

# THE ALEPH-BEIS OF RELATIONSHIPS

*by Rabbi Label Lam*

*And now it was not you who sent me here but G-d; He has set me as a father to Pharaoh... (Breishis 45:8)*

As a father: As a friend and as a patron. (Rashi)

The Maharal from Prague explains why Rashi includes both roles of "friend" and "patron". If he would have said "friend" alone then we would have been left with the misimpression that his relationship with Pharaoh was limited to being some kind of coequal. Therefore the term "patron" is employed which implies that he guided Pharaoh the way a father guides his child. The term "patron" is insufficient because that would signal that he, Yosef had some kind of authority over Pharaoh. Pharaoh was in fact the King and Yosef was his subject. The power of his influence was due to his "friendship" rather than legal authority. Therefore the description "patron" also needs also to be tempered by the term "friend".

In trying to understand the meaning of Rashi we may also have stumbled upon a clear definition and a reliable job description. What is the task of a father?

The Chovos HaLevavos writes the following unqualified "if" "then" formula for success in relationships: "If a person has a wife or relatives or friends or enemies he should rely on G-d that he will be saved from being overly busied and troubled by them. He should try to fulfill his obligations to them and satisfy their needs with a full heart, and he should not put his burdens upon them. He should be concerned about things that are good for them and he should be reliable to them in all their matters. He should teach them good and correct conduct in matters of Torah and matters of the world, that which will help them in the service of The Creator...And these good things that he does for them should not be so that he will receive a reward for this and not with the intention that they will help him when he will need their help, and not because he loves honor and he seeks the praise they will give him for this, and not to rule over them but rather his intention should be only to fulfill the

Mitzvos of his Creator, to keep His Torah, and to carry out his obligations to them. Anyone who is busy with their needs for any of these agendas will not achieve what he hopes to achieve in this world and his efforts will have been in vain and he will lose his reward in the next world. However, if he benefits others only with the intention to serve G- d, then G-d will help him so that goodness will redound to him in this world and He will place his praise in their mouths and He will increase his esteem in their eyes and he will have earned a great reward in the world to come."

It was 21 years ago that I asked a Rebbe of mine the secret of raising a wonderful Jewish family. He told me, "Don't get personally involved!" His words mystified my wife and me for a long while. We had one little baby at the time and he was the apple of our eye. Every gurgle was poetry. We had taken hundreds of rolls of film in the first few months alone. (We have no pictures of his brother, our second child, at that age.) Are we to be cold and distant? It took years to appreciate the profundity of his words.

Sometimes a parent has to be like a judge. Coolly banging the gavel and declaring, "Motion denied!" What about emotions!? Are they denied? No! I have a phrase, "Feelings are real to the feeler, but they don't rule." The good parent has to float like a boat. The boat is in the water, touching the waves, but not being pulled down into the water. If a boat is not equipped to be a submarine and it becomes submerged in the swirl of emotions, it's lost. The best part of the boat must float securely above the cries, focusing on what's best for the child. "I know you want xyz dear! The answer is still "NO!"

We can learn practically from Rashi's definition of an AV (Aleph-Beis). Yosef was both a friend to Pharaoh, and a guide. His ability to direct Pharaoh was not based upon legal leverage. He didn't have that type of authority. Rather it's an outgrowth of trust that develops when one senses that somebody is doing things for his good. Simply that's what a father does. It's also the **Aleph-Beis of relationships**!? DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).