

"Assemble the people, the men, and the women, and the children." (31:12)

The above *pasuk* relates the mitzvah of *Hakheil*. This was the time, during *Succos* immediately following the *Shemittah* year, in which all of the people were to assemble in the *Bais Ha'Mikdash* to listen to the *Melech Yisrael*, Jewish king, read *Sefer Devarim*. *Rashi* comments that, although the young children were not able to comprehend the meaning of the event, they were to be brought *ovhthcnk rfa i,hk*, "to give reward to those that brought them," their parents.

Rashi is citing the words of the *Talmud* in *Chagiga 3a* which attributes this interpretation to *R' Elazar ben Azaria*. Indeed, the *Talmud* considers this interpretation to be a major *chiddush*, novel idea. What really is so new about this interpretation? The *Anaf Yosef* suggests that *Chazal* mean to emphasize Hashem's love for *Bnei Yisrael*. Not wanting to leave their children alone, the parents would be forced to bring them along. Consequently, Hashem transformed this requisite into a *mitzvah*. If parents carried out their responsibility *l'shem shomayim*, for the sake of Heaven, they should be rewarded.

Environmental influences play a major role in a child's educational development. The atmosphere at such a holy gathering was sublime, the mood sincere and awe-inspiring. Undoubtedly, parents who arrange for their children to be exposed to such inspirational experiences will merit to see them growing into G-d-fearing Jews. What greater reward can a parent anticipate than to have *Torah nachas*?

Horav Moshe Feinstein z.l. asserts that the *mitzvah* of *chinuch ha'banim*, educating one's children, should be performed *lishmah*, for its own sake, just as one performs any other *mitzvah*. Logic should not be the critical determinant in *mitzvah* performance. If we were to apply our rationale to education, we might foolishly expend all our efforts only on behalf of those children who are gifted and demonstrate signs of the greatest promise. This would be a grave mistake. We never know what will motivate one child over another. More than likely, the child upon whom everybody gives up hope diligently proceeds ahead of his more astute peers.

We must approach the *mitzvah* of *chinuch* as a *gezeiras hakasuv*, decree of the *Torah*. This was *R' Elazaer ben Azaria's chiddush*. *Chinuch ha'banim* is more than just a parent's obligation, it is a profound *mitzvah*! This *mitzvah* extends beyond the realm of the parents. Indeed, every Jew is adjured to be responsible that all Jewish children receive a Jewish education, regardless of their parent's inclination. On the contrary, if parents shirk their responsibility someone else must take over and actively intervene in the child's spiritual development.

We may suggest another thought. There are various levels of success in education. Perhaps the highest degree of success is achieved when a child gravitates to study and desires to improve himself. A child should not have to be coerced to study *Torah*; it should be part of his routine in the

same manner as eating, drinking, and sleeping.

This natural proclivity is achieved only when a child is constantly exposed to *Torah*, even when he is yet young and can only benefit subconsciously. This is the homiletic rendition of *Chazal's* message: "To give reward," to the ones who "bring them." In their words, reward is due to those who cause them to come subsequently on their own. Parents who bring their children to such lofty gatherings at a tender age, even at the expense of the parents' own spiritual satisfaction, will stimulate these same children to develop a natural tendency to continue on their own. This will be the parent's true reward.