

A Father, A Rebbe

Parshas Yisro

by Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

It is axiomatic that a teacher's stringent posture of a super authority must mellow with acts of courtesy and sympathetic consideration, in order to have impact. In Torah ideology, however, more is required. The instructor must have the talent to create in the classroom an aura of a home, in which he is the father, giving loving guidance to his children. When the Al-mighty revealed Himself to Moshe at the burning bush, He spoke to him in the voice of his, Moshe's, father (Midrash Raba Shemos 3:1). It may be assumed that this was so not only during the initial calling upon Moshe, but continued throughout the process of redemption and later when the Torah was given. A father's voice constitutes a voice of love and compassion. A father not only instructs but raises a child. A teacher with parental sensitiveness not only shares his wisdom but affectionately gives his inner self, as if genetically, to his student. "And thine eyes shall behold thy teacher (Isaiah 30:20). This means that it is not sufficient to hear a lecture, but to see the Rebbe, to keep him before one's eyes and to take the Rebbe unto himself.

When Joshua was appointed the next leader and teacher, Moshe was told "And thou shalt give of thy glory upon him" (Bamidbar 27:20). This is more than instruction. It is an inner quality, an inner majesty and augustness, which can be bestowed after a lifetime of bequeathing Torah to a student one raised. "And his attendant, Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tent" (Shemos 33:11). The tent was Joshua's home.

To a certain extent all of Klal Yisroel were children of Moshe. For he taught them not as a mere instructor, but as a father guiding his children. At one point, when the Israelites demonstrated their discontent with the Manna, Moshe, in a mood of despair, cried to the Al-mighty: "Why ... that Thou layest the burden of all this people upon me. Have I conceived all the people, or have I begotten them, that Thou sayest to me, 'Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing-father

bearth the sucking child, unto the land which Thou hast sworn unto their fathers" (Bamidbar 11:11, 12). Now where in the Torah is such a command given to Moshe to carry them as a nursing-father? The answer is clear. It is in the task assigned to him to be a Rebbe. For to be a Rebbe is not merely to impart one's insights, but to offer his inner self to his disciples. The Ohr Hachayim (ibid.) adds that Moshe did not say, "Am I a father to them?" For indeed he was! Moshe knew that his responsibilities to them are that of a father to his children. He was aware of the Talmudic teaching that "one who teaches Torah to his friend's son is as if he had given birth to him." Moshe accepted these responsibilities happily. It was their demands above their real needs that he complained about.

The benediction "Ahava Rabba", prior to the recital of Shema, is a form of a Bracha for Torah Study. If a Bracha for study was not recited until after Shacharis it should not be recited anymore, because the obligation has been fulfilled by reciting "Ahava Rabba" (Brochos 11b). In this benediction there is much emphasis on paternal love with which Torah is accorded to us. It is with this fatherly voice, loving and patient, that every instructor can succeed in raising students for Torah.

Conversely, teaching Torah is in itself a manifestation of greatest love. Bilaam said to Balak: "there will be a time when G-d's love for Israel will be demonstrated to all as they will be sitting before Him and learn Torah from His mouth..." (Rashi Bamidbar 23:23). In order, thus, to gain a child's genuine respect, a father must become his Rebbe. While the teacher must assume the father image, the father must assume the Rebbe image. The child has a natural need to see his father in that capacity. He needs to see his father and his mother in the role of teachers, in order to revere them. In the Hagadah of Pesach the father is advised to give attention to his wise son: "And you, too, should tell him." In addition to many sources open to the wise son to enlighten him, he is in need to hear particularly from his father, whom he is desirous to see in the role of instructor.

The rabbis say (Kidushin 31a): When the nations heard the beginning of the Decalogue they thought all the Mitzvoths are only for the honor of the Al-mighty. As soon as they heard the Mitzvah of honoring father and mother, they were more appreciative of the other laws. Herein dwells a crucial teaching for us Jews as well. The Mitzvah of honoring parents affords us the realization that the Al-mighty gave us the Mitzvoths, as a loving Father, in order to uplift us to sublime heights of a meaningful and sanctified life. KABAID in the context of the Decalogue enlightens us that the Mitzvah of honoring parents is contingent upon the other Mitzvoths. Only by raising our children for Mitzvoths, and conveying to them Torah depths, becoming their spiritual mentors and guides, can we enjoy receiving from them honor and reverence.