

Now Avraham was old, well on in his years, and Hashem had blessed him with everything. (24:1)

Avraham *Avinu* was the *mechanech*, educator, par-excellence. He taught a pagan world the truth of monotheism. He inspired as he taught, thus serving as the vehicle for promulgating belief in the Creator. As the first educator, he set the standard for excellence in education. His goal was not simply to teach his generation, but to set the parameters and lay down the rules for the most appropriate manner in which to inculcate one's beliefs in his students. When we study the educational approach of the first Patriarch, we are confronted with two questions which are pointed out by **Horav Arye Leib Heyman, zl**. These two questions serve as powerful lessons for the educator and parent – who is, in fact, a child's first – and often primary – educator.

Avraham had a servant who was also his primary disciple. Eliezer was entrusted with searching for and seeking out a wife for Yitzchak. This woman would be the next Matriarch, replacing Sarah *Imeinu*. As the wife of Yitzchak and, thus, progenitress of *Klal Yisrael*, she must be a special woman. Avraham detailed three criteria to which he expected Eliezer to adhere without fail. He exhorted Eliezer not to take a Canaanite girl for Yitzchak. They were a vile, immoral people, whose influence was passed down through the genes. If Yitzchak would marry a Canaanite, the bright future which was designated for him could quite possibly be precluded.

Second, Avraham demanded that Eliezer take a wife for Yitzchak from his own country and birthplace. The third request is the one upon which we will focus. Yitzchak was not permitted to leave the country. If we peruse the *pesukim*, we see that Avraham clearly spelled out the first two criteria. There are no questions, no grey areas that might mislead Eliezer. The third condition, however, was ambiguous in the sense that Avraham did not come out and blatantly say, "Yitzchak may not leave home to look for a wife." Rather, Avraham intimated this idea to Eliezer to the point that Eliezer questioned him: *U'lai lo soveh ha'ishah laleches acharai el ha'eret*. "Perhaps (what if) the woman does not want to leave?" (*Bereishis* 6:5). Why did Avraham not come straight out with his request? Was it by design that he waited for Eliezer to pose the question?

Rav Heyman derives from here that a *rebbe* should encourage his students to think on their own. He should teach in such a manner that allows them to question what he says, and respond to his questions. Otherwise, they just sit there listening to his lecture without participating on their own. Their ability to digest the lesson and incorporate it into their own thought processes thereby becomes stunted. A *rebbe* should empower his students to think.

In *Bereishis* 15:2, Avraham's servant and disciple, Eliezer, is referred to as *Damesek* Eliezer. In the *Talmud Yoma* 28b, *Chazal* view *Damesek* as an acronym describing Eliezer's spiritual relationship with his *rebbe* Avraham. *Damesek* stands for, *Doleh u'mashkeh, miToras rabo l'acheirim*, "He draws out the Torah from his *rebbe* and gives others to drink." Rav Heyman gleans from here that Eliezer would toil to understand the profundity of Avraham's teaching, so that he could transmit it

to others. How do *Chazal* know that Eliezer had this unique approach to study? From where do they derive that this is the meaning of *Damesek*?

The *Rav* suggests that it is specifically from the fact that Eliezer questioned Avraham concerning the girl's refusal to return with Yitzchak that we learn that Eliezer did not merely listen to the lesson and move on. Avraham encouraged questions. He empowered his students to think, to postulate, to theorize. Thus, Eliezer understood that he was to question Avraham concerning Yitzchak's leaving home in the event the girl refused to relocate.

We now address the second lesson to be extracted from Avraham *Avinu*'s "manual" on education. These *parshios* address the first Patriarch's life – his relationship with people of all backgrounds, his students, his wife and extended family – but what about his most important student, his heir and successor? Nothing is mentioned of Avraham's relationship with Yitzchak *Avinu*. There is practically nothing – no lessons, no conversation, no dialogue, no message – nothing! In fact, the only recorded discourse between father and son is the fifteen words that passed between them at the *Akeidah*. What educational lesson can we learn from the "unrecorded" conversations between father and son?

Rav Heyman explains that we adduce from here that, *Gedolah shimushah shel Torah yoser mi'limudah*, "Greater is the service of Torah than its (actual) study" (*Berachos* 7b). The *dugma*, example that a *rebbe* personally portrays to his students is of greater and more enduring value than the lesson he gives them. The impression which affects the student most strongly is the one that is imparted daily by observing his *rebbe*'s venture, his reaction to success, his ability to confront challenge, to remain stoic under moments of duress and strong during periods of travail. Avraham's lesson to us is if one wants to teach his son the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah*, it is best transmitted to the son by having him observe his father/*rebbe* executing the *mitzvah*. This applies across the board to all aspects of Torah. True, we need explanations and dialectic, but the primary lesson is best taught by role models.