

## **“May my teaching drop like rain; may my utterance flow like the dew.” (32:2)**

*Ibn Ezra* explains the simile to rain and dew as meaning that the words of *Torah* should penetrate the nation and make it fruitful, just as the rain and dew nourish the earth. *Horav Mordechai Gifter, z.l.*, notes that rain and dew have an effect only on earth, but not on stones. Only soil contains the requisite minerals and nutrients which are conducive to growth, while stones do not. Likewise, in order to be successful, a *rebbe* must have someone with whom to work. The student must possess certain basics upon which to build. First and foremost is attitude. The weakest and most challenged student can achieve success if his attitude is focused on success. *Torah* is much more than a body of knowledge. It is our lifeline, our primer for religious and spiritual development. Hence, the student must have some degree of *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven. If these two principles are in place, then his *rebbe's* teaching can “drop like rain” and “flow like the dew,” nurturing the spiritual development of the student.

This is not meant as a reference to those who toil in the fields of special education or with children who are at risk. Their noble work develops the necessary attitude and enhances the skills required for *Torah* study. The *Ibn Ezra* refers to a child who is “turned off” or has never been “turned on.” They must first have their hearts of stone sensitized in such a manner as to be conducive to learning.

There is another student who I feel we should address: the one whose parents; either by design or by indifference, turn their child against the *Torah*. A depressed child cannot learn. By virtue of their actions and behavior, parents can make their child feel distressed— a feeling that can lead to depression and beyond. We also encounter the parent who does not know how to talk to his child, at times being condescending or even abusive. A child cannot learn if his emotional balance is being undermined by his parents. We should also not ignore the parent who denigrates the school and the *rebbe*.

Last, we turn to the key word which lays the groundwork for a child's/student's educational development: obedience. A child who does not obey cannot and will not learn. Rather than punishing a child for disobedience, we should first ask ourselves why the child/student is not being compliant? In response, we suggest the following: Do we know how to tell him what to do? Do we provide the proper example for him to follow? Do we ourselves meet the standard which we impose upon him? The weaker, smaller and less capable will naturally defer to the bigger, the stronger and the more capable. For this reason, the young look up to their elders for guidance. This is true to the extent that the elders prove themselves worthy of this deference, by being superior in stature, strength and ability.

The key to earning the respect and ensuing allegiance of our children is to behave in such a manner that they will have reason to look up to us as morally and spiritually superior. True

obedience is not elicited by command. It is not engendered by the substance of what is being asked but, rather, by the character of the person who is asking. Any shortcoming in a parent's behavior, any deficiency in his character, will weaken a child's resolve to obey. The only source of genuine compliance is a child's free-will. Indeed, such submissiveness continues on even after parents and children are separated by distance in space or time.

This idea applies to parent and teacher alike, for both seek to inspire and inculcate a child in the *Torah* way. We must remember that a child's docility and obeisance always correspond to the respect he has for the character of his parent or teacher. This may seem to be a tall order, but then no one suggested it was going to be easy.