THE 7 LAWS OF TEACHING

FOR MOTHERS

Anne Elliott

HOMESCHOOLING Torah
Psalm 12:3

Determine
to improve your teaching skills daily

These words which I command you today shall be in your heart.
You shall teach them diligently to your children.
Deuteronomy 6:6-7

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Introduction

When I was in high school, I attended a small Christian school where we could fine-tune our electives. If we wanted to learn something, they'd find a parent with some knowledge to teach a class, even for just one or two students. For example, a gentleman taught mechanical drawing and drafting to three boys, who later used those skills in life. It was a really cool opportunity.

I wanted to be a teacher and thought I'd study elementary education in college. To learn teaching in high school, a teacher in the elementary grades created a class for me. I became her teacher's aide, grading papers, making bulletin boards, helping with bathroom breaks, and learning to teach history or science lessons. She gave me a textbook from the 1800s by John Milton Gregory called *The Seven Laws of Teaching*. Each day, she assigned me essays based on the book, which we didn't have time to discuss since she was teaching.

I want to share this book with you because it's excellent, old, and reprinted by many publishers. I'll provide a link below to an Amazon Kindle version, but you can also find it on Archive.org for free. I'll borrow a few of Gregory's laws of teaching and share my perspective on applying them to homeschooling.

To start, understand that children have the capacity to learn and need to acquire experience. Learning involves physical growth—neurons forming as the body and mind develop. This capacity grows through training, like turning a child's head in a certain direction to guide their neurons, similar to teaching a baby to eat from a spoon. The physical action of dipping a spoon into a baby food jar, getting it to their mouth without spilling, requires significant training. Education often involves giving children the physical capacity to learn by guiding their movements.

Teaching, on the other hand, is about helping children acquire experience. Knowledge isn't just out in the universe—it's what one person learns and passes to another. Imagine Adam and Eve figuring out what's inside a coconut or which plants were edible. That knowledge, gained through struggle, has been passed down for 6,000 years. We don't want our children to learn everything through the school of hard knocks. Teaching is passing on humanity's acquired knowledge, including how it was discovered and developed. For example, George Washington Carver made inventions from peanuts, which have been refined into modern technologies like electronics and robotics.

To be trained and taught, children need a love of learning and the ability to seek knowledge independently. You can't pass on all the world's knowledge in 20 years, so equip them with skills to learn for life. Teaching is communicating experience—painting a picture in someone's mind.

For example, I picture my yellow metal water bottle with a flip-top and cool lemon-flavored liquid. Teaching is transferring that image to you. Like Bob Ross painting a landscape, a teacher builds a picture piece by piece, sharing experiences to help students avoid mistakes.

~Anne

Handy Links:

- The Seven Laws of Teaching, by John Milton Gregory (Amazon)
- The Seven Laws of Teaching, by John Milton Gregory (free on Archive.org)

The Law of the Teacher

You must know the subject to teach it.

You can't describe a water bottle you've never seen or a Bob Ross painting you haven't viewed. Many parents hesitate to homeschool because they feel uneducated in subjects like algebra. While you can't teach what you don't know, there are levels of knowing. A beginner teacher might have faint recognition of a topic, like knowing a battery's positive and negative ends. A more skilled teacher can describe it clearly, perhaps reading from a book. A master teacher explains, proves, illustrates, and applies it, with their knowledge shaping their behavior—like a surgeon practicing good nutrition, not just preaching it.

Imperfect knowledge means imperfect teaching, but you can improve over time. Enthusiasm for a subject, even with limited knowledge, inspires students. Find something exciting about the topic—whether math, chemical bonds, or King George's battles—to spark their interest. Before teaching, study the topic briefly to boost your enthusiasm. For example, I might pull a biology dictionary off my shelf to refresh my understanding of the circulatory system, tying it to real-world issues like a virus's impact to make it relevant. Enthusiasm covers mistakes and inspires students.

Connect unfamiliar topics to what students already know. Discuss with friends, your spouse, or online communities like our Homeschooling Torah forum to brainstorm ways to make subjects engaging. Write down ideas so you don't forget when teaching.

The Law of the Learner

The learner must attend with interest to the material.

Students need enthusiasm, not just the teacher. Passive attention, like being drawn to a flashy TV ad, is short-lived because it requires no effort. Online curricula with animations often rely on this, but it can tire students. Active attention, driven by self-control—like a college student paying attention in a dull class because they paid for it—is better but not ideal. The best is secondary passive attention, where the subject itself captivates the learner. For example, I love midwifery and eagerly read 600-page textbooks on it. Similarly, many of us were drawn to Torah by the Holy Spirit, unable to pull away.

This love of learning grows through persistent effort. A student might start with self-control in a boring class, but an enthusiastic teacher can spark curiosity. Over time, they may Google a topic unprompted, moving to secondary passive attention. Teachers are needed because we're not yet in the era where knowledge is instinctive, as promised in Jeremiah 31:34. Instill self-control, but don't force learning harshly—it can

create dislike for a subject. Instead, balance effort with rewarding, fun lessons to foster a love of learning. For example, reward a child who learns to read with exciting "living books" that keep them engaged.

Arrange knowledge in a logical order, like a curriculum's scope and sequence, to make learning easier. Teaching algebra to a first-grader is inefficient without foundational skills. A systematic approach builds confidence and rewards effort with mastery. Link new concepts to familiar ones to reduce intimidation and make learning rewarding.

The Law of the Language

Learning requires a shared vocabulary.

Knowledge, like medicinal herbs or scripture, is tied to words. Language isn't just words—it's a system of signs and symbols, often visual. John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word," showing language is divine, not human-invented.

You must know your students' vocabulary, like speaking a five-year-old's language or teaching them new words. If you use unfamiliar terms, they'll get distracted, like when reading and pausing to look up a word.

Ensure words match the student's understanding. For example, in Proverbs 28, "the wicked flee when no man pursueth," the word "flee" means "run away," but a child might think of "flea" like a dog's pest. Or "the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want" means "not lack," not "not want ice cream." Use synonyms or simpler terms to clarify, like explaining "Shabbat Shalom" means "peaceful day of rest."

Encourage students to express what they've learned in their own words to confirm understanding. If they can't, they haven't learned it. Have them teach a concept back, like solving a math problem on a whiteboard, to test comprehension.

Language is the storehouse of knowledge. The word "act" leads to related terms like "action," "active," and "actual," unlocking broader understanding. Body language, pictures, and creation also convey knowledge, like stars revealing a Creator. Use simple, short sentences and teach vocabulary gradually. When testing, focus on vocabulary mastery, as it underpins concepts. Spend time on stories and experiences to make words meaningful, reviewing them throughout the year.

Don't assume interest means understanding—students may smile to please you without grasping the material. If there's no understanding, check the vocabulary first, rephrasing with stories until it clicks. Expand your own vocabulary to find new ways to explain concepts, even if you don't use big words.

The Law of the Lesson

The truth you want to convey must be learned by connecting it to something the student already knows.

You can't start from nothing—we're not YHVH, creating something from nothing. Your job as a teacher is to find shared knowledge and connect the new to the old.

This can be challenging because you must explain using what's in the student's mind, not yours. For example, if I know a lot about baking bread but my student doesn't, my explanations won't help unless I connect to their experiences. Put yourself in their shoes.

Always move forward, learning something new each day, but tie it to prior knowledge. Avoid boring repetition, like a teacher saying the same thing daily, but don't introduce concepts so new they're incomprehensible. You'll see confusion in students' eyes, especially in math, when the connection to prior knowledge is missing.

Knowledge is comparing new information to what's known and judging its truth. For example, if I say a tree's leaves are purple, you know it's false. You learned colors in preschool and can discern the difference between purple and green, and you judge that a true statement would be, "A tree's leaves are green."

Stories help make these connections. When a friend shares a story about their dog's trick, you recall similar experiences, sparking discussion. This back-and-forth builds new knowledge by connecting to shared experiences. To explain an unfamiliar concept, like math, compare it to familiar settings—the kitchen, garage, or grocery store—to make it relatable.

Explaining isn't just speaking loudly, clearly, or urgently. If I'm in Israel and ask for the bathroom in English to a Hebrew speaker, no amount of clear enunciation helps without shared language. Similarly, repeating a math problem like "2 + 2" or a story problem about girls buying dresses won't help if the student lacks the connecting knowledge. Reword it using a shared experience, like a recent shopping trip, to bridge the gap. Avoid exasperating your child, as Ephesians 6:4 warns against provoking children to wrath. Use stories and discussions from their life, not yours, to make new knowledge as familiar as basic colors.

Learning is problem-solving. When introducing a new concept like ratios, students start with a question: "What's a ratio?" That's the first step. For example, if a student doesn't know who Ronald Reagan is, ask, "Do you know who he is?" Their blank expression gives you a teaching opportunity.

The steps of problem-solving are: (1) Ask a question, (2) Organize resources (e.g., Google, dictionaries, books, or experts), and (3) Evaluate answers to find the right one. For instance, a dictionary may list multiple meanings for a word, but only one fits the context.

Knowledge is a collection of solved problems passed down since Adam and Eve, like distinguishing poisonous from safe plants. Connect new lessons to prior knowledge, review briefly to refresh shared experiences, and allow discussion to relate old and new.

The Law of the Teaching Process

Don't tell students anything they could discover themselves.

This law emphasizes fostering self-learning. This idea initially troubled me, as Torah is our schoolmaster leading to Messiah, and Romans 1 says nature teaches everyone about God. Yet, some individuals require teachers because they don't understand what they see in nature or what they read in Scripture. For example, the Ethiopian eunuch needed Philip to explain Isaiah's scroll (Acts 8), and a child struggling with spelling "broccoli" may need you to provide the answer quickly rather than divert to dictionary skills.

Ultimately, you want students to become discoverers of truth, practicing the problem-solving steps: asking questions, organizing tools, and evaluating answers. Adam in Genesis 2:15-3:8 didn't learn alone—YHVH guided him, giving commands and walking with him daily. Even naming animals was a guided discovery, showing we need teachers to connect discoveries to truth.

Teachers save time, prevent mistakes, and build confidence. Without them, Eve was deceived, misquoting God's command about the tree because Adam didn't fully pass on the knowledge. Schools connect discoveries to established truth, avoiding wasted time or dangerous errors. Under supervision, students practice problem-solving safely, gaining confidence with guidance. For example, in math, don't solve the problem for them. Help them identify the problem, find tools, and check if the solution makes sense, building their confidence.

Young children are motivated by bright colors, action, and concrete stories, while older students respond to thoughts and feelings. Teaching is like planting seeds, requiring long-term care to protect from storms, birds, or poison. In Matthew 13's Parable of the Sower, seeds on the wayside were devoured because listeners didn't understand. Stony ground seeds sprouted but withered under pressure, like a child who grasps math initially but gives up when it gets hard. Distractions, like TV or life events choked thorny ground seeds. Good ground, cultivated and protected, yields abundant fruit. As a teacher, be a gardener, ensuring understanding, shielding from distractions, and fostering growth through encouragement.

Inspire students by sharing your love of learning, especially for tough subjects. Join them in discovery, show passion, and give time for questions. Use the six serving men—who, what, when, where,

why, how—to spark discussion. Avoid rushing or finishing their sentences. Watch for argumentative children who act "wise in their own eyes" (Philippians 2:14). Distinguish sincere questions from arrogance to maintain a productive learning environment.

The Law of the Learning Process

Students must reproduce truth to show they've learned it, beyond mere memorization.

Reciting history facts or Bible verses doesn't mean understanding. True learning is explaining in their own words, like paraphrasing John 3:16 with a personal example. Copywork, like kings copying Torah, is a tool, not the goal. Students must understand and apply it.

Teach students to investigate, seek evidence, and apply knowledge. Peter urges us to give a reason for our hope (1 Peter 3:15), showing understanding. Wisdom—applying knowledge correctly—is the goal, not just knowing facts. For example, learning about herbs involves reading, discussing, verifying with evidence, and using them effectively.

In education, this means: (1) Learn the lesson (reading or copying), (2) Understand it through discussion, (3) Paraphrase it, (4) Verify with evidence, and (5) Apply it.

The Shema (Deuteronomy 6) encompasses these steps—hear, understand, and do. Teach children to prove truth, like verifying scripture, and apply it daily. As children mature, they ask "why," requiring reasons and evidence to avoid deception like Eve's.

The Law of Review

True knowledge is completed and tested through review and application.

Review perfects knowledge, confirms truth, makes it ready for use, and enables application. For example, reviewing 4 × 7 = 28 ensures it's automatic for real-world use, like measuring in a workshop.

Review is the most critical part of learning—if students can't recall and use knowledge, they haven't learned it. Torah is read yearly in synagogues (Acts 15) because fresh perspectives and new experiences deepen understanding. Like blind men describing an elephant from different angles, reviewing from new viewpoints clarifies knowledge.

Tests should assess what students remember and can apply, not just facts. In Homeschooling Torah, we repeat math levels yearly, revisiting worksheets with a year's worth of new experiences, enriching understanding. History is taught twice—once young, then later with deeper perspectives like government or economics. For older students, assignments like writing about George Washington's character apply knowledge to life. An artisan bread maker,

unlike someone using a mix, masters her craft through repeated application.

Use lesson plans, sticky notes, or a curriculum to track what to review. Highlight books, use worksheets, or create notebooking pages, timelines, or maps to reinforce connections. For example, a map of Italy in geography differs from one tied to historical events, strengthening retention. Have students summarize lessons verbally or in writing, pausing to review after units or weekly. About a third of school time should be dedicated to review, ensuring deep learning rather than merely completing a curriculum.

In Homeschooling Torah, lessons follow "Hear, Learn, Keep, Do." Hearing is understanding deeply, learning is researching evidence, keeping is reviewing, and doing is applying. Home is ideal for this, unlike church settings where time is limited (1 Corinthians 14). Discussions continue beyond lessons—while cooking, cleaning, or at activities—fostering ongoing learning.

Conclusion

The seven laws of teaching, as outlined by John Milton Gregory, provide a timeless framework for effective homeschooling by emphasizing the connection between teacher, learner, and knowledge. The teacher must master the subject and inspire enthusiasm, while the learner needs to engage with interest, using a shared language to bridge understanding. Lessons should build on prior knowledge, fostering a discovery-driven process where students learn to investigate, evaluate, and apply truths independently. Through consistent review, knowledge is solidified and made ready for real-world use. Together, these laws create a dynamic, relational approach to education, encouraging parents to cultivate a love of learning in their children, guiding them toward wisdom through patience, shared experiences, and purposeful instruction.

By integrating these principles, homeschooling becomes a journey of mutual growth. Teachers and students collaborate to connect new ideas to familiar ones, using stories, discussions, and practical applications to make learning meaningful. This process, rooted in patience and reinforced by review, equips children not just with facts but with the tools to seek truth and apply it wisely throughout their lives, fulfilling the biblical call to hear, learn, keep, and do.

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