

## And impress them sharply upon your sons, and speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk upon the way; when you lie down, and when you get up. (6:7)

A simple reading of the *pasuk* implies that one is to teach the commandments to his children/students, who are considered like his children. He should also speak words of Torah, with the primary topic of his conversation always being Torah-oriented. Last, he should occupy himself with Torah at all times: when he is in his home: or when he is traveling: at night when he lays down to sleep; and when he arises in the morning – Torah must be his primary focus in life. Perhaps, we might apply writer's license to interpret the *pesukim* as an orientation for parents and teachers on how best to impart the Torah's lessons, values and commandments to our precious children. *V'shenantam le'vanecha*, "And you shall impress them sharply upon your sons." How is this best performed? By *v'dibarta bam*, "speak of them." You must make Torah the primary focus of your conversation. Children growing up in a home in which Torah is the spoken "language" receive a message concerning its significance. *B'shivtecha b'veisecha u'v'lechtecha ba'derech*: "whether you are at home or on the road": You always find time to learn and make sure that your children are acutely aware of your *sedarim*, study sessions. Furthermore, *b'shochbecha u'bekumecha*: "when you lie down and when you get up," nothing should take precedence over your children's education. Every waking minute of the day, from early morning when you arise until the time that you retire for the night, your children's spiritual and moral development must be constantly on your mind.

When queried concerning his recipe for success in raising children, the **Brisker Rav, zl**, commented, *Tehillim mit treren*, "The tearful recitation of Psalms" – on an almost constant basis. This, of course, means when time allows. The Brisker *Rav* never lost focus. His children were the future and, as such, he was compelled to think about them constantly.

Although they never had biological children of their own, **Horav Simcha Wasserman, zl**, and his *Rebbetzin* were experts on the subject of child-raising. Indeed, when one of his *talmidim*, students, asked the *Rosh Yeshivah* how he developed such expertise in a field in which he sadly did not have personal experience, *Rav* Simcha replied, "I do have personal experience. I have the experience of how my parents raised me." I share with the reader some of *Rav* Simcha's powerful insights into this critical topic.

"A child is like an immigrant who arrives in a new country. He makes observations and eventually adopts the customs and culture of his host country. Parents are a child's country. If the parents are happy, if they smile often and cooperate with one another, the child will learn that this is the lifestyle in 'this country.' Thus, he, too, will become like them. When parents are happy, children are happy. When parents are depressed and unamicable, the children will be lethargic and unfriendly." It rubs off. When parents communicate through barbs, sarcasm and patronization, the children will grow up with a warped sense of communication with others.

“The first *mitzvah* of the Torah concerns procreation. The Torah enjoins us to reproduce, but the obligation does not end with bringing a child into the world. It continues with raising him properly, in molding him into a decent, upstanding human being, who contributes to other people and to the world. The obligation to raise our children is not a separate *mitzvah*, but rather, an extension of the *mitzvah* to reproduce.”

In life, we have functions. When we succeed in satisfactorily fulfilling our functions, we are happy. Rav Simcha observes that one of the greatest functions that we have as Jews is that of raising children and transmitting the *Mesorah*, Tradition, to the next generation. We have in our hands a very special gift which the Almighty entrusted us with developing into a worthy human being. To paraphrase the *Rosh Yeshivah*, “The Torah does not want us to raise institutions. It wants us to raise people. The secret of raising people instead of institutions is unselfishness.”

While there is great joy in raising children, joy is not the goal. There is tremendous *nachas* to be derived from raising children. *Nachas*, however, is not the goal. It is not all about “us.” We bribe children, so that they will be happy. Why? Because we want to be happy. Happy kids makes for happy parents. Are we acting in the child’s best interest, or are we placating ourselves? We are constantly giving children trinkets, toys and sweets, because this makes them happy. We are, regrettably, teaching the child to be a taker. If he or she is not satisfied with what he or she receives from us, he or she will go elsewhere, because he or she has been nurtured to become a taker. When a parent, however, is a giver, if the parent gives because the parent wants to give and enjoys giving – the child grows up a giver.”

When the parent is focused, and knows and understands his obligations to his child, everything that he is doing as he is raising his child is for the child’s benefit and not for his own self-interest. Many people map out their child’s life based on their own personal ambitions, which are selfish and not for the good of the child.

A child must be raised for the child’s sake – not to promote the parent. Perhaps this is what Shlomo *HaMelech* means when he says, *Chanoch lanaar al pi darko*, “Educate the child in his way.” Do what is best for the child. Yet, we are human, and it is difficult to divorce ourselves completely from our self-interest. To the extent that we act out of concern for the child, the greater will be our success in raising him and, concomitantly, the greater will be our *nachas* and joy.

Rav Simcha applies the same concept to the world of Torah *chinuch*. In the world of Jewish education, one’s concern must be child-oriented. It is all about the student. If one’s motivation is purely for the child – and not to impress parents, principals, board members – he will know how to teach. If, however, he has ulterior motives as well, then there is no guarantee of success.

A young man once approached the *Rosh Yeshivah* with a question. His father was concerned about his ability to earn a living once he left the *kollel*. As a result, primarily in order to assuage his father’s anxiety, he was considering a career in teaching. The question was: Should he take a

teaching course in order to learn how to teach? *Rav* Simcha questioned the young man's choice of vocation – why teaching as opposed to business? He replied that he wanted to maintain a connection with Torah. *Rav* Simcha gave the reply, “When a person teaches with only the benefit of the students in mind, he will find that he possesses the personal resources to do the job. If your motivation, however, is primarily personal, if you are entering the field of Torah *chinuch* for your own sake, then I think you had better take that course.”

When we act towards our students as parents should act towards their own children, we are helped from Above in a manner that allows us to communicate naturally with our students. We sense their needs and are, thus, able to address them in a proper and successful manner.

Teaching, as well as parenting, is a balance of love and discipline, with even the discipline to be given with a dose of love. Every rule must be established upon a motivation of love. This applies equally to punishment. We never get even. We discipline to teach, but always out of love. Too much love ruins the balance in the same manner that too much discipline turns off the child/student. Everything we do is for the sake of the child. Thus, it is always well thought-out and balanced.

*Rav* Simcha relates that, in his parents' home, there was tremendous warmth and affection. We must remember that his father was the venerable *Horav Elchonon Wasserman, zl, Rosh Yeshivah* of Baranovitch, primary disciple of the *Chafetz Chaim* and of the *Gedolei Ha'dor*, preeminent Torah leaders of the pre-World War II generation. His mother had a rule: The children were not to ask for anything. I guess she felt that asking implied need, and the parents provided what was needed. If a child asked for something, he did not receive it. There was limited money in the Wasserman home, and it was something the parents wanted to impress on their children. The message was: “If we can afford and we have, you will be given. We know what you need.” The children grew up confident and filled with trust. They were taught self-control, accepting the fact that they would be given what they needed. As *Rav* Simcha remarked, “We learned that we could not walk around being ‘wanters’ and ‘takers.’”

*Rav* Simcha relates, “One day, our mother came home with some honey. My younger brother, Dovid, was four years old at the time, and he wanted some honey. He knew, of course, that if he would ask for the honey he would not get it. So, he moved a chair over to the table, stood upon the chair and made a loud *brachah: she'hakol niheyeh biDevaro* (the blessing made on various foods, including honey). He figured that now our mother would be compelled to give him the honey. After all, he had already recited the *brachah* and one must not make a *brachah l'vatalah*, in vain. Her immediate response was to go to the kitchen and obtain a glass of water and give it to him. He was not getting the honey!”

Children must learn from day “one” that there are things which they may do and there are things that one may not do. Consistency is the best tool for teaching self-control. Once one has made a statement he should not revert and attempt to alter it. One should be careful concerning what exits

his mouth, but, once it has left his mouth, he has no other recourse but to support it. One who undermines himself has very little chance of receiving support from his children.