

For I have loved him, because he commands his children and his household after him that they keep the way of Hashem. (18:19)

The literal translation of *yedaativ* (reference to knowledge) is, "I know him." Understandably, when one loves and cares for someone, he seeks to bring him close and know him better. Hashem loved Avraham because he did not keep His teachings to himself. When one believes in something, he wants to shout it from the rooftops, to reach out to whomever he can, so that he can share these verities with him. Interestingly, Avraham *Avinu* performed many *mitzvos* for which he achieved singular distinction. In addition, he kept the entire Torah even prior to its being given to *Klal Yisrael*. Yet, the only time that we find the *lashon* of *chibah*, term of love (Hashem loved Avraham), is with regard to *chinuch ha'banim*, educating his descendants. Avraham was the first outreach expert; he wrote the book on *chesed*, but none of these wonderful *mitzvos* earned him the appellation of *yedaativ*, loved him. Each of the *Asarah Nisyonos*, Ten Trials, which Avraham successfully passed did not earn him the description, "loved by Hashem." Only one *mitzvah*, *l'maan asher yetzaveh es banav*, "because he commands his children," did. Why?

Acharav, "after him," is a powerful word which connotes Avraham's teaching method. He taught by example. He did not make demands; he showed the people that he, too, answered to a Higher Authority and that everything he was doing was in accordance with the *tzivui*, command, of Hashem. Avraham taught; he did not compel. He demonstrated his commitment by his actions which he welcomed and encouraged others to follow.

Perhaps we might take this idea a bit further. *L'maan asher yetzaveh es banav* is the criterion which serves as the barometer for our *mitzvah* observance. How stable/solid are our actions? Will they be sustained through the vicissitudes of time, ideologies, culture and societal changes? Can we say that our children observing our *mitzvah* performance today will be inspired and remain connected to these *mitzvos* a generation later? Will they transmit that which they saw to their own children? *Mitzvah* observance, if it is to be taught to our children, must be able to withstand the test of time.

Furthermore, *l'maan asher yetzaveh es banav*, should be the criterion by which we measure the value and authenticity of our religious observance – and everything that we do. How much of what we do, the way we act, where we go, etc. do we want our children to emulate? Perhaps we might think twice before acting. After all, our children are watching.

The *Sefer Tiferes Banim* writes that a person does not earn the title *yarei Hashem*, G-d-fearing, or *tzaddik*, righteous man, unless he carefully watches over his children. (This does not mean that something will not go wrong even in those homes where parents maintain a watchful eye over their children's activities.) One can be a *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, devoted and committed in every way, but if he does not educate/see to his children's education, he should not be called a *yarei*

Hashem. We see that despite all of Avraham's attributes and *mitzvos*, the only time that Hashem expressed His love for him was with regard to Avraham's commitment to inculcating his family with his values. Any commitment that one does not sufficiently value enough to transmit to his children is not much of a commitment.

A father's traditions, the customs that were bequeathed to him by his own father, are (should be) sacrosanct. He must realize that his children derive incredible benefit from his adherence to these customs. In some situations, these customs are what keeps them attached to *Yiddishkeit*. *Horav Gamliel Rabinowitz, Shlita*, relates that he heard from a Holocaust survivor that throughout his years in the various Nazi concentration/labor camps, and despite being a teenager at the time, he never once ate non-kosher food. It was difficult for him, and, as a result, he endured much suffering, but he was unyielding in his tenacious commitment to keeping kosher. Indeed, he served as an inspiration to others, not only with regard to kosher food, but to *Yiddishkeit* as a whole.

The survivor explained that he was able to withstand all of the pain and suffering only because he was raised in a home in which commitment to *kashrus* was sacrosanct. He remembered that once his father was quite ill, and the family fed him food that was of questionable origin (the *kashrus* had not been confirmed). As a result, when his father's health returned, his father accepted upon himself (as penance) to fast on Mondays and Thursdays. It was such devotion that inspired his young son to keep kosher during the entire Holocaust.

A father should make sure never to belittle a *mitzvah*, custom, tradition, any Torah practice in general, especially when his children are watching. Children have a habit of outdoing their parents, by completely rejecting what their parents had only belittled.

A father and mother, both of *Chassidic* persuasion, came to *Rav Gamliel* to seek his counsel concerning their son who wanted to shave his beard. They were pained by his decision, which would bring tremendous shame and ridicule to their family. (In the *Chassidic* community, shaving one's beard is frowned upon. There is an element of holiness to the beard, as expressed by the *Zohar HaKadosh*. Therefore, when a boy of *Chassidic* upbringing shaves off his beard, it is cause for concern.)

Rav Gamliel met with the boy and expressed to him the pain that his decision was causing his parents. The boy responded that he was only changing *minhagim*, customs. He would not shave with a razor (which is prohibited), but with a shaver. From a *halachic* standpoint, he was doing nothing wrong. "Regarding my family customs," the boy reiterated, "I have seen members of my own family veer many times from their customs. Why should I be held to a higher standard than they hold themselves? I am acting no different than they are acting!"

Sadly, this boy's claim was valid. By their own actions, parents set the standard for their children to emulate. If the standard is of a positive nature, we may hope that the child will follow. If it is of a negative nature, all we can do is hope that for once the child will "rebel."

Rav Gamliel believes the challenges which seem to appear in our generation may be attributed to a weakened and diminished relationship between children and their grandparents. Such children have not been raised to respect the past, to respect the world of their grandparents. To them, their grandparents are mere relics of a lost generation. If we link ourselves firmly to our parents and grandparents, we may hope to see a continued relationship with our children, grandchildren and beyond.

Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl, relates the story of a young boy who hailed from an unobservant home, who sought desperately to alter his life's trajectory by becoming *frum*, observant. He became close to *Rav Galinsky* and slowly began performing *mitzvos*, until he become completely observant. His parents did not take kindly to their son's religious transformation. Indeed, they were so furious over their son's gravitation to an archaic lifestyle that they actually sued *Rav Galinsky* in court. They contended that by convincing their son to become observant, he had damaged him irreparably.

Rav Galinsky was summoned to court. When the judge explained the charges against him, *Rav Galinsky* vehemently denied them. He insisted that he was instructing and encouraging the boy to emulate his father, to actually follow in his footsteps. The judge was puzzled. "How could this be?" he asked. Anyone could see that the father was *chiloni*, totally secular, while his son dressed and acted like a true *ben Torah*.

Rav Galinsky explained, "This boy's grandfather was devoutly observant. He was meticulous in his *mitzvah* observance and diligently studied Torah daily. His recalcitrant son, the boy's father, rebelled against his father's principles and lifestyle. Thus, I told the boy to act exactly as his father had acted. Just as he rebelled against his father's values and lifestyle, so should he." The court was impressed with *Rav Galinsky's* argument and found him innocent of any coercion.