

For I have loved him because he commands his children and his household after him. (18:19)

Chinuch ha'banim, educating our children, inculcating them with the moral/ethical values of our Torah expounded by *Chazal*, is the primary role with which parents are charged. Hashem says that He loves Avraham *Avinu* because he places education uppermost in his mind. Everything that Avraham did contained an educational aspect. He lived to serve Hashem. We can perform no greater service to the Almighty than one which imbues others and brings them closer to serving Hashem. We can derive a number of lessons from this *pasuk*. First, one is not included under the rubric of a *yarei Hashem*, G-d-fearing Jew, unless he maintains a strong eye over his children's education. Avraham *Avinu* reached the apex of spiritual devotion to Hashem, yet he did not warrant the love of the Almighty until he demonstrated his affinity for transmitting the Torah to his children and household.

Second, we wonder about the meaning of *acharav*, after him. Simply, it means that they follow his example. What he does and how he acts comprise one element of his pedagogical dynamic. They follow after him, doing what he demonstrated for them. I think, however, that we may suggest a deeper message in the word *acharav*, after him: after he is gone. The litmus test of a parent's educational success is: whether his child continues along the path that the father delineated and practiced.

All too often, we (sadly) visit homes whose affiliation with Torah is tenuous or, at best, the people are complacent. These are young men and women who grew up in observant homes, and, for some reason, the parents' observance did not transfer over to the next generation. Something happened in the "shipping" (or in the "packaging"). Acting in a certain manner does not always send a strong enough message. Children must be educated; they must receive a clearly-defined image of what is acceptable – and what is not. This brings me to the third lesson.

L'maan asher yetzaveh es banav v'es beiso – acharav, "Because he commands his children and his household – after him." Writing this circa 2020 amid a society where everything goes, and Heaven help the parent who comes on too strong with his/her child, I wonder how we define *yetzaveh*, command. The Torah is conveying to us, in no uncertain terms, that the most effective manner by which to teach a child is command. This is definitely not politically correct in 2020. On the other hand, the Torah is intimating that if a parent wants to be assured that *acharav*, after him – after he is "gone" (after his "120"), his child, hopefully now grown up, will adhere to his father's image of a Torah Jew, then the father must teach by command. Let me qualify this: How we issue the command (i.e., what motivations, inspirations, prizes, sweet-talking we employ) is dependent on parent and child. One principle is unwaiverable: the child must have a "command" – a clear, defined message that this is the behavior that the parent expects. Otherwise, the *acharav* will probably not occur.

Yosef *HaTzaddik* was on the verge of falling into the abyss of sin. What saved him was *d'mus d'yukno shel aviv*, "the image of his saintly father." This means that his father's image was deeply engraved in his psyche. This can only be achieved through command, whereby a child knows that there is only one way. Each father and mother must endeavor to find the most appropriate, loving manner to convey this command, but it must be a command. Parents who maintain such an unequivocal approach to raising and educating their children will live on and on in their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, because it becomes part and parcel of the essence of the child.

Horav Yosef Sholom Elyashiv, zl, was asked who is considered a child's primary educator. His reply: the parents. He/she knows his/her child, understands his/her personality; thus, he/she knows how to educate the child. (Obviously, this is a general statement and open to individual situational exceptions.) The parent's suggestions, based upon his or her individual perception and discernment, should never be ignored, because a parent usually know what is best for his or her child (although parents might lack objectivity – which must be factored in). The mother, as the *Tolner Rebbe, zl*, explains, sets the tone and tenor in the home. While the father might (and should) focus on developing a child's knowledge of Torah, his desire and love of Torah will come from his mother. This, says the *Rebbe*, is the meaning of *Toras imecha*, "The Torah of your mother (*Shema beni mussar avicha v'al titosh Toras imecha*, "Hear, my child, the discipline of your father, and do not forsake the teaching of your mother" [*Mishlei* 1:8]).

Having said this, we reiterate the importance of parents being firm, but loving, demanding, but understanding. A "one-size-fits-all" approach to child-rearing is not realistic, because children are different. The "oldest," pride and joy, might not be the smartest. The youngest might give the parents a run for their money that overshadows anything they experienced with their other children. That is life. No one said that it was going to be easy, but the rewards are remarkable.

A Bnei Brak family was going through a serious challenge with one of the sons who had gravitated to a group of friends that was not conducive to the spiritual goals that they sought for their children. His parents were firm with him, stating unequivocally that his friends and behavior were unacceptable. *Erev Pesach*, he ran away from home. He claimed that no one seemed to care about him, so he was leaving and going where he would feel respected. The parents were heartbroken and did not know what to do. Since it was *Erev Pesach*, they were busy with *Yom Tov* preparations. The whole time they were hoping that after a few hours of "stewing," their errant son could come to his senses and return home.

The father returned from *shul*, and the family sat down at the table; one seat was glaringly empty. The father asked the *gabbai* at the *Lederman Shul* (where he attended services) to ask the *Steipler Gaon, zl*, what they should do. The answer came back, *L'hamtin*; "To wait." Two hours passed, while everyone sat around the table talking. The time for eating the *afikoman* was rapidly approaching. Once again, the father appealed to the *gabbai* to ask the *Steipler* what they should do. The response came back: "Wait." Another half hour passed, and suddenly the door opened.

Their son had returned. He looked at the table and then at his parents, and he asked, “You waited for me?” “Of course; you are our son.” All of his anger melted away once he saw that he was valued by his parents. Sometimes, all the child needs is to be told: “You count; You are special.”

The Hermans, *Horav* Yaakov Yosef Herman and his wife, were unusual *baalei chesed*; their kindness knew no bounds. *Rav* Yaakov Yosef was a demanding person – of himself, and of those whom he educated. The family took in an orphaned boy, Avreml, whom they raised as their own. Indeed, he required the firm, demanding discipline manifest by *Rav* Yaakov Yosef, coupled with the extraordinary love showed to him by Mrs. Herman. One day, *Rav* Herman made what Avreml felt was too strong of a demand on him, and Avreml refused to carry out his surrogate’s instructions. Avreml went so far as to complain, “Do you know that I am an orphan? Why are you so demanding? It is not right!”

Mrs. Herman attempted to sooth Avreml’s feelings – to no avail. He knew that his surrogate father was upset. Finally, Avreml announced, “I have decided to move out! I am leaving your house.” He collected his few belongings, placed them into a duffle bag and went to the door – all the while turning his head back to see if *Rav* Herman would “beg” him to stay. He did not.

Reluctantly, he went down the stairs. When he reached street level, he heard *Rav* Herman calling after him as he ran down the stairs, “Avreml! Wait a moment!” Avreml waited, hoping deep down that now *Rav* Herman would ask him to stay, perhaps even apologize for his demands on him. He was wrong. *Rav* Herman, the educator par excellence, caught up with Avreml, and, in his hand, he had a little bag, “Mother and I would like you to have these cookies in case you get hungry.” Then, *Rav* Herman took out a few dollars from his pocket and said, “Here, in case you need some money.” No apology; no lessening of his demands; just love and more love. Avreml came back, realizing that, indeed, he was being treated just like their child: demands coupled with love.