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**The Power of Love**

When is the first time the word אהבה (love), appears in the Torah? It’s worth spending a few moments thinking about this.

In the 1960’s, Harvard Psychology Professor Robert Rosenthal claimed he could identify which students would experience an intellectual growth spurt in the upcoming school year.

All students in a certain Californian primary school were given an IQ test. These scores were not disclosed to the teachers. Rosenthal then randomly chose 20% of the students and gave their names to the teachers and told them that these students could be expected to be “intellectual bloomers” that year, doing better than expected in comparison with their classmates.

At the end of the year, all students were again tested with the same IQ tests used at the beginning of the year. Amazingly, the randomly chosen “intellectual bloomers” performed better and did indeed experience significant gains over the year compared to their fellow students.

The conclusion drawn was that teacher expectations can influence student achievement. High expectations lead to better performances and low expectations lead to worse. It is almost a self-fulfilling prophecy. Students internalise the labels and succeed accordingly.

Rosenthal believed that even attitude or mood could positively affect the students when the teacher was made aware of the "bloomers". The teacher may pay closer attention to and even treat the child differently in times of difficulty.

Now back to our question. When is the first time the word אהבה (love), appears in the Torah?

The answer is this week’s parsha: קַח נָא אֶת בִּנְךָ אֶת יְחִידְךָ אֲשֶׁר **אָהַבְתָּ** אֶת יִצְחָק. Hashem instructs Avraham to take his son Yitzchak, “whom you love” and offer him up as a sacrifice.

The second time the word אהבה is used in the Torah is in next week’s parsha: וַיִּקַּח אֶת רִבְקָה וַתְּהִי לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה **וַיֶּאֱהָבֶהָ**. Yitzchak marries Rivka and “loves her”.

The third time the word אהבה is used in the Torah is in the parsha after that in describing the love of Yitzchak and Rivka for their children:**וַיֶּאֱהַב** יִצְחָק אֶת עֵשָׂו ... וְרִבְקָה **אֹהֶבֶת** אֶת יַעֲקֹב.

My brother in law, Rabbi Jeremy Finn, has recently published a wonderful sefer called “The Heart of the Parsha”. In a piece on this week’s parsha, he cites Rabbi YY Jacobson who makes an insightful and powerful observation.

As Yitzchak had been the recipient of love, he knew how to love others. Since Avraham had shown love to Yitzchak, Yitzchak was able to show love to Rivka and because she received her husband’s love, she, in turn, was able to love her son Yaakov.

The Torah is teaching us that if we want our children to grow up as loving, productive and well-balanced members of society, we need to show them love. Our children will not know how to love unless they have experienced being loved.

This needs effort and needs us to be proactive in our relationships. Showing our children that we love them will not only build them, but will help them in their relationships too.

And not just in our homes; these lessons can be applied in the classroom, in the workplace and beyond. Showing and expressing our care and love, having high expectations and believing in our students, family members, employees and others we come in contact with, raises the bar. It makes them more likely to perform better, meet those higher expectations and, in turn, they will project those feelings outward even further.

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