

You must assemble the nation, the men, and the women and the children... so that they may hear and that they may learn and fear G-d. (31:12)

Assembling men and women is understandable, but why the children? Do they even begin to understand what this event is about? Do children understand enough that what they hear at the public reading of the Torah would move and inspire them to study the law? Perhaps if they were all alone without their parents, our questions would have some basis. The Torah wants their parents to remain with them – not like the father who comes late to *davening*, drops off his son and proceeds to the *Kiddush* club. Bringing the child in such a manner truly has very little value. Whatever the child may have picked up at the *shul* will quickly be forgotten as a result of the father's hypocrisy. *Lasseis schar l'miveihem*, "To give reward to those (parents) who bring them": These are *Chazal's* words. A child is inspired by the experience of standing with *Klal Yisrael* all together focused on the Torah. *L'miveihem*; "to those who bring themselves with them" is perhaps how *Chazal* should be understood.

The *Yerushalmi Yevamos* 1:6 teaches that the mother of Rabbi Yehoshua *ben* Chananya would bring his bassinet into the *bais hamedrash*, so that the young infant's ear would become attuned to Torah study. Why? There is no listening, no learning – just being there. Is this enough to warrant award? **Horav Yeruchum Levovitz, zl**, derives a powerful lesson from here concerning the significance of *chinuch*, education, and when it begins. Not first grade or even preschool, but from birth, children are influenced by their environment. Children are impressionable. They hear and see. If what they hear is positive, they will acknowledge the significance of a Torah life and follow through as they grow older.

Is just bringing their children to the experience sufficient reason to reward the parents? *Rav* Yeruchum quotes the **Alter, zl, m'Kelm**, *Horav Simcha Zissel Broide*, who quotes the Torah's statement regarding the *meisis u'meidiach*, *Lo sachmol v'lo sechaseh alav*, "Neither shall you show him mercy nor keep silent concerning him" (*Devarim* 13:9). *Halachah* is clear that we do not seek reason for mitigating his justice. Indeed, the one who incites the Jew to worship idols is worse than the actual offender. Why? Because "He sought to turn you away from Hashem." Influencing others to act negatively is worse than the actual perpetrator. This is true even if the inciter had been unsuccessful. The mere fact that he attempted to turn a Jew against Hashem is sufficient reason for executing him – without mercy.

We see from here how evil it is to take advantage of the unknowing and turn them away from Hashem. How much more so, observes the *Alter*, is the reward of one who devotes himself to bringing back the lost souls, the alienated, the assimilated, the individuals who simply never had a chance. This is true even of those who labor in the field of outreach with no great success. Just trying is reason for reward. Heaven forbid should one even think to himself – "This is a waste – I have not succeeded in altering the course of the subject's life. He is still not observant and will

probably continue living this way.” It is not about success. It is all about the attempt.

Thus, the *Ramban* is teaching us that bringing the children to the *Hakhel* experience is not due to *chinuch*, education. It is because “bringing them” is important – not because they will listen or learn. The mere fact that one made the attempt to reach out, to bring a Jew closer to Hashem is what earns him the reward. This is a powerful message for all those who devote themselves to Jewish outreach, who devote their lives and energies toward bringing their alienated brothers and sisters closer to Hashem. Success is not the barometer of eternal reward. *Hishtadlus*, the actual endeavor, is what counts. Success is in the Hands of Hashem.