

IMITATING

by Rabbi Chaim Morgenstern

Children also have the tendency to imitate their parents' actions and behavior (noch machen in Yiddush), and they observe and retain more than we realize. A kindergarten teacher once told a group of parents to please be careful what they say and do in front of their children, as she knows exactly what transpires in their homes from the way the children play, talk and behave in school. For example, two children are playing house and one is the father and the other the mother. If the mother remarks to the father, "Where does it say that the wife must immediately obey all of her husband's wishes?" then the child is indicating that this is how her mother speaks to her father.

Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky was once asked how and when he trained his children to say brachos. He replied, "We never taught them. They saw us making brachos before and after eating, and because children naturally imitate their parents, they also started making brachos." (Reb Yaakov, Artscroll, p. 324)

Children also imitate midos ra'os - bad character traits - from their parents. Chazal say, "Whatever a child speaks is (learned) from his father or his mother." (Sukah 56b) They exemplify this with the story of Miriam bas Bilga, who renounced her Jewish religion and married a Greek nobleman. When the Greeks entered the Bais Hamikdosh and desecrated it, she went to the mizbayach (altar), pounded her shoe on it and exclaimed, "Lukos, Lukos" - wolf, wolf (in Greek) - How long will you devour our nation's money?" (Referring to the korbonos (sacrifices), like a wolf who roams around searching for food). Upon hearing these words, the sages penalized her entire family of kohanim by placing various restrictions on them when they served in the Bais Hamikdash. Chazal explain that the reason why Miriam bas Bilga's family deserved this punishment is because her statements were a reflection of their feelings. During my teenage years, there was a family that lived down the block from us whose young children constantly used vulgar and obscene language in their conversations. When I asked my older sister when and how these young children learned to speak in this manner, she replied, "Just pass by their home when their parents are quarrelling and you will hear that they use exactly the same language when they are angry at each other."

Main point to work and focus on for the next week:

Since children observe and imitate their parents, parents must be more aware of what they do and say in front of their children.

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