

## These are the offspring of Aharon and Moshe. (3:1)

Interestingly, the Torah begins the *pasuk* stating that the following are the sons of Aharon and Moshe, but mentions only the sons of Aharon *HaKohen*. *Rashi* explains that whoever teaches the son of his friend Torah, it is considered as if he gave birth to him. A *rebbe* is a child's spiritual mentor -- and much more. As his spiritual mentor, he has the opportunity to mold his student's life, inspire his goals and aspirations, essentially to change him. He becomes the child's spiritual progenitor, granting him spiritual life, which is of infinitely greater value than his physical life.

Playing a role in a child's spiritual development is no small contribution. Everything that one does to initiate and enhance a child's spiritual development is critical and deserving of the appellation "progenitor." *Chazal* (*Pirkei Avos* 2:11) quote Rabbi Yochanan *ben Zakai*, who was detailing the praise of his students. He was blessed with Torah scholars of unusual calibre, (they merited a *rebbe* who was without peer) each one possessing unique qualities which played a crucial role in his unique development. Concerning Rabbi Yehoshua *ben Chananya*, he said, *Ashrei yoladito*, "Fortunate is the one who gave birth to him!" He intimated that the greatness of his *talmid*, student, should be attributed to his mother. *Chazal* explain what it was that his mother did to ensure her son's devotion to Torah. She would bring his bassinet inside to the *bais hamedrash*, so that the first sounds that he heard would be the sounds of Torah study.

Such action demonstrates a mother's extreme love for -- and devotion to -- Torah. Why do *Chazal* refer to her as *yoladito*, the one who gave birth to him? Why not simply *imo*, his mother? *Chazal* should praise his mother for her devotion to Torah and to her son. **Horav Zaidel Epstein, zl**, comments that *Chazal* use the word *yoladito*, who gave birth to him, as opposed to *imo*, his mother, by design. They seek to underscore the notion that, by bringing his bassinet to the *bais hamedrash* on a constant basis, she became his spiritual progenitor. Not only was she his physical birth mother, she was also his spiritual mother.

**Horav Shmuel Berenbaum, zl**, understands this *Chazal* as a directive to the *Rebbe*, spiritual mentor, of our children to maintain a sense of love toward his young charge. Success for a Torah mentor is contingent upon his loving relationship with the student. He must view the student on the same plateau as he would his own child. He can harbor no distinction. This inherent love must be manifest in the manner that he conveys the lesson. Teaching Torah is unlike teaching any other discipline. One who teaches math must be proficient in the subject matter and be well-versed in the pedagogical process of conveying the curriculum to the student.

Torah teaching is different. It goes without saying that the *rebbe* must be well-versed in the material he teaches, for one can only convey clearly what he has himself mastered. A *rebbe* who is not lucid in every aspect of his curriculum has no right to teach. Torah teaching has an added aspect. *Chazal* teach that, following the forty days that Moshe studied Torah from Hashem, our quintessential *Rebbe* and leader had not yet mastered the Torah. It had to be given to him by Hashem as a gift. Moshe was an unparalleled student; yet, under the best conditions, learning from

the *Rebbe* that “wrote the Book,” he was unable to retain the lesson! This teaches us that the Torah is unlike any other form of erudition. It is sacrosanct, Divinely authored, and thus beyond the ken of the human mind. Indeed, the Heavenly Angels could not fathom how a *yelud/ishah*, someone born from a woman, a flesh and blood mortal, could penetrate the Torah’s depth. Thus, it was necessary that Torah be given over *b’mesorah*, transmitted, not just taught. Hashem gave the Torah to Moshe, who, in turn, gave it to Yehoshua, thereby establishing a specific learning process. The method of studying Torah from a *rebbe* is to receive it via *mesorah*.

When Moshe received the Torah as a gift from Hashem, it became his, to the point that he could now give it to someone else. Without receipt of the Torah through the vehicle of *matanah*, gift, it could never have penetrated Moshe’s being, making the Torah a part of his essence. Thus, when Moshe gave the Torah he had imparted into himself from Hashem to Yehoshua, he was transmitting a part of himself! This is exactly like a father to a son; whatever the father has within himself – his personality, character, DNA, etc. – is transmitted to his son. When a *rebbe* teaches Torah to his student, it should be father/son like, because the *rebbe* is giving himself to the student. Obviously, this relationship works only when it consists of a special *rebbe* and a consummate student.

A student who develops a pleasant relationship with his *rebbe* will obviously have a much easier time accepting his *rebbe*’s teachings. A man who had been chairman of the history department in a large, prestigious university for fifty years came into *Horav Simchah Wasserman’s yeshivah* one day to recite *Kaddish*. He had *yahrtzeit* and the *yeshivah* was near his hotel. After *Minchah*, he started up a conversation with the *Rosh Yeshivah*. “Rabbi,” he began, “I am a lonely man at this point in my life.”

The *Rosh Yeshivah* was visibly surprised. He said, “That seems odd considering the many students whose lives you have touched throughout the years. Tell me – how many students did you teach in your life?”

They made a general accounting and arrived at a figure of 30,000. The *Rosh Yeshivah* asked, “With such an incredible number of students whose lives you have touched, tell me – how many of them invited you to their wedding?”

The professor gave a stunning response, “Not a single one.”

I used the word “stunning,” but “frightening” might be more appropriate. Imagine teaching 30,000 students and not one cared enough to invite him to his/her wedding.

*Rav Simchah* observed that a *yeshivah* student would never, ever, consider not inviting his *rebbe* to his wedding. It is unheard of. This is because Torah is taught *b’ahavah*, with love, and it creates a strong bond between the *rebbe* and his student. The *rebbe* views his student as his child. Who would not invite his “father” to his wedding?