as possessing it. Each fact we learn is arranged in the matrix of all we already know. One who knows how to Google "Shakespeare sonnets" cannot be compared to the one who has memorized Shakespeare's sonnets. The latter carries the words with him. The former is an accountant of knowledge; he knows where the treasure is, but it does not belong to him.

Real education instills a desire for knowledge, not merely the tools to acquire it. We are shaped by what we know and what we yearn to know. The Talmud tells us that as a young man Hillel was so desperate for words of Torah that he climbed on the roof of the study house to hear the discourses of his great predecessors, Shemaya and Avtalion. Noticing the darkness, they looked up and saw the young man on the skylight, covered with snow. The rabbis rescued Hillel, washed and anointed him, and sat him by the fire.

"If you want to build a ship," wrote Antoine de Saint Exupery, "don't drum up people together to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the sea." First teach children to love learning; the web will wait.