Jewish Tribune – Vayeira

**Do as I do…**

The story is told of a mechanech here in London who taught at JFS. It was a winter’s day and he was unable to attend the one minyan for mincha in lunchtime. He therefore made his way to the Beis Hamedrash later in the afternoon to daven Mincha b’yichidus.

The lights in the room were off and the sun was setting; its last rays meekly streaming through the high windows. Just as he lowered his head onto his forearm as we do during Tachanun in the presence of a sefer Torah, a student walked into the room and was stunned by the sight.

His teacher was silently praying in a position of submission, humility and sincerity. He was so taken by the image that he later recalled that this image of his teacher displaying simple yet sincere Yiras Shomayim, was the catalyst to him becoming frum.

Talmidim and children can smell sincerity a mile away.

Avrohom Ovinu is the paradigm of chesed and displays exemplary hachnosos orchim when he welcomes three strangers to his home at the beginning of this week’s sedra.

The Gemara in Bava Metzia 86b tells us that whatever Avrohom did for his guests himself, personally, Hashem likeswise did for Klal Yisrael Himself later in history. But whatever Avrohom did through a shliach, an agent, Hashem likewise did for Klal Yisrael only through a shliach.

Therefore, when Avrohom asked his son Yishmoel to bring water to his guests and did not attend to this personally, Hashem used a shliach generations later to reward this action and did not do so directly.

But why slight Avraham for this? Chazal tell us that he involved Yishmael in order to train him in the performance of mitzvos[[1]](#footnote-1)!?

The answer I once heard from R’ Noach Schwartz in the name of Rav Lipa Rabinowitz (a well-known educator formerly of Manchester and now in Yerushalayim) points to the secret of excellence in parenting and chinuch.

If we want to train children to do something, it is far more effective to role model this behaviour ourselves than instruct our children to do so. If Avrohom would have brought the water himself, it would have made more of an impression on Yishmael than instructing him to do so.

This is a wonderful idea and a powerful and important lesson. If we want our children to learn, daven, be sensitive and thoughtful, then we need to model this behaviour. Children see through insincerity very quickly. They detect passion in Yiddishkeit or the lack thereof. As ever, effective parenting and chinuch begins with us and not our children and requires honesty and introspection.

At Hasmonean, when I interview new Kodesh staff, that is always a top consideration. Will they be role models? Is there a passion? Boruch Hashem, we are blessed with a dream team of passionate and outstanding role models in the boys’ and girls’ school.

Rabbi Bixenspanner said a beautiful vort on Shabbos Shuva a few years ago. The Torah teaches us that men, women and children came to Hakhel. The Gemoro in Chagiga 3a asks: if men come to learn and women come to listen, “taf lomoh bo’in”? Why do the children come? Rabbi Bixenspanner explained that if a child has a father who genuinely comes to learn and does so with excitement and commitment and has a mother who comes to listen with passion and modesty, “taf lomoh bo’in”, why bring the children? there is no need! They see sincerity and love for Yiddishkeit at home on a daily basis and don’t need the experience of Hakhel.

The lesson is clear. We have to practise what we preach. Each and every one of us, parents and teachers alike, have to serve as exemplary role models to our children. This is the surest way of conveying the beauty of our heritage to the next generation.

**Rabbi Golker is the Menahel of Hasmonean High School. To listen to his shiurim, go to TorahAnytime.com or JewishPodcasts.Org**

1. see Rashi - Bereishis 18,7 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)