

GOING BEYOND THE CARROT

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

In Parshas Eikev we read the second section of the Shema. *"And it will be, that if you will diligently listen to My commandments... And you shall teach them to your children - to speak in them - while you sit in your home, while you walk on the way, when you retire and when you arise."* [11:13,19]

Mefarshim (Torah commentators) note the problematic wording of the above pasuk. The phrase "to speak in them" seems to be describing how we should teach our children: i.e. We should teach them in such a manner that they... Seemingly, then, the Torah should have continued, "When **they** sit in their homes; while **they** walk on the way; when **they** retire and when **they** arise."

Nachal Eliyahu explains that above pasuk deals not with the children's dedication to Torah study, but rather with the parents'. The most important aspect of chinuch (Torah education) - even more than what we teach our children - is how we conduct ourselves. As the oft quoted expression goes, "Children do as we do, not as we say." It is all very well for a parent to prod and encourage his child to excel in their studies - to learn diligently and energetically; to play less and learn more - but more often than not the deciding factor will be the parent's own behavior. Does he spend his spare time learning, or is there always something else to do? Does she encourage her husband to spend more hours studying Torah, or is it somehow the last item on the list? Is it clear to their children that their main preoccupation is with Torah - or does it sometimes seem that their real interests lie elsewhere (money and possessions, vacations and hobbies, keeping up with the news and keeping up with the Jones', and other untold distractions)?

Which parent hasn't told their child umpteen times, "Torah is the best schorah (merchandise)," and, "Tov li Toras fichu - The Torah of Your mouth is better for me, than thousands in gold and silver." (Tehillim/Psalms 119:72) Little do we realize just how perceptive their little minds are at determining if we really mean what we say, or if it's no more than lip service. Not to say that every child is a born cynic, critically analyzing everything he's taught. Many children willingly accept things at face value. But only those lessons which have been reinforced through the lessons of life - which children learn from observing and interacting with those around them - will truly withstand the "test of time."

And you shall teach them to your children. What is the best and most effective way to teach them? By speaking in them - when **you** sit in your house; while **you** go on your way; when **you** retire and when **you** arise. (See also Olas Shabbos Volume 12 Issue 42 Torah Education - Starting With the Best Materials which addresses this issue at length.)

I once saw another explanation of the above pasuk. Education doesn't simply mean getting a child to do something - to learn, pray, review, etc. Using appropriate and timely positive and negative reinforcement, it is relatively easy to make a child do as we please. With a combination of threats and/or incentives, all but the most stubborn child can be had, at least temporarily.

But true education is so much more. It means getting the student to want to do something - to love to learn, and to want to pray with dedication. Humans can not be and will never be trained mice. In the long run, we pursue those matters for which we have gained a true appreciation, and disdain things for which we have gained little respect. What this means is that even the most diligent student, if his education has consisted primarily of acting and learning through incentives, but has never been encouraged to go beyond the incentives and gain an appreciation of Torah for its own sake, has gained very little. His parents and teachers may pat themselves on the back - after all, he is a model student. But a time will come when there are no more incentives, no more prizes or punishments - no more carrots.

The Torah stresses that a parent/teacher/rebbe can not take pride simply because their children/students are good **while they are around**. Our task is to help our children and students acquire a love for Torah such that even when we're not there, their dedication remains steadfast. And you shall teach them to your children - not just teaching in the conventional sense, but rather to teach them to speak in them - even when, you - the educator, sit in your home, while you walk on the way, when you retire and when you arise - and you're not there to prod and prompt, to arouse and encourage, still their behavior bespeaks that of a Torah Jew.

It is essential that every educator - parent and teacher alike - ask himself: Am I an educator, or a policeman? What goes on when I'm not around? Am I the wise sage, or just the carrot-holder? Granted, without those good-old incentives, children can sometimes deteriorate into an unruly bunch. But are we at least making an effort to go beyond the carrot?

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