

He shall offer an unblemished male; he shall bring it to the entrance of the Ohel Moed, voluntarily. (1:3)

The *Midrash* relates the story of a recalcitrant ox whose owner wanted to bring it as a *korban*. The ox, however, refused the honor. No matter how many people the owner sent to move the ox, they were unsuccessful. The ox was not budging. A poor man came along and noticed the owner's predicament. He walked over to the ox and produced a single blade of grass from his pocket. He waved the blade of grass in front of the ox's nose, causing the ox to give a mighty sneeze. As the ox sneezed, it coughed up a needle that had been lodged in its throat. Once the needle was out, the ox went along obediently to be slaughtered in the *Bais Hamikdash*. Had the ox not expelled the needle, such that had he been slaughtered in its present state, the *korban* would have been invalidated, since a needle in the esophagus renders an ox *treifah*, unkosher. The *korban* was saved by the "sneeze."

There is, however, more to it. The **Midrash Shmuel** employs this story to interpret the above *pasuk*, *Tamim yakrivenu*, "Complete and perfect it should be offered." If one wants to be assured that his *korban* will not be blemished, *yakriv oso lirtzono*, "He should offer it with the animal's free will." When one observes an animal willingly proceeding to the *Mizbayach*, Altar, it is an indication that it is kosher. An unkosher animal would not willingly advance to the *Mizbayach*.

In his *Chinuch Malchusi*, **Horav Mordechai Hominer** writes that a similar approach will prove effective in successfully educating our children. To educate a child, one must do so in conjunction with the child's free will. To force-feed a child academically will only cause the child to regurgitate its lessons. An educator's function is to coax the child, to encourage and empower him, while he removes the obstacles that stunt his ability to learn. He does not force the child. Otherwise, one might produce a child that is a *treifah*, a wounded child, who has no desire to learn Torah, and, often, even less desire to remain *frum*, observant.

I must add that it is not necessarily what one says, but how one expresses himself. Attitude, emotion and sincerity play crucial roles. The quintessential teacher, the individual who is probably most responsible for making *Torah-She'bKsav*, Written, and *She'Baal'Peh*, Oral Law, available to generations of Jews is Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki or – as he is popularly known – *Rashi*. Our great teacher was obviously born with incredible potential, but his mother's self-sacrifice encouraged and empowered his vast erudition. She did not coddle her only son. A single parent, she raised *Rashi* with a deep reverence for Torah.

Rashi was orphaned of his father at a young age. His mother was all alone in the world. Thus, she could easily have demanded that her prodigious child remain home with her until he was age-ready to enter the family business. One does not become *Rashi*, however, with a mother like that. She sent him to Worms, Germany, to the *yeshivah* of the *gadol hador*, the pre-eminent Torah leader of the time, Rabbi Yaakov *ben* Yakir. What she told him as she sent him off should inspire us; "My

son, you are going off to study in the *yeshivah* of the *gadol hador*. If you do not return from there an accomplished Torah scholar, replete in your thorough knowledge of the Torah – I will not be happy to see you!”

Such a statement might ruffle the sensitivities of some contemporary Jewish mothers – and fathers. I guess *Rashi's* mother knew what she was doing. She knew her son's unusual capabilities. These words were engraved in the heart of the young scholar-to-be. His commentary, as well as the teachings of his distinguished grandsons, the early *Tosafists*, are the result of this admonition. All this came about in the merit of a Jewish mother who did not fear telling her young son that she demanded excellence in return for her sacrifice.

We often sugar coat an incident, mollify an experience, in order to present it in a more appealing manner. While, at times, this may be necessary, it can backfire and destroy an exceptional inspirational occurrence. A young boy's world is pure and pristine. He has no '*shtick*' in his perception of an incident. He sees black and white, and he reacts accordingly. At times such as these, it might be best to allow for the child to perceive the experience according to what he sees – without us attempting to soothe the situation. The following incident is a prime example. A young man was *davening* in *shul* with his four-year-old son standing next to him... watching. Suddenly, the father became so overwhelmed by the meaning of the words he was reading that he began to weep. The quiet sobs became loud crying, as a torrent of tears began to roll down his cheeks onto the table where he was hunched over. What does a four-year-old boy do when he sees his father weeping bitterly? He also begins to cry. Now there were two people weeping bitterly – a father and his son.

A man observed what was taking place. As a “good neighbor,” he was not minding his own business, so he attempted to convince the boy that his father was not crying for any serious reason. He had just been overcome with emotion. One does not have to cry during *davening*. This individual meant well, and he soothed the child's fears. Nothing was wrong. The boy's father got a little “carried away” during *davening*. Think nothing of it. He was not crying as a result of the *davening*. No emotion is to be connected to prayer. His father was just overtired and overreacting. While this worked for the child, the kindly man, who truly meant no harm, just blew the opportunity for a once in a lifetime inspirational lesson: Yes, people do cry when they *daven!* That is what *tefillah* is all about. One speaks with Hashem, and when he really gets into it, he expresses his emotions. Regrettably, it was too late for the child. The experience and its positive vibes vanished.