

# LEAVING A TRUE LEGACY BEHIND

*by Rabbi Pinchas Winston*

*And God spoke to Moshe, after the death of the two sons of Aharon, when they drew near before God and died. (Vayikra 16:1)*

This will be the 3,323rd seder the Jewish people will have celebrated since the first one we made back in Egypt. For a while, we didn't have such a complete Haggadah to follow as we do today. However, from the beginning, a central part of the Seder has always been what to tell the next generation about what we do and why.

I wonder how many times the average person uses the word 'legacy' throughout the course of his lifetime. Until it became the name of a car, probably almost no times at all. Until people approach death, they don't really think much in terms of their legacies, which is a little late to ponder such an all-important issue.

What is a legacy? It can be a few things, but in this context, it is something—either good or bad—passed on from one generation to the next. Indeed, it is often used to refer to the positive accomplishments of an individual for which he will be remembered, and the benefits that may remain, long after he has gone from this world.

It's as if a person lives on through his legacy. Leave this world without a positive legacy and you leave it for good, until eventually even children can forget the day they lost a parent, and how much more so if the legacy left behind is a negative one.

Yarzheits force people to constantly recall the death of relatives, and therefore, they invoke memories. What will be remembered about the deceased relative? That is the person's legacy, and as it is recalled on earth, so is it recalled in Heaven, which is anxious to see if the person being recalled was good PR or bad PR for God, Torah, and mitzvos.

What is the ultimate legacy for a Jew? To be a solid link in the unbroken chain of Jewish tradition. To make sure that what was started by Avraham continues on through you and your line:

*And Avram said, "God, what will You give me, seeing that I go childless, and he that shall possess my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" Avram said: "Behold, to me You have given no seed, and now one born in my house is to be my heir."*

And, behold, the word of God came to him, saying: "This man shall not be your heir, but he who shall come forth out of your own bowels shall be your heir." (Bereishis 15:2-4)

What was Avraham worried about? That all of his physical property would be inherited by the chief of his house? Unlikely, since Avraham's main concerns were not material, but spiritual. If his entire life was devoted to getting mankind to recognize God as King of the Universe, obviously his greatest concern was that his work would have been for naught if it died with him, and Eliezer was not the one, apparently, to continue on where he left off with that mission. He needed a Yitzchak to continue his spiritual legacy.

Nadav and Avihu mentioned at the beginning of the parshah, apparently, had not been good links, so they were removed from the chain, having died childless, since they had delayed getting married. Likewise, the end of the parshah is concerned with illicit and immoral relationships, because such relationships are for the sake of producing the next generation of links in the chain. How can any child be that if born of an illicit relationship, and how can a sexual relationship be sanctioned if not for this purpose?

So chinuch banim, the education of children, becomes a hugely important mitzvah and given top priority in Judaism. Unlike with respect to Western society, in which the education of children is primarily to make them financially self-sufficient and capable of adhering to Society's laws, Torah education goes a few steps further. This is why, in the Torah world, the parents tend to play a far more active role in the education of their children than they do in the secular world.

For, a Torah Jew is a man or woman with a mission, something that is made clear from an early age. Avraham ignited something in his lifetime, and it almost was extinguished in Egypt through 210 years of Jewish exile. Yetzias Mitzrayim, the entire process of redemption from Egypt, reignited that flame once again, and the torch has been passed on from generation to generation, at least through the families that have kept the message alive.

Message? Which message? It's in the story of the four sons:

The Torah speaks of four children: One is wise, one is wicked, one is simple and one does not know how to ask. The wise one, what does he say? "What are the testimonies, the statutes and the laws which the Lord, our God, has commanded you?" You, in turn, shall instruct him in the laws of Passover, [up to] "one is not to eat any dessert after the Passover-lamb."

The wicked one, what does he say? "What is this service to you?!" He says "to you," but not to him! By thus excluding himself from the community he has denied that which is fundamental. You, therefore, blunt his teeth and say to him: "It is because of this that the Lord did for me when I left Egypt"; "for me," but not for him! If he had been there, he would not have been redeemed!"

The simple son, what does he say? "What is this?" Thus you shall say to him: "With a strong hand God took us out of Egypt, from the house of slaves."

As for the one who does not know how to ask, you must initiate him, as it is said: "You shall tell your child on that day, 'It is because of this that God did for me when I left Egypt.' "

It's about becoming a link in the chain. The Wise Son asks to be included, whereas the Evil Son excludes himself. He takes a step back and says, "Hey, this may work for you, but it doesn't work for me. I don't relate." Like many before him and after him, he may continue to make a Seder for tradition's sake, but it will cease to act as a link in the chain, and become merely a family affair.

The Wise Son says, "Count me in. Fill me in. Let me know what I have to know so that I can keep this legacy alive. This may entail sacrifices, but without such sacrifices, without being part of a legacy, how can my life be ultimately meaningful?" When children say such a thing, parents can smile to themselves and rest assured that they have created a legacy, that they have been the link in the chain that they were meant to be.

So, we tell such children everything. We transfer our baggage to them. Not the negative emotional baggage. Unfortunately that happens whether we want to or not whether we try to or not. It is the spiritual consciousness of what it means to be a human being, a Jew, a link in the unbroken chain of Jewish tradition that is most difficult to pass over to children, because whereas the former is automatically absorbed by just living together, the latter is quite intellectual.

Being so, children need time to develop before they can buy into their parents' spiritual approach to life. It could take 25 years before they appreciate their parents' priorities in life, if at all. Therefore, in order to make sure it happens, hopefully sooner than later, but certainly later, they have to plant a time capsule of sorts.

But it is not a regular time capsule. It might contain books and essays like other time capsules, but it contains lifestyle mostly. Children are, either consciously or unconsciously, like video cameras. They see everything we do, how we act and how we react. And they record it somewhere in their minds and their hearts, and at the right time well into the future, once they're forced to face the same life situations their parents once had to face, the camera will flip on in Playback mode.

"My father used to do this ..." the child-turned-adult recalls. "My mother would say this ..." the daughter might recall, duplicating something that she might have ridiculed when she was too young to understand, but now, appreciating its importance, performs it with the same love and sensitivity she once saw her mother display.

That's legacy. A person can live until 120 years of age—and die leaving no legacy, making it as if he never existed. A person can build monuments to himself, but they will only matter to the pigeons after he is long gone if what he started wasn't worth continuing. But a person can die young, God

forbid, and be eternal he left something eternal behind.

*"For the living know that they shall die" (Koheles 9:5): these are the righteous who in their death are called living ... "But the dead know nothing" (Shmuel 2:23:20): these are the wicked who in their lifetime are called dead. (Brochos 18a)*

How can a person who is physically dead still be considered alive? Why would a person who is physically alive be considered dead?

It all comes down to what you consider to be life and what you consider to be death. Here's how the Torah defines both:

*I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Therefore choose life that you may live, you and your seed, to love God your God, to listen to His voice and to cleave to Him. For that is your life and the length of your days, so that you may dwell in the land which God swore to your fathers, to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Ya'akov, to give them. (Devarim 30:19-20)*

After all, what brought death into the world in the first place? The distance created between man and God from the first sin back in the Garden of Eden. Separation from God is like pulling the plug of an electrical appliance out of an electrical socket. Won't it die?

Cleaving to God is life itself. But, not just the kind that keeps the body functioning, but the kind of life that allows a person to live beyond his physical limitations so that even after his body has expired his life has not. That is a person's true legacy.

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