

YOU CAN SAY THAT AGAIN!

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

Parshas Emor begins with a warning to the Kohanim, the Priests of the nation, to guard themselves from ritual impurity:

"Speak to the Kohanim, the sons of Aaron, and say to them: [You] shall not contaminate [yourselves] to the soul of a dead person... (21:1)"

Rashi notes an apparent redundancy in the pasuk (verse), **"Speak to the Kohanim, and say to them..."** Why doesn't the Torah simply state, "Say to the Kohanim...?"

Rashi comments that the redundancy comes to teach us an additional law regarding ritual purity:

"It comes to caution the adults regarding the youth (Le- hazhir ha-gedolim al ha-ketanim)."

Since there are young Kohanim who might not be yet capable of guarding themselves from ritual impurity, the responsibility to do so is placed upon the shoulders of the adults of the priestly community.

The simple explanation is that this lesson is derived from the extra wording, "and you shall say to them..." Since there is nothing superfluous in the Torah, each apparent redundancy must come to teach us an additional lesson which we otherwise might not have known. In this case it comes to teach us the need for the elder Kohanim to watch over the youngsters.

Perhaps, however, we could suggest a different understanding of how the redundancy teaches us this lesson. When watching over the young, it is important that the elders remember that one warning is not always enough. The nature of the young is such that they often require many warnings and cautionings. "Speak... and say to them - To caution the adults regarding the children," i.e. to forewarn the elders that when caring for the youth, they may sometimes have to "speak" and "say" things again and again.

In a more general sense, mefarshim (Torah commentators) apply the concept of "To caution the elders regarding the children" to all aspects and facets of chinuch (Torah education). The first thing a mechanech (a provider of chinuch) - whether teacher or parent - must realize, is that children must be taught using methods which are age- appropriate.

When instructing an adult, we expect to teach something once. One doesn't have to repeat oneself over and over again. When teaching children, we have to bear in mind with whom we are dealing; children are not adults, and they're not on our level. They are not likely to integrate lessons as

quickly or as efficiently as we might hope.

The lesson of "Speak... and say" must be applied to our methods when providing our children with a Torah chinuch. We may often have to say things over and over again. Don't expect things to sink in all at once. Chinuch is all about repetition. That's to be expected, and it's part-and-parcel of educating children. Lessons must be enforced, re-enforced, and doubly re-enforced, until, eventually, they reach their mark.

Every parent and every teacher has experienced the frustration of having given a "major speech," elaborating on some aspect of good manners, Torah values, etc., only to find - moments later - his children/students doing the exact thing he has just spent so much time and effort teaching them not to do. Where, we ask, are the results? Have all our carefully chosen words fallen on deaf ears? Was our derasha (speech) a colossal waste of time and energy?

No. Chinuch is a gradual process. It is the integration of Torah values, middos tovos (positive character traits), derech eretz (good manners) et al into everyday life. This integration will (usually) not occur as the result of a "one-timer," powerful though it may be. Change, especially in children, takes lots of time, and lots of patience.

Think back to your own childhood. More than anything, we recall those lessons we were taught over and over again; stories we heard more times than we'd like to remember. Yet these very lessons are now engrained in our minds - they have become part of our psyche; they are us.

The Gemara tells the story of Yehoshua ben Chananya, who, as an infant, his mother would wheel him in a stroller to the study hall every day, so that his ears would absorb the Torah being learned there. Eventually, he emerged as one of the greatest Talmudic Sages of his generation. His mother understood that chinuch isn't just an occasional powerful lesson. Rather it is the constant and consistent exposure to Torah values and middos tovos that plants the seeds of Torah within the young.

If our home environment is one which re-enforces and bespeaks Torah values and good middos, these values will slowly (sometimes very slowly) but surely seep into the moral fibre of our children. There comes a day when parents find themselves pleasantly surprised to observe that so many things they were sure had no effect on their children, have in fact become a part of them. This is what chinuch is all about: Constantly, consistently, and firmly conveying to our young the values, ideals, and concepts that mean so much to us.

"Speak... and say." When dealing with the young, we must constantly remind ourselves the lesson of "Emor... ve-amarta." Lessons sink in with time. Be patient. Be consistent. Above all, don't give up. And you will find (hopefully!) that the values which matter to you, about which you speak (and speak...), and which you bespeak, will indeed find themselves in your progeny.

Text Copyright © 1999 Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann and **Project Genesis, Inc.**
