

How goodly are your tents, O Yaakov, your dwelling places, O Yisrael. (24:5)

Chazal interpret the terms *ohalecha*, your tents, and *mishkenosecha*, your dwelling places, as allusions to the habitats, which house our spiritual heritage, namely our *bais haknesses*, *shul*, and *bais hamedrash*, study hall. The *ohel* is the *ohel shel Torah*, tent/study hall where Torah is studied; *Mishkan* is the place where the *Shechinah*, Divine Presence, reposes, the synagogue. *Targum Yonasan ben Uziel* elucidates the *pasuk* uniquely, “How goodly are your study halls, the place where Yaakov, your father/Patriarch, served/studied”. He makes a point of including an inference to our Patriarch for his devotion to Torah study and as the one who represents the principle of Torah in Jewish life. After all, it was Yaakov, who was the first to study in a formalized *yeshivah*, when he went to Shem and Eiver for fourteen years of intense, diligent Torah study (the Torah curriculum, which our Patriarch studied, is beyond the scope of this *dvar Torah*).

When **Horav Moshe Shmuel Shapiro, zl**, *Rosh Yeshivas Be'er Yaakov*, spoke at the stone-laying ceremony of Beth Medrash Govohah in *Eretz Yisrael* (Lakewood East), he quoted the above commentary of *Targum Yonasan*. He underscored the notion that a *bais hamedrash/yeshivah/shul*, with its unique individual qualities that allow it to serve as a home for Torah and *tefillah*, apparently still requires the power of the *Avos HaKedoshim*, holy Patriarchs. Thus, Bilaam (being no fool) understood this, and, therefore, he included the power of Yaakov as a reason for the preservation of Torah.

The concept of *b'ruach Yisrael sabba*, in the spirit of our grandfather, Yisrael/Yaakov *Avinu*, has been the beacon of light that has illuminated and guided us throughout our tenure in *galus*, exile. It also served as the GPS for *Torah chinuch*, education, in the Holy Land during the latter part of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, when the Jewish émigrés from Europe and Russia spurred the establishment of schools for their children. There were those who had fallen under the influence of the *Haskalah*, Enlightenment, and, as a result, sought an education for their children, which stressed the secular and ignored the spiritual. Little did they realize that such an education would succeed in their children's abandonment of Judaism.

Our people have confronted many challenges to both our physical and spiritual well-being. We have attempted not to be influenced by the winds of change by staying true to our heritage. The clarion call, *b'ruach Yisrael sabba*, has been the supporting spirit, which has encouraged us to return to our forefather's roots and “hang in there” until that time in the near future when Hashem will redeem us from this exile.

In *The Mashgiach*, the biography of **Horav Meir Chodosh, zl**, *Rebbetzin Shulamit Eizrachi* writes concerning the educational crisis confronting the religious families prior to the mid-1930's. The *chareidi* schools were not structured according to the strict educational standards demanded by the *Mashgiach*. He was an educator par excellence and felt that the methods employed by the

two dominant *chadorim*, Chayei Olam and Eitz Chaim, were not what he was seeking. The alternative was the modern religious schools whose teachers were far from religious. Sadly, a number of well-known *bnei Torah* sent their children to these schools. When a young *kollel* fellow approached the *Mashgiach* for advice concerning a livelihood, the *Mashgiach* suggested that he open a *cheder* for young children and work his way up. Indeed, he was prepared to give him his son, Aharon, as his first pupil.

“How can I manage a group of small children? I have no experience in handling this age group,” the young man asked.

The *Mashgiach* was not dissuaded. “Do you love small children? Do you have patience with them? Do you aspire to educate our children to have *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, and *ahavas Torah*, love of Torah? If so, you are assured Divine assistance. And, if your efforts are for the sake of Heaven, with all your heart, you will surely succeed!”

The young man replied, “Yes”. Thus was established the *Talmud Torah Yavneh* in which most of the children of the European *yeshivah* immigrants were educated. A number of the Holy Land’s *gedolim* were products of such an education.

Girls did not fare much better. The nascent Bais Yaakov movement was having difficulty enrolling girls into its school. Due to the lack of observant professional teachers, the parents hesitated sending their daughters to the school. They invested great significance in the high educational level of secular studies. They felt that a girl could not function in society – even if it were primarily *chareidi* – if she did not have a strong background in secular studies. The parents were prepared to sacrifice their daughter’s spiritual studies (and spirituality) for an education that would allow their daughter to be comfortable in the outside world.

Obviously, the *Mashgiach* made every attempt to change their way of thinking. “In the end, you will lose your children. They will grow up and stop listening to your views and following your ways”. he pleaded. (We must emphasize that the teachers in these schools were non-observant, either due to lack of knowledge or because they were freethinkers who did not believe in a Torah-oriented way of life.)

The parents replied that the schools were, indeed, religious, “They *daven* every day”.

“*Tefillah* is not the determining factor – the teachers are!” was the *Mashgiach*’s counter argument. “Of what use are a few pieces of better education, if your daughter ends up reneging the yoke of *mitzvos*?”

A school does not take the place of a good home. Furthermore, a dysfunctional home will not be corrected by the best of schools. Parents must work in harmony with a school, supporting its teachers, administrators and *hashkafah*, religious perspective. A child that receives mixed

messages will end up like the messages he receives – mixed up. Mutual support in a Torah-oriented institution that is guided by *ruach Yisrael sabba* still requires much *Tehillim* and *siyata diShmaya*. Only then can we be assured of success.