

He sent Yehudah ahead of him... to prepare ahead of him in Goshen. (46:28)

Rashi quotes the well-known *Chazal*: Yaakov *Avinu* sent Yehudah to prepare the way for the family. He sent Yehudah to establish a *bais Talmud*, house of Torah study, a *yeshivah*, from where Torah would be disseminated. No one questions that Yehudah was a capable leader, a spokesman for the family, but was he appropriate to be a *Rosh Yeshivah*? Levi and Yissachar were the two brothers who devoted their days and nights to spiritual pursuits. One would have expected that Yaakov would have selected either or both of them to be his emissaries to build a *makom Torah*. The answer lies in how we define a *Rosh Yeshivah*, whose function is to be *mechanech*, educate, a generation of *bnei Torah*.

The *Tiferes Shlomo* (*Horav Shlomo Ganzfried, zl*, author of *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*) explains that Yehudah demonstrated his ability to be *mekabel achrayos*, accept responsibility, when he told Yaakov, *Anochi e'ervenu miyadi tevakshenu*; "I will personally guarantee him; of my own hand you can demand him" (Ibid. 43:19). The Patriarch hesitated to send Binyamin to Egypt, for fear that he would lose him, as he "lost" Yosef. Yehudah countered that he would assume responsibility for his safe passage to Egypt and back. To build a *makom Torah*, an institution in which Torah study would thrive and be disseminated to others, it is critical that its leader never shirk responsibility.

A responsive leader is prepared to "own" the problem, present a solution and never make the same mistake twice. This way, he builds trust among his colleagues and subordinates, achieving the respect of those around him. Thus, he gets better results. While we often confuse responsibility with accountability, they represent diverse mindsets. An accountable leader is answerable, and he is willing to accept the results of a project or activity, regardless of its negative or positive outcome. A responsible person goes further. He views himself as the one who must make the project "happen," even if it is not something in which he personally believes. If it is his job or a position he has assumed, he is relentless in seeing it through to the finish line, because he has taken responsibility for its completion.

How does *achrayos* play itself out in the area of Torah *chinuch*? A Torah leader (*rebbe, Rav, Rosh Yeshivah, menahel, Rosh Kollel*) is concerned for each and every *talmid*, student, regardless of background, acumen, pedigree or financial portfolio. He cares and worries about everything that involves his *talmid*, both spiritually and materially, because an unhappy student who has external, troubling concerns does not learn well. He shares both in his student's joy and his pain and makes every effort to address his needs. Indeed, each and every one of the *gedolei Yisrael* who achieved the pinnacle of greatness in the area of *chinuch* manifested the highest degree of *achrayos* for his *talmidim* and their institutions. *Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl*, cared for each and every *talmid* as a father cares for his son. His care extended far beyond the student's spiritual growth. Every aspect of his student's life was important to him. During the winter, if he would notice a student walking around without a sweater (buildings were not heated), he would tap the student on the shoulder and ask,

“Where is your sweater? Are you cold?” Undoubtedly, his caring nature “warmed” the student. When a student knows that his *rebbe* cares about him, he feels a sense of obligation and gratitude to the *rebbe*. To absorb oneself in the sea of Torah requires a calm, relaxed and happy mind. When one is troubled, learning successfully is a challenge. When the *talmid* perceives that a *rebbe* is devoted to him, it makes all of the difference in the world.

Horav Shimon Shkop, zl, was a brilliant Torah scholar whose volumes on *Talmud* are staples in every *yeshivah*. He was also a *Rebbe* par excellence who cared for every *talmid* as if he were his own child, as well as for those who were not yet his *talmidim*. Every Jewish child has enormous potential, and one never knows how and when it will be realized. The following story is a classic which demonstrates this Torah giant’s love for a Jewish child and how it played itself out years later.

The Bolshevik Revolution took its toll on Russia and, as always, its Jewish population, which suffered whenever an upheaval occurred. The *bachurim* studying under *Rav Shimon* in his *yeshivah* in Grodno were suddenly shocked out of their idyllic Torah study when they heard loud shots. Apparently, the war was being brought to their doorstep. As the sounds of battle came closer, their thoughts slowly drifted from the *Gemorah* to their lives. Would they survive this incursion? Would they ever see their families again? Would their spiritual status be impugned as a result of the impending troubles?

Suddenly, the door burst open, and a group of gun-wielding soldiers burst into the room. They had the *bachurim* line up against the wall. They looked at their *Rebbe*, who instructed them to follow the orders. *Rav Shimon* arose from his seat and stood with his students. The *bachurim*, many of whom were still boys, were overcome with fear. Whatever composure they maintained was due to their revered *Rebbe*, who stood there staring into the faces of the soldiers, without fear. As the head of the soldiers stepped forward, *Rav Shimon* told him, “We are prepared to follow your orders and do what you ask of us. We are simply studying our Torah.” The soldier did not reply. He just kept staring at *Rav Shimon* with penetrating eyes, as if he were trying to place *Rav Shimon*, to recall an incident in his life that included the *Rosh Yeshivah*.

“*Rebbe*, is that you?” The *Rosh Yeshivah* looked at the man, but was unable to recognize him. The man removed his military cap and ordered his men to lower the rifles.

“*Rebbe*, I know that you do not remember me, but I will never forget you. When I was a young man, I came to *Telshe Yeshivah* (where *Rav Shimon* had been *Rosh Yeshivah*) for an entrance *bechinah*, test. As I was walking from one building to the next, you looked at me and the first thing that you noticed was that a button was missing from my coat. I told you that it did not really matter. You would not take no for an answer, and you insisted that I come to your house, where your wife would sew on a button. You said that it was bitter cold outside and, thus, important that my coat be properly buttoned to protect me from the elements. Your concern and compassion for a total stranger left a strong, enduring impression on me. In the end, I decided that *yeshivah* was not

really for me, and soon thereafter I was drafted into the army. While my life took a different turn than many had hoped for, I never forgot the warmth you showed me that cold, frigid day.” He turned to the boys and told them how fortunate they were to have such a *Rebbe*. He then ordered his men to leave. They marched away, leaving the entire village unscathed, all because of the caring and concern of a *Rebbe*.

Horav Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg, zl, was the consummate *Rebbe* whose love for his *talmidim* was palpable. In a biography of his life, Rabbi Yechiel Spero relates a number of stories that demonstrate his love and concern for each of his *talmidim*. One vignette particularly moved me. One of his *talmidim*, who was now a *Rosh Yeshivah*, asked his *Rebbe* for a *brachah* for one of his *talmidim*. Apparently, he was struggling and in need of Divine assistance. As *Rav* Scheinberg listened to his student relate the issues confronting his student, *Rav* Scheinberg’s face manifested pain. It was obvious from his expression how much he cared for the struggle of a student whom he did not personally know. He asked his student for the boy’s name and the name of his mother, so that he could *daven* for him. His student, the *Rosh Yeshivah*, admitted that he did not know his student’s mother’s name.

Rav Scheinberg looked at his student with disappointment: “How could a *rebbe* not know the name of his student’s mother? Do you not *daven* for him?” *Rav* Scheinberg immediately rattled off this *talmid*’s name along with his mother’s name. “Seventeen years ago, you were undergoing an issue that was troubling you and occupying your mind. I began *davening* for you then, and I have not stopped *davening* for you for the last seventeen years.”