**Parenting from the Parsha- Parshat Acharei Mot/Kedoshim- Transmitting Our Values**

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This week’s parsha features one of the most well-known pesukim in the Torah. Among the myriad of commandments given to Bnei Yisrael in Parshat Kedoshim, HaShem commands "ואהבת לרעך כמוך", “and you shall love your fellow as yourself”. Much has been written about this incredibly important Mitzvah, as the Torah’s expectation seems almost unfair and unrealistic. But I would like to focus on a seemingly innocuous observation made by Rashi. Commenting on this pasuk, Rashi quotes the Midrash, אמר רבי עקיבא זה כלל גדול בתורה, “Rabbi Akiva says, this is a great rule in the Torah”.

As we consider the juxtaposition of this passuk and Midrash to the Sefirat Haomer period in which we currently find ourselves, an important question emerges. Generations ago, Sefirat Haomer was transformed into a time of mourning due to the fact that, during this period, 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva died in a plague. The Gemara explains that that they perished because “they failed to treat each other with respect”. In light of these facts, many commentaries raise an obvious question. How could Rabbi Akiva, whose “great rule” was the commandment of “love your fellow as yourself”, produce 24,000 students who perished because they did not respect each other? How could Rabbi Akiva have failed to pass down to his students the one commandment that was, in his view, the most foundational commandment of all?

While the commentaries offer a number of suggestions to this conundrum, I would like to share a suggestion that my father makes in his book Unlocking the Torah Text Vayikra pgs. 204-05. I believe his thought underscores an important message for us as parents. My father suggests that the contrast between Rabbi Akiva’s main belief and the actions of his students “reflect the universal challenge of intergenerational transmission”. Very often, we as parents assume that the core beliefs and ideas that form our worldview and are so obvious to us will automatically be passed down to our children. We are under the impression that something that is fundamentally important to us will be instinctively important to our children as well, without it needing to be taught openly and actively. After all, if it is obvious to us, shouldn’t be it be obvious to our children as well?

However, this mistaken assumption fails to take into account the reality that our children are fundamentally different than us, and that they grow up in a vastly different reality and world than we grew up in. Therefore, those issues or values that we consider to be a vital part of our value system may not be an automatic value in the eyes of our children, who may see the world from a very different vantage point than we do.

Perhaps, suggests my father, herein lies the answer to our question regarding Rabbi Akiva. Perhaps Rabbi Akiva was under the mistaken impression that since the need to love one’s peers was so obvious to him, and was so central to his Torah worldview, it would be automatically obvious to his students as well-that there was no need for him to spend time focusing on it explicitly. There lay his mistake- not understanding the need to actively verbalize and teach even those values that appeared to him to be self-evident.

We have mentioned a number of times in the past that our children learn more from how we act than from what we say- that who we are as people impacts upon our kids much more than the things we tell them. However, this lesson from Rabbi Akiva adds an important proviso. While our actions may speak louder than our words; at the same time, our actions are not enough. We cannot assume that all of our values and principles will be automatically passed down to our kids through osmosis. We must actively and consciously engage our children in issues and ideas that we feel are important for them to consider and hopefully live by. We cannot assume that our children will grow up with the same convictions that we did- and we must be vigilant about actively relaying to our kids those values and ideas that we hold dear.

Wishing everyone a Shabbat Shalom!

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