

He called to Moshe. (1:1)

Chazal (Vayikra Rabbah 7:3) say: “Why do they begin the teaching of *Chumash* to children with *Toras Kohanim (Vayikra)* and not with *Bereishis*? Since the children are pure, without sin, and the offerings are pure, it is, therefore, fitting that the pure should come and engross themselves in the study of that which is pure.” One should ask an intelligent person, one versed in pedagogy and proficient in the educational methodology for reaching a young child, captivating his interest for learning: From where should the child begin to learn? At what point should the lesson plan for teaching *Chumash* on the most elementary level begin?

The individual is likely to respond by suggesting *Parashas Lech Lecha*, the story of Avraham Avinu and Sarah *Imeinu*. How our Patriarch was the first one to listen to and spread the Name of Hashem to a world of idolaters and Sarah’s yearning for a child, her passion to bring the next Patriarch into the world, would be a story that would inspire young minds. Why do *Chazal* gloss over this and, instead, suggest that we begin with an introduction to *korbanos*? A child who begins to learn Torah must be captivated by it, excited about learning and passionate about following in the footsteps of our great and noble leader.

Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl, gives a simple, but powerful, explanation: only Hashem knows His Creations; only He understands the workings of our *neshamos*, souls. Our *neshamos* are the essence of Heavenly purity and must be treated in such a manner.

Rav Pincus compares this to a novice who purchases a brand-new car. He is so impressed with its beauty, its lines, its power. He is now able to travel wherever his heart desires. He is excited beyond words. The next day, he loads the car with his luggage and food for a long trip. He just cannot wait to visit all the places that heretofore had only been a dream for him. He begins the drive. It is incredibly smooth and quiet; the music is relaxing; the air conditioning is comfortable. Everything seems to be going well – until, 300 miles into the trip, the engine sputters and stops working. Nothing he does can get the car of his dreams to start. He immediately calls the salesman and explains his predicament. “You probably ran out of gas,” he replies. “What gas? No one told me about gas,” the novice driver answers. The salesman directs him to a gas station and tells him to fill up the tank. The man pulls up to a pump and takes one whiff of the gasoline and says, “There is no way I will put this foul-smelling gasoline into my pristine car.”

What does one respond to such a person, whose obtuseness prevents him from listening to sound advice? He did not make the car. How can he decide what is best for it? A similar concept applies with regard to educating Jewish children. The finest, most experienced Torah *mechanech*, educator, has no clue concerning the depth, purity and sanctity of a *Yiddishe neshamah*. He is dealing with *neshamos* clothed in the bodies of children. Thus, *Chazal* say: *Yavo’u tehorim v’yisasku b’taharos*, “Let the pure (*neshamos*) involve/engage in the study of that which is pure.” This means, explains *Rav Pincus*, that Torah is absorbed directly into the *neshamah* of a Jewish child. A child that cannot sit still in class might be restrained, thus maintaining order in the room,

but his *neshamah* receives nothing. A child who acts with *chutzpah* to both parents and educators, a boy who has yet to distinguish between what is his and what belongs to others, might respond to the latest psychological theories and tools, but, at the end of the day, all the discipline and analysts will not address the problem of his *neshamah*. The *neshamah tehorah*, pure soul, of the Jewish child responds to a different set of rules. Hashem designed the playbook which consists of one rule: *Yavo'u tehorim v'yisasku b'taharos*.

The values imparted in a Torah-oriented school are different. A boy growing up in a Torah environment knows that stealing is prohibited. Another boy's bike is not to be touched. The *rebbe* does not teach this explicitly. Studying Torah and learning *Chumash*, however, inspire the student to live a life in which he does not touch that which does not belong to him. It is not a law. It is self-evident. Children derive powerful character lessons from the stories in *Sefer Bereishis*. Rav Pincus notes that, on the surface, one might err and derive negative lessons from the story of Yosef and his brothers: Reuven's impetuosity; and Yehudah's fall from grace. Yet, this does not occur in a Torah environment, where children study Torah – not Bible. Torah is pure – the children are pure – the lesson is pure.

One of the first and primary lessons a child should learn is the importance of Torah in our lives. Not only should we not waste our time, but we should see to it that we do nothing to keep someone else from learning. *Horav Pinchas Schreiber, zl (Rav, Av Bais Din Ashdod)*, spent his entire life learning Torah. Stories abound concerning his total devotion to – and diligence in – learning Torah. As such, every minute of distraction was devastating for him. He spent his days learning in *Ponovezh Yeshivah*. His *Rebbetzin* was a *ganenes*, pre-school teacher. She would leave the house daily at 7:30 a.m., at which time Rav Pinchas would keep an eye on their children until 8:00, when the baby-sitter arrived. The young woman understood the value of Rav Pinchas' learning and never arrived late. Sadly, she and her husband had not yet been blessed with children. She had waited for months to get an appointment to see a renowned fertility expert. It was marked off on her calendar in bold. She could not forget that date; it meant so much to her. She did, however, forget one thing: to inform *Rebbetzin* Schreiber that she could not make it on time that day.

The day arrived, and, at 7:45, she realized that she had forgotten to let her employer know that she was not available that morning. It was too late now, since the *Rebbetzin* had already left for school. On the one hand, it would probably be months before she could get another appointment. On the other hand, if she did not arrive by 8:00, Rav Pinchas would be compelled to learn at home. Even if the children would be perfect angels, his learning would not be the same. She could not have that on her conscience.

It was a very difficult decision, but Torah reigns supreme. She would have to hope for another appointment, but she could not have Rav Pinchas' impaired learning (compared to learning in the *Yeshivah bais medrash*) on her head. She cancelled her appointment and showed up on time for her job. No one was aware of her "sacrifice," in order not to cause any diminishing of Rav Pinchas' learning. They took it for granted that she showed up as usual. Hashem, however, knew

(as He knows everything). That very month, Hashem blessed her with a positive response to her constant supplication: she conceived, and, nine months later, she gave birth to a healthy boy. He was her only child. In fact, the fertility expert whom she eventually saw exclaimed that he had no idea how, from a scientific standpoint, she had conceived. The woman, however, knew in what merit she had conceived her child, who became a distinguished Torah scholar and raised a beautiful Torah family – all because his mother understood the value of Torah.