

JUST FOLLOW THE LEADER

by Rabbi Label Lam

And HASHEM said to Moshe: 'Say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aaron, and you shall say to them: "To a (dead) person he shall not become impure among his people..."' (Vayikra 21:1)

Say to the Kohanim...and you shall say to them: The Torah uses the double expression of "say" followed by "and you shall say" to caution the adults with regard to the minors. (Rashi)

We understand that the Kohanim-The Priestly cast are to play an important role as living examples of holiness and purity for the entire nations. Therefore they are saddled with extra restrictions and responsibilities. Now we also discover here that the Kohain parents must make it clear to their children and see to it that they maintain their spiritual innocence as well. How are the Kohanim to accomplish this second task? Where is the manual for success in relating the holy work of one generation to the next?

The Gemorah (Yevamos 114A) indicates that the first "say" is directed at the adults to remain pure and be distant from contaminants while the 2nd "say to them" is a directive to the elders to see to it that the young also abide. How is that at all helpful?

Whenever a statement in Pirke' Avos is introduced with the words, "He used to say" - "Hu Haya Omer" the Rav Bartenura, explains it to mean that he said it frequently and repeatedly. It was not a one-time statement, a quotable moment at an inaugural address. Another explanation can be gleaned from the opposite of the following bizarre example:

A young doctor gave an amazingly clear presentation about the dangers associated with cigarette smoking. Everyone left the auditorium so inspired, informed, and impressed that it would be hard to imagine that anyone who witnessed the talk could ever touch one of those tobacco sticks. Yet the very next day that same doctor was spotted in the street dragging shamelessly on a cigarette.

When approached and reproached with both shock and dismay he responded in a cavalier fashion, in much the same way Bertrand Russel the world famous ethics professor did when he was caught in an uncompromising situation with a co-ed, he is reported to have retorted, "If I was a math professor, would you expect me to be a triangle?" So said this doctor, "What do you want from me? That was a lecture!" Whenever the Mishne says, "Hu Haya Omer-He used to say" it may be read

more literally, "He was what he spoke!"

In the 1st paragraph of "Shema" we recite twice daily, "and these words that I command you today you shall place on your heart", and then it states, "and you shall teach them to them to your children..." Why in that order? Children read the heart! They know if we are whole or half-hearted in what we preach. How else can they know whether we have first internalized the message we are delivering besides through the tone?

In the 2nd Paragraph of "Shema" which is also on the post of every door in a Jewish home it states, "Educate them to speak in them (words of Torah)", and now comes the "how", "with your sitting in your house and with your going on your way, and with your lying down and rising up." How do we teach them the way? The way we go about our business speaks louder than any lecture.

Children can instruct us more than adults on this subject. When asked, "How do you know whom to marry, 10 year old Alan answered, "You got to find somebody who likes the same stuff. Like, if you like sports, she should like it that you like sports, and she should keep the chips and dip coming." A middle aged man I was learning with decided that to honor his son's Bar Mitzva he would begin to put on Tefillin. His son turned to him with all earnest and said, "Dad, I want to do just like you! When I'm 46 I'm going to start putting on Tefillin too." We are all teaching by what we say and do and they **just follow the leader**. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).