

“Aharon shall arrange it, from evening to morning.” (24:3)

The Torah tells us in this pasuk that Aharon HaKohen was responsible for arranging the lamps of the Menorah. In Parashas Tetzaveh, when the Torah records this ritual, it mentions that Aharon's sons also arranged the lamps of the Menorah. Why is only Aharon's name mentioned here? The Baal HaTurim explains that after Nadav and Avihu died in the Sanctuary, Aharon no longer permitted his remaining sons to enter alone. He always accompanied them into the Sanctuary. These are amazing words! The Baal HaTurim's penetrating insight into Aharon's behavior is both profound and pragmatic. How are we to understand this? Elazar and Isamar, Aharon's remaining sons, were not children. They were grown men, erudite and pious. Why would Aharon deem it necessary to accompany them into the Sanctuary?

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, feels that Aharon's action implies a profound truth in regard to child-rearing. Parents should not leave their children unsupervised, even in Hashem's Sanctuary! Being a parent denotes tremendous responsibility; one that cannot and should not be delegated to the street or to friends and neighbors. Parents should personally observe and supervise their child's growth and development.

Is the Sanctuary sacrosanct to the point that it is impossible to be adversely influenced? First, how does one know that the child arrived at the bais ha'medrash? Perhaps he was waylaid along the way. Furthermore, who is to say that a bais ha'medrash that is open to everyone, whose policy is to reach out to the wide spectrum of Jewish society, will not contain within its walls someone of unsavory character and belief? Indeed, even in the sheltered walls of those batei medrash that are exclusionary by nature and principle, who is to know what festers in the inner heart and mind of all those in its midst?

It is for this reason that parents have an overriding responsibility to be cognizant of everything that involves their children. They must be sure that their children have responsible and spiritually refined friends and that they adhere to the parameters set forth by the institution to which they are sent to learn Torah. This is true for those children who have made the Sanctuary their home. How much more so should we devote our attention and efforts on behalf of those children, who for a number of reasons, are not availed this opportunity?

Horav Zilberstein decries those parents who permit their children to “hang around,” either on foot or riding around on their bikes a good part of the day, literally riding in circles with nowhere to go. (We must bear in mind that Horav Zilberstein is a rav in Bnei Brak – not in an American metropolis.) When children – regardless of their age – spend quality time, hours and hours unsupervised, aimlessly wandering, parents are asking for trouble. Parents must realize – and I paraphrase Horav Zilberstein – that just because they are tired and need rest and relaxation, does not give them an excuse for permitting their children to be unsupervised. Would they chance losing an expensive diamond because they were too tired to take care of it? Our children are our greatest and most valuable treasure. We should treat them as such.

Accordingly, if parents are to spend as much time as feasible in the supervision of their children, it would be logical that these same parents should themselves display the highest ideals and character traits, in order to imbue these values and attributes into their children. Would it not be foolish – and, in fact, hypocritical and self-defeating – to delude ourselves with the notion that we each teach our children to become masters in an area where we ourselves have failed in the amateur stage? Should we not study and perfect all of the moral skills and virtues in which we hope our children will perfect themselves, so that we can model for them what is acceptable and what is not? Prior to attempting to rid our children of their faults and bad habits, should we not first begin by examining ourselves, seeking to purge these vices from our behavior? Should we not scrutinize our own words and actions to insure that our children do not emulate – and even outdo – our wrongdoings? To paraphrase Horav S. R. Hirsch, z.l., “At the moment G-d places our very first child into our arms, we should solemnly pledge in His presence that, before attempting to become the educators of His pupils in His spirit, we will first proceed to the task of educating ourselves.”

Horav Hirsch explains that to educate means to guide or lead someone else toward oneself. This is based upon the idea that the word “educate” is derived from the Latin “ex” (out) and “ducere” (to lead or to guide). The German term popularized by Horav Hirsch for defining education is “erziehen,” which literally means “to draw” one’s pupil up towards one’s own level. The educator’s/parent’s function is to “bring his pupil/child up” to the level that the educator/parent has himself attained. Our children learn to walk by watching us walk. They subsequently learn patience, equanimity, gentleness, sensitivity, integrity, humility, moderation, justice and loving-kindness from us. We have a responsibility to provide them with a positive example.

The love we demonstrate for our children should motivate us to triumph over our shortcomings, to root out the evil that has plagued us, and to eliminate the faults that have been an unfortunate part of our existence. In conclusion, the maxim “docendo discimus,” “we learn by teaching,” may be applicable to other fields of endeavor. In regard to raising Jewish children in the derech Hashem, way of Hashem, we should read instead, “Let us learn in order that we may teach.”