

# CHINUCH: TRAINING FOR LIFE

*by Rabbi Osher Chaim Levene*

The Torah relates how Avraham involved his son Yishmael in preparing the food for his guests. The Jewish patriarch did this in order to educate him in the observance of mitzvot (Bereishis 18:7 and Rashi ad. loc).

There is a mitzvah of chinuch, to train and educate one's progeny in their formative years of childhood, despite the fact the obligation of mitzvah observance is only upon Jewish adults. This calls for to train and educate children in the ways of Torah living.

In the famous words of the wisest man, Chanoch l'naar al pi darko... "Train a child in the way he should go; when he matures, he will not deviate from it" (Mishlei 22:6).

What is the underlining nature of this mitzvah?

The word "chinuch", often translates as "training" or "education", actually means "inauguration" (Rashi, Bereishis 14:14). There is nothing as important as the inaugural stage. It establishes the precedent from where everything subsequently flows: "Everything follows after the origin" (Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer Ch.42). It is the map indicating the direction in which one is heading.

In the life of a Jew, chinuch is the basic introduction to Judaism for one's offspring.

Here a Jewish child experiences his induction to what Jewish living is all about. The lifelong held values and ideals of a Jew - such as good character traits, faith in G-d and pride in the Torah - are stamped upon the precious Jewish soul in his most impressionable developing years.

Where the child learns to speak, he is immediately taught to say "The Torah that Moshe commanded us is the inheritance of the Congregation of Yaakov" (Devarim 33:4). This verse is so special because its pronouncement beautifully captures what it is Jewish parents are setting out to achieve through their chinuch training.

They are conveying the treasured legacy each Jewish child inherits from the parents; how their child is the next link in the chain of mesorah, the Jewish tradition; a tradition nostalgically traced back to the forefathers.

Every Jewish child is a torchbearer.

Only through a successful "inauguration" can Jewish parents hope for the continuity of their Jewish living. Where Torah ideals are important to parents, they then become important to their children,

who follow their example. The child joyously accustomed and enthusiastic to a life of mitzvah observance is likely to elect to continue forward on this religious pathway once he enters adulthood.

Chinuch sets out to mold the child by correcting personality faults and rooting out bad traits. It arms a Jewish soul in his passage through life by providing him with the Torah outlook to successfully tackle life's vicissitudes, to love G-d and have an unswerving faith in Him to living the life of a Jew. The course is presented by Osher Chaim Levene, author of SET IN STONE (2004: Targum) about the meaning of mitzvah observance and PEOPLE OF THE BOOK (2007: Targum) about the biblical personalities. A London-based writer and educator, he learned at the Gateshead and Mir Yeshivas, holds a Bachelor of Science (Honors) business degree from London's City University, and is a Member of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors.