

Say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and you shall say to them. (21:1)

Rashi notes the redundancy in the words, *emor v'amarta*, “**Say** (to the *Kohanim*) and you shall **say** (to them).” He explains that this is “to enjoin the adults with regard to minors.” It is consistent with the *Talmud Yevamos* 114a, in which *Chazal* explain that the word, “say” indicates that adult *Kohanim* are prohibited to make themselves impure through contact with the dead. “And you shall say” implies that the *Kohanim* are commanded to make sure that *Kohanim* who are minors must also not defile themselves. *L'hazhir gedolim al ha'ketanim*, “To caution adults with regard to the children” has become a Torah *chinuch*, education catchphrase. It is an important rule, but how is it derived from the redundancy of the words? Just that the Torah says twice to “tell them” does not provide clear proof that it is addressing the educational aspect of reaching out to the next generation.

Horav Moshe Shmuel Shapiro, zl, quotes the *Maggid m'Dubno* who once asked his

Rebbe, the *Gaon, zl, m'Vilna*, to identify the most effective way of influencing children.

The *Gaon* answered with a *mashal*, parable. The *Gaon* asked the *Maggid* to bring a large cup and to surround it with smaller cups. Then he asked the *Maggid* to pour liquid into the large cup and continue pouring until the liquid overflows into the smaller cups. In order to have children absorb the lessons, so that they retain them, the *rebbe*/teacher/mentor must first be personally permeated with an overdose of whatever character traits he seeks to impart to his students. They, in turn, will be suffused with the overflow.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* comments that the *Kohanim* were instructed twice in order to give **them** a double-measure of *kedushas Kohen*, the sanctity of the *Kohen*. Thus, it will “spill over” to their children.

The lesson is simple: students learn **from** the *rebbe*. As the *rebbe* becomes saturated with Torah and *middos tovos*, character traits, so do the students imbibe from his overflow of good. This presents a new concept in what today’s educational experts term “continuing education.” It is not sufficient for the teacher merely to be aware of new studies and methods; he must also be able to teach – period. A *rebbe* who is not constantly growing spiritually will soon “run out” – become depleted – of that overflow, leaving him little to communicate to his students.

The other perspective is that of the student. In order to be inspired by one’s mentor, the student must view himself as the “small” cup at the side of the much larger cup. When a student considers himself to be on the level of his *rebbe*, when arrogance has reached such a nadir that he no longer sees his mentor as being greater than he, there is no overflow

– he cannot learn anything. It is a two-way street. The *rebbe* successfully inspires his students only after he has himself been infused with Torah wisdom and ethics. The student then receives this infusion only after he has lowered himself sufficiently to the point at which the *rebbe*'s overflow will stream down to him.

The “overflow factor” was a primary educational principle embodied by one of the past generation’s premier Torah educators, the *Mashgiach* of Chevron/Slabodka and, later, Ateres Yisrael, *Horav Meir Chodosh, zl*. He would say, “One must fill himself until he brims over with wisdom and knowledge, filling the adjacent vessels – his students – with the overflow that he himself cannot contain. One must pour into the cup, pour and pour, with the pouring for himself, but everything that overflows for the students and for anyone else who wishes to learn.” This was the song of his life. Everything he developed – everything that he thought about and originated – he did for himself, pouring into his own cup. His entire life was one long service of Hashem. He embodied the essence of *Mussar*, ethical/moral conduct, reflected by his spiritual discipline and demeanor. He served as a perfect role model for others to emulate, as the “liquid” poured over the sides with an overflow that inspired those close to him.

Rav Meir would say, “Nurture yourself, so that you may nurture others.” *Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl*, commented, “When *Rav Meir* spoke with his students, every word was a result of his work on himself. This idea goes to the very core of the *Mashgiach*'s principles and the method of education he imbibed from his great *Rebbe, Horav Nossan Tzvi Finkel, zl*, reverently known as the *Alter m'Slabodka*.”

The *Mashgiach* was once queried concerning what he was preparing for his upcoming *Mussar shmuess*, ethical discourse. His response is classic and bespeaks his *Mussar* personality. He replied, “I am not preparing a specific lecture. I am going to speak from what is in my heart.” In his *shmuessen*, the *Mashgiach* did not transmit ideas and statements from *Chazal* in a vacuum. When he spoke, he transmitted **himself**. He shared with his listeners whatever it was that he was engaged in at that specific moment, the subject in which he was presently absorbed, in which he desired to plumb its depths in order to grasp its concepts and internalize them. When these topics penetrated his mind, when they pervaded his heart and animated his spirit, he would share them with his students. Whatever it was – a *chiddush*, novel idea; a new perspective; an emotion which he now felt – he dispensed to them. It was as though an inner light illuminated the depths of these ideas, compelling him to share it with his students.

In order for a *rebbe*/mentor to succeed with the overflow effect, the material he studies must become a part of himself – his essence. His learning and *middos* are not external, but an intrinsic part of his being. The traits that one values do not float somewhere in the upper reaches of his intellect or in profound depths of philosophy. One's *middos* are not simply a “good *vort*,” a nice thought. They become life itself. One becomes a living, breathing *Mussar sefer*, volume of ethical refinement. Only then can he successfully impart “himself” to his students.