

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

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Chazal (Yevamos 114a) explain the apparent redundancy of *Emor v'Amarta* – “Say and tell,” to convey the important message of, *l'hazhir gedolim al ha'ketanim*, the adult *Kohanim* are cautioned regarding the children. A *Kohen* is not permitted to come in contact with the deceased; neither is he permitted to cause his children to become contaminated. Simply, the Torah is teaching us a primary lesson in *chinuch*, Torah education: children learn by example. “Do as I say – not as I do” is not effective. Inevitably, children mimic what they see. Thus, if a father wants to impart positive Torah-oriented behavior, he must himself be a paradigm of this behavior. The reason the Torah chose to teach this lesson specifically through the medium of the *kohanim* is that the unique lineage of *kohanim*, as descendants of Aharon *HaKohen*, renders them appropriate role models.

Two boys in the same class can both come from fine, observant homes. If one is a *kohen*, however, he is different and must be extra cautious concerning laws of *tumas meis*, contamination from a dead body. This plays itself out in the various socio/religious ideologies, such as: *yeshivish*, *heimish*, modern Orthodox – depending in which neighborhood one's residence is located, financial status, etc. Parents must confront the reality that children are highly impressionable, and their minds absorb what they see and hear. The environment in which they grow up plays a significant role in molding their character and values. *Chanoch lanaar al pi darko* (*Mishlei* 22:6), instructs the mentor (*rebbe*/parent) to teach, guide a child in accordance with the child's own way: skill, aptitude, personality. Perhaps, it also enjoins us to exert great care in dealing with our children. They do what they see. They will soak up the *chinuch* which we impart to them in accordance with their *derech*, which includes the environment in which they are placed.

Education is about building a world within our child, piece by piece, brick by brick, through experiences, interactions and the examples (ours included) which they encounter daily. Parents cannot simply hope their children will adopt good values if they fail to create a positive environment in which their children can grow. Children learn more from what they see than from what their parents tell them. A lack of consistency between a parent's words and actions creates confusion within the child's mind, thereby weakening his moral foundation.

Memories of our parents' actions, behaviors, both religious and mundane, are the foundation of our view of their identities. Our parents' values and principles become guideposts for our journey through life. If one is fortunate, those memories are positive and serve as a beacon of light to illuminate the child's path as he matures into adulthood and transitions into becoming the mentor, rather than the disciple.

During one of his many jaunts around the globe fundraising for his *Yeshivah*, the *Ponovezher Rav*, *zl*, visited Cincinnati, Ohio. People told him that, in the local *cheder*/day school, an extraordinary *rebbe* was eminently successful in imparting Torah knowledge and values to young children. This

was surprising, given Cincinnati's earlier history as the bastion of reform Jewry, a city whose secular Jewish leadership did all in its power to undermine Torah scholarship and *mitzvah* observance in this country. The *Rav* had to watch the *rebbe* teach. As the *Rosh Yeshivah* stood outside the classroom door, he heard the *rebbe* reading the *chumash* in the same singsong tune in which the *rebbeim* taught in Eastern Europe. He could not believe his ears. He must speak to the *rebbe*; he must find out how he retains such love, such passion, such excitement in teaching *Torah* in such a secular community.

"How do you do it?" The *Rav* asked the *rebbe*. The *Rebbe*, who also happened to be the *menahel*, educational director and founder of the school, replied: "I was born in a small town in Lithuania. My parents had four sons. My mother took care of the home, while my father traveled every week, peddling wares before returning for *Shabbos*, during which time he would learn what he could with us. Regrettably, as much as my parents had a deep-rooted love of *Torah*, their level of education was limited. One day, we received exciting news that a renowned *melamed*, *Torah* teacher, had moved to town. He was a capable *rebbe*, and charged one ruble per month per student. This meant an added four-ruble monthly expense for my parents. It would be difficult, but well worth it. Finally, their sons would receive a *Torah* education. My parents cut back on their meals as a means of saving money. This, however, was not enough to pay the *rebbe*. They decided to pawn whatever items they had in the house that were not absolutely vital. Then came my mother's jewelry. She did not have much, but she sold whatever she did to pay the *rebbe's* fee. The silver candlesticks and whatever further "extra" silver followed in succession. We now no longer had anything to sell. Two months passed, and, with a heavy heart, the *rebbe* served his ultimatum. He was owed eight rubles. He, too, had a family to support. He would have to let us go in order to make room for other boys. He gave my parents a week to pay the debt – or else.

"On the sixth day, my mother had a brainstorm. The family still had something of value: a cow. The cow was a source of sustenance. It provided milk to drink, from which my mother made butter and cheese. My parents would sell the cow to pay the *rebbe*. They could not discontinue their sons' learning. They would all have to sacrifice for *Torah*. The next morning, my parents left home in the accompaniment of our family cow.

They walked ten kilometers each way and returned home excited. They were able to sell the cow for eight rubles! Now they could pay the *rebbe*, and their sons could continue learning *Torah*. That story was seared into our minds. When realizing how much *Torah* meant to our parents, we knew what our goals in life would be."

During *Horav* Dovid Povarsky's tenure as *Rosh Yeshivah* of *Ponovezh*, his son, *Horav Boruch Dov, Shlita*, read a letter to him that he had received from a wealthy *baal ha'bayis*, *layman*, with whom he had studied in the *Mir*. They had retained their friendship throughout the years, as this man became a generous supporter of *Ponovezh*. In the letter, he asked for his grandson to be accepted in the *Yeshivah*. The man had once been a student of *Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl*, of *Mir*, and his sense of *yashrus*, straightness and integrity, was seared into his mind. He wrote, "There is no such

thing as *protektzia*, preferential treatment, with me. I ask that my son receive a *bechinah*, entrance exam, like everyone else. If he passes fine; if not – also fine.”

Rav Boruch Dov stopped for a second to read a P.S. He told his father that, at the end of the letter, he cites the commentary of *Sforno* concerning a certain topic and adds that it impressed him deeply, to the point that he was overjoyed beyond anything he could remember. When the *Rosh Yeshivah* heard this, he said, "You may inform him that his grandson has been accepted into the *Yeshivah*. When a grandfather has such incredible joy concerning a *Torah* thought, we want his grandson in our *Yeshivah*!"

Apparently, such a grandfather had imbued his family with his own extraordinary love of *Torah*.