

## The children agitated within her, and she said, “If so, why am I thus?” (25:22)

*Chazal* teach that *vayisrotzetzu*, “and they agitated,” is derived from *rotz*, to run. When Rivkah *Imeinu* passed the *yeshivah* of Shem and Ever, Yaakov struggled to leave; and when she passed a house of idol worship, Eisav wanted out. The *Bais HaLevi* asks the well-known question: We are taught that a Heavenly angel teaches the Torah to the growing fetus. If so, why would Yaakov want to escape to the *yeshivah*? He was learning Torah from an angel; can one ask for more? The *Bais HaLevi* explains that such learning is not worth it if it means being in the vicinity of Eisav. I would like to take the liberty to expound on this idea. After all, we do not always have the luxury of choosing our child’s learning environment. Depending upon where one lives and what school his children attend, we can always find students from diverse backgrounds, who, due to no fault of their own, might influence the class in a less-than-positive manner. Does this mean we should all homeschool our children?

I think we gloss over a critical aspect of the learning experience: the *rebbe/talmid* relationship. An angel may be able to expound on any area in the entire corpus of Torah, but the angel does not have a *kesher*, relationship, with the student. If the student is a perfect learner – great. If the perfect learner is in a classroom with other boys who are not perfect, the *rebbe* is able to mold his *shiur* to fit each student individually. The angel, however, gives a one-size-fits-all lecture. The angel has no motivation, no outreach, no sense of joy in learning Torah, no focus on the individual needs of each student in a classroom of boys that might not be on his spiritual, moral plane. Yaakov *Avinu* could not learn in the presence of Eisav because he had no *rebbe* to cater to his individual needs, trying to study Torah with a brother who wanted anything but Torah study. An angel’s teaching is robotic; a *rebbe* teaches with his heart.

Let us delve deeper into this idea. *Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl*, focuses on the benefits of a *rebbe-talmid* relationship. When a student develops a bond, he becomes connected, not only to his immediate *rebbe*, but also, to his *rebbe’s rebbe*, going back to the *mesorah*, chain of tradition, heralding back to *Har Sinai*. A *rebbe’s* relationship with his student is one predicated upon love and reciprocity.

*Horav Meir Chodosh, zl, Mashgiach of Chevron and Ateres Yisrael*, was an educator without peer. His love for his students was legendary, treating each and every one like he was his only son. They could come and go to his house whenever they pleased and stay as long as they wanted. After all, they were his sons! He loved each student, regardless of his faults and weaknesses. He would peer into each student’s heart, track his progress, pay attention to the effort he expended and rejoice with his every triumph. Talent and ability were not factors in his abiding love for them. His students were part of his “self.”

The *Mashgiach* never saw any student in a negative light. He would always find positive aspects

about the student and underscore them. When he was compelled to rebuke a student, it was with great pain – a pain that was evident, as a father must rebuke his son. He never raised his voice, threatened or spoke harshly. He spoke softly, with complete calm, patience and respect. Thus, his words penetrated deeply and had a lasting effect.

It was this form of *rebbe/talmid* relationship that Yaakov could not experience when he was learning from an angel. Furthermore, a *rebbe* imbues his students with a love for Torah and joy in studying it. *Horav Pinchas Sheinberg, zl*, was wont to say that a *rebbe*'s function is to create a feeling of *Torasecha shaashuai*, "Your Torah is my delight," in every student. *Shaashua* also means toy. When a child plays with his toy, he is completely engrossed in it. Nothing disturbs him; no one can distract him and take him away from his toy. Likewise, the *rebbe* should make the Torah the student's "toy," so that he experiences the greatest delight upon studying it. [One caveat: in order for the *rebbe* to imbue his student with joy, he must feel a sense of joy and excitement about life, and the merit that he has to teach *Yiddishe kinder*.]

Last, a student must be infused with a sense of confidence. One who is insecure, afraid, anxious, nervous cannot *shteig*, succeed to the fullest, in Torah. He must be calm, relaxed, as well as excited to learn. *Horav Chaim Kanievsky, zl*, related in the name of *Horav Meir Karelitz, zl*, brother of the *Chazon Ish*, the following story – whose veracity has been a tradition in their family.

The author of the *Pischei Teshuvah*, commentary on *Shulchan Aruch Yore Deah* (also, *Even Ha'Ezer* and *Choshen Mishpat*, published after his *petirah*), *Horav Avraham Hirsch Eisenstadt, zl*, was *Rav* in Utyan near Kovno. Prior to his passing, he asked that his son be his successor in leading the community. Apparently, this did not sit well with some of the community's leadership, who felt that, while the son was erudite, he did not come close to the level of his father. They felt that a city of the caliber of Utyan could do better. Thus, they debated the issue and arrived at a consensus of opinion: The would-be *Rav* would travel to Kovno, to the *gadol hador*, preeminent Torah leader of the generation, *Horav Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, zl*, and submit to a *bechinah*. *Rav* Yitzchak Elchanan would then decide if the young man was qualified to lead their community.

Travel was not quick and simple. It was a strenuous, grueling journey to Kovno. Furthermore, taking an examination from *Rav* Yitzchak Elchanan was not a walk in the park. The trip, the pressure, anxiety, all contributed to a poor showing on the examination. *Rav* Yitzchak Elchanan was under-impressed – to say the least. While the young man who stood before him might be learned, he certainly did not qualify to fill the shoes of the *Pischei Teshuvah*.

That night, *Rav* Yitzchak Elchanan had a dream during which the *Pischei Teshuvah* appeared and implored him to retest his son. "You should know that my son is a *gaon muflag*, brilliant scholar, who is eminently capable of assuming the position as *Rav* of Utyan. When he is given the opportunity to calm down from the pressure, he will demonstrate his uncanny knowledge." The *Kovner Rav* acceded to the "request," and the *Pischei Teshuvah*'s son proved his father right. He shone in his brilliance, demonstrating to *Rav* Yitzchak Elchanan that he was familiar and

comfortable in all areas of Torah law. When a student is shown warmth, love and understanding, he will produce beyond our and his expectations. So, why would Yaakov remain with Eisav if he could enjoy the benefits of a *rebbe*?