



Dear Parents,

Erev Shabbos Parshas Nitzavim 5779

An astounding observation is recorded in the Gemara (Nedarim 81a). The Gemara asks: “Why is it, that Talmidei Chachomim (Torah Scholars) do not, as a rule, have sons who are also Talmidei Chachomim and Bnei Torah?” Among the five answers given, Rav Ashi states the following: “Because they call other people `donkey.’” Rashi explains that they denigrate and defame others by minimizing the Torah knowledge and scholarship of others.

In their passion, commitment and involvement in Torah learning, there seems to be an apparent tendency, at least among some scholars, to dwell on the superiority of their own understanding, their own approach, their own thinking and their Chiddushim, and thereby to also put down and point out shortcomings in other Torah scholars’ ideas and understanding.

What, you may ask, does that have to do with the failure to pass on the mantle of Torah scholarship to their children? Wouldn’t the children be filled with pride upon hearing their father’s constant denigrating of others, in that he possesses superior knowledge and they can have a part of that? Doesn’t such an attitude build pride within the members of the family? Wouldn’t they also aspire to such a superior status?

“It is certainly no question why these children would yearn to learn Torah...”

This attitude is not a Torah attitude, and equally important, it doesn’t work. In this week’s Parsha (Devarim 29:9-10), on his final day on earth, Moshe Rabbeinu gathers all of Klal Yisrael together for the purpose of establishing a Bris, covenant with Hashem. The Torah specifies who came to this gathering and emphasizes that everyone was there as one – the greatest leaders down to the lowly water carriers – they all were dignified, all respected and all had a place in the group. No one’s superiority was glorified and no one’s minimal stature was a point of focus. It was all groups and all individuals in Klal Yisrael, together.

Why is it that a Talmid Chochom who is critical of others may have children who turn in a different direction from the path on which he thought he was raising them? It is because these children constantly hear criticism of other Talmidei Chachamim, of their Rebbeim, Rabbonim etc. This is teaching them to not respect their own Torah teachers. Is it any question then, that they have little respect for the Torah, and scant regard for studying it?

A simple lay person on the other hand, who does not possess impressive Torah knowledge, yet who respects Talmidei Chachomim, who is always role-modeling to his children to show great respect and deference to Rebbeim and Rabbonim is teaching them to value Torah as the most precious commodity in the world. It is certainly no question why these children would yearn to learn Torah, appreciate its beauty and depth and strive to become Talmidei Chachomim in their own right.

“If we respect it and value it, our children will want it.”

With the Yomim Nora'im and its opportunity for serious self-reflection upon us, it behooves us to take an accounting of how we come across to others and especially to our children. In our efforts to excel, whether it be in Torah and Mitzvos, our professions or whatever interests us, do we put others down to show our own superiority? Are we exposing our children to a barrage of criticism as a way of relating to others and their accomplishments?

Respect for others and appreciation for the accomplishments and struggles of others is the Torah way and the most effective means to show our children what is truly worthwhile. If we respect it and value it, our children will want it.

Best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos and warmest wishes for a Kesiva V’Chasima Tova.

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