

You shall teach them thoroughly to your children and you shall speak of them. (6:7)

Rashi teaches that *banecha*, your sons, *eilu ha'talmidim*, applies equally to one's *talmidim*, students. In *Nitzotzos*, *Rav Yitzchak Herskowitz, Shlita*, relates a story he heard from a *Rosh Yeshivah*, who is one of today's more successful *marbitzei Torah*, disseminators of Torah, in *Eretz Yisrael*. Apparently, Torah was not always this individual's primary interest. As a young, teenage student attending *Yeshivas Ohr Yisrael* in *Petach Tikvah*, he was involved in a lot of things, most of which were not Torah-related. Running with a group of like-minded students, he presented a constant challenge for the patience of the *yeshivah's Mashgiach*, ethical supervisor. Every opportunity to sneak out of the daily instruction in *Talmud* was an opportunity to catch up on his sleep. In short, he was walking the fine line between remaining in the *yeshivah* and being asked to leave to join the ranks of those who had sadly relegated themselves and their future to a life devoid of Torah erudition. The alternatives to a proper Torah education were dismal.

At this point of our story, we see a teenage *yeshivah* student floundering within the system. One cannot really refer to him as a student, because he was at risk, at best a non-student, who happened to be on the *yeshivah's* student roster. He was at the point that, after considerable warnings, the next infraction would gain him entrance to the street with the others who had failed in the *yeshivah*. Drifting through the day as usual, with no interest in learning, sitting in the back of the *bais hamedrash* trying to catch up on some needed sleep, the *Mashgiach* came over to his seat, and pointed to him and three other students, "Out of the *bais hamedrash*! Pack your bags and leave. You no longer have a place in the *yeshivah*. How dare you go to such and such a place!"

Apparently, someone had reported to the *Mashgiach* that a group of students, "one" student included, had left the *yeshivah* without permission and visited a place that was off limits to *yeshivah* students. (This writer does not know the identity of the place that these students had visited, nor am I aware of the prevailing mindset in those days, to be able to determine what was considered off limits.)

Our "hero's" immediate response was, "It is a mistake. It was not me. (For once) I was not there yesterday." The boy pleaded with the *Mashgiach* to listen to him. It was a case of mistaken identity. He simply was not there. The *Mashgiach* was intractable, "Take your belongings and leave immediately! You are no longer wanted in this *yeshivah*."

The boy was upset for two reasons. First, he did not want to be asked to leave the *yeshivah*. The image of his devastated parents stood before him. His parents were not giving up without a fight. They took their son the next day to the office of the *Rosh Yeshivah*, the venerable **Horav Yaakov Neiman, zl**. The boy began his plea, saying, "*Kavod Horav*, I know that, in the past, I have proven time and again that I make poor choices, spending time with the students who are not into learning, sneaking out to places that are inappropriate for an observant Jew – let alone a *yeshivah* student.

This time, however, I am innocent! I did not go.”

The boy did not know if *Rav* Neiman considered his plea to repent the paragon of integrity, but, regardless, he was willing to give him another chance. *Rav* Neiman looked straight into the tear-filled eyes of the student and said, “My child, do not weep. Do not be pained – especially if you are not guilty. Tomorrow, you are to attend class as if nothing had happened. I will speak with the *Mashgiach*. You have nothing to worry about.”

The next morning, the boy entered the *bais hamedrash* as usual. As the *Mashgiach* was about to come over to him, *Rav* Neiman appeared at the entrance to the *bais hamedrash*. This was unusual, since the *Rosh Yeshivah* was already advanced in age, frail and in ill-health. A conversation ensued between the two. While the student did not hear the whole conversation, it was the last sentence that changed his life – forever. “Please accept him as if he were my own son!” was *Rav* Neiman’s request of the *Mashgiach*.

Lightning had struck! Hearing these words spoken about him, he knew that the *Rosh Yeshivah* cared about him! He was like his own son! From that day on, the boy’s life changed. He threw himself into his learning with such incredible diligence that it astounded everyone. After all, the *Rosh Yeshivah* loved him; he was like his own son.

A mother once came to a prominent *Rav*, seeking his advice concerning her son who was drifting off the *derech*, path, of Torah and observance. His response was classic: “Show him greater love!”

What is the meaning of showing greater love? Do we not all show all of our love to our children/students? *Rav* Hershkowitz quotes the well-known question and answer given in educational circles concerning *Yaakov Avinu*’s reaction to his son, *Reuven*’s, relationship with *Leah*, *Reuven*’s mother. While *Chazal* teach that *Reuven* did not sin (in our terms), his act of impetuosity was severely criticized by his father, when he lay on his deathbed. Why did *Yaakov* wait so long to have his “talk” with his eldest son?

The explanation which the commentators give is that our Patriarch feared a negative reaction on the part of *Reuven*. Had *Yaakov* rebuked *Reuven* at the time of the incident, *Reuven* might have changed his familial allegiances and followed his uncle *Eisav* on his journey to infamy. Frightening – but quite possibly true – especially in today’s society – when our children are sadly accorded many negative examples to follow. Today, a parent must think hard and long concerning for what incursion he will rebuke, and how he will administer his carefully selected words of reproach. We do not want to “offend” the children whom we have carefully and meticulously “spoiled” throughout their formative years. “They” were never wrong. It was always the “friends,” the *rebbe* or the school. To lose it now and tell it like it is might upset the careful balance that we have established with our children.

On the other hand, ubiquitous criticism, pervasive disparagement, casting aspersion on everything

that does not meet with the standards with which we were raised will only distance today's youth. There must be a balance which is regulated by common sense. While this quality is often at a premium, one who does not possess it should seek the help of someone who does. Someone who does not recognize or respect common sense has a much more serious problem.

During the period of Czarist Russia, the Jewish youth were in danger of being kidnapped by the evil authorities and drafted into the Czar's army for a minimum of twenty-five years. Those few who survived physically no longer had any relationship with Judaism as a religion. These young men were called the Cantonists. Jews would do anything to avoid the accursed Russian draft. One young teenager received the dreaded letter to report to the draft for an "interview." Deathly scared, he went to the *Rav* of his village and asked for his blessing. "Please, *Rebbe*, I do not want to go to the army!" the boy cried.

The *Rav* looked at the boy and asked, "My son, are you *Shabbos* observant?" The boy was embarrassed when he answered, "No." "Do you observe the laws of *kashrus*?" the *Rav* asked. "Sometimes," the boy replied. "Do you *daven*? Do you recite blessings?" was the next focus of the *Rav*. Sadly, the answers were, once again, in the negative.

The *Rav* thought for a few minutes, as the boy stood there humiliated, thinking to himself that the *Rav* would never give his blessing to a Jewish boy who did not practice even the basic tenets of his religion. After what appeared to be careful rumination of the boy's responses, the *Rav* looked at the boy and said, "I hope the authorities will be as disappointed with your answers as I am!"

The boy stood there for a few moments, contemplating the *Rav's* blessing, and then suddenly a smile came across his face. The *Rav* did not say that he was disappointed with him. He indicated that it was his answers that distressed him – not the boy – just the answers. As a result of the *Rav's* common sense and deep-rooted compassion for a Jewish child, he saved the boy.

The blessing was effective, and, as a result of the *Rav's* thoughtfulness, the boy became an observant Jew and went on to study Torah and raise a Torah-observant family that was a source of *nachas*, spiritual satisfaction, to Hashem.