

Foundations

Dear Parents,

The *Midrash (Vayikra Rabba 9:1)* on this week's *Parsha* explains why only by a *peace-offering*, a שלמים, does the *Pasuk* say "that one will offer to Hashem," and not by other *korbanos*. It applies the *pasuk* in *Tehillim (50:23)* that says: *he who offers a Todah offering, honors Me*. One who brings a *Todah* is not atoning for a sin as in other *korbanos*, and therefore he is in truth bringing it for the express purpose of acknowledging and honoring *Hashem*.

The *Midrash* then digresses and brings numerous interpretations of the second part of the *pasuk* in *Tehillim* - ...*vesam derech*... which means "one who orders the way." *Rabi Yannai* reads the phrase as *shom derech*, meaning "one who appraises the way." The *derech* being referred to is "*Derech Eretz*." One who appraises (analyzes) his way (his behavior), possesses the trait of being a *Baal Derech Eretz*.

The *Mishna* in *Avos (3:22)* states ... *If there is no Derech Eretz there is no Torah*. *Rabbeinu Yonah* explains that before one can expect Torah to be part and parcel of his personality, he must correct his own character traits. **Torah will not take root in one who is not a *mentsch*.**

A related point is made by *Rav Aharon Kotler zt'l* in *Mishnas Aharon I*, (pg. 116). He says: *Some people have a tendency to downgrade the need for basic decency, thinking that they are relatively unimportant in relation to one's ruchniyus*. Chazal tell us just the opposite - a prerequisite for success in spiritual endeavors is decency, upstanding behavior and doing things properly, in an orderly and refined fashion.

It is simply not true that a person negligent with regard to relatively unimportant things will be more scrupulous when faced with matters of great import. In the depths of a man's psyche there is a common root. One who is

disorganized in material matters will be disorganized in his spiritual pursuits as well. **The way one acts with regard to mundane matters is critical to his success in the more sublime, spiritual realm.** Indeed, *Derech Eretz* precedes Torah, for without *Derech Eretz*, one's Torah will be deficient as well.

Parents may feel it justified to overlook the small behaviors of their children; the way they speak, how they take care of their things, how they look after their siblings, how quickly or slowly they respond to parental instructions, etc. in order to preserve their relationship with the child, and will only correct their behavior or speech when it is something 'major.' They may not even pay much attention to the niceties of proper behavior, company manners and the like, because it seems so superficial and insignificant. Indeed, we need to focus on the end goal and to 'not sweat the small stuff'. Nevertheless, Chazal, as amplified down to our own times by a *Godol* such as *Rav Aharon*, show how *Derech Eretz* is fundamental and overlooking it is not the way to build a *Ben Torah* or *Bas Yisroel*.

Raising a child involves building a structure, which will only be as strong as its foundation. Parents, no matter how learned or not they are, whether they grew up in the most *Torah-dik* home or in a home that did not yet discover the beauty of *Yiddishkeit*, have a tremendous reservoir of lessons to impart to their children. The message here is that the foundation is made up of *mentchlichkeit* and *Derech Eretz*. Kindness, caring, refinement, calm and helpfulness. They are the true cornerstones of a great person, a great Torah person.

Have a wonderful *Shabbos*,



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