



**RABBI AARON**

Editor, Torah Tidbits

**GOLDSCHIEDER**

# Dialogue Between Generations

Rabbi Elan Adler served as the dorm counselor at Yeshiva University's High School dormitory of M.T.A (Manhattan Talmudic Academy) in the late 1970s - mid 1980s. During this same time he served in the prestigious role of one of the *shamashim* of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik. In this capacity he would spend many hours in the afternoon with the Rav in his apartment attending to his needs and offering any needed assistance.

One year, in his role as the dormitory head he was supervising a particularly difficult group of young men. In general they were having a very hard time with their Judaism and their observance. Rabbi Adler brought these students to meet the Rav and offer his students the opportunity to ask whatever they wished of the eminent sage.

The Rav cordially invited them into his apartment. They sat around the living room and began to ask the Rav questions. At one point a student asked, "Why did those guys so long ago make so many rules and regulations?" The Rav paused for a moment, and he calmly said: "Of course, you are welcome to ask any question... and

it is completely fair to challenge and analyze any part of Judaism and Jewish law. But I have one request. When you refer to the rabbis of old, please refrain from using the term "those guys." We as Jews have a special term that we use when quoting the Sages. They are called *Chazal*, or even more precisely, the "*Chachmei Hamesorah*." (As heard from Rabbi Elan Adler).

This exchange between the Rav and the students offers us a poignant glimpse into the cherished place that the principle of *Mesorah* played in the world view of the Rav. Perhaps more than any other theme in Jewish life, the Rav continuously underscored this idea.

In this same vein the Rav pointed out that the primary role of a parent is to be a teacher and conveyor of the tradition to the next generation. This idea, said the Rav, can be deduced by contrasting the names chosen for the first humans and the first Jew.

The Torah tells us that "The man called his wife's name Eve (*Chava*) because she was the mother of all living things" (*Chai*) (*Beresheet* 3:20). But man's name is not identified with fatherhood; he is called *adam* or *ish*, but not *av*. His role as a father was not portrayed symbolically by his name, while Eve's role as mother was; nothing reflects Adam's task as a father. In contradiction the name of Abraham reflects his role as father. The Torah emphasizes that the first two letters of his name relate to his role as

av, father (Family Redeemed, p.105).

“Within the first community, founded by Adam, the father’s role is of such minimal significance that it is not worth being demonstrated by the name...With the emergence of Abraham and the founding of a new community, the coventatal one, the vague role of fatherhood and the all-absorbing experience of motherhood were redeemed...What is fatherhood in the coventatal society? It is the great educational commitment to the *Mesorah*...to pass on to the child the covenant, a message, a code, a unique way of life...” (Ibid. p. 106-107).

Avraham possessed the unique ability to deliver a message to his offspring. Strikingly, it was this distinctive quality that God found most precious in His eyes: “For I have known him because he commands his sons and his household after him, that they should keep the way for the Lord to perform righteousness and justice...” (*Bereshit* 18:19). The Rav commented on a key term in this verse: *yetzave*, “to command.” According to the Rambam, the word *mitzvah* means not only a command, but also alludes to the term *tzava’ah* (will). In general we are familiar with the kind of will in which a parent leaves material wealth and belongings to a child. But here the *pasuk* speaks of a spiritual will in which a parent passes on the mandate to live a life in the *derech Hashem* (God’s way). (Chumash Mesoras HaRav, Bereshit, p.121)

In a remarkably personal disclosure the Rav shared his own ‘spiritual will’ of sorts with his children. His son in law, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein zt”l rendered the Rav’s message in this way:

“If asked, upon his arrival in the

afterworld, to delineate his claim to eternal life, he would point to three factors: (1) He studied Torah with his children, (2) he had founded the Maimonides School in Boston, and (3) he had for a very long time, assumed responsibility for the economic solvency of an eminent talmid *chacham*.” (Leaves of Faith, Vol. 1, p. 229).

Each item mentioned by the Rav is worthy of close study. Although, perhaps we can suggest that all three items share a common theme; namely, *Mesorah*. The Rav, following in the footsteps of the forefather Avraham, was resolute in passing the teachings of Torah to his own family and to the Jewish children of his community. And when the Rav eulogized the *talmid chacham* he secretly supported, he exquisitely classified him as a rabbi who exemplified “one of the remnants of the scribes of Israel. The eminent Rabbi Chaim Heller zt”l, said the Rav, bridged the gap of generations. “In every generation we meet, miraculously, the soul of an ancient generation planted in the present...” (Shiurei HaRav, p. 52).

- It is an essential part of Jewish life to interact with past generations and link our lives with the treasured worlds of the yesteryear.
- It is spiritually exhilarating to experience the dialogue between generations and the rhythm of continuity.
- A Jew who recognizes his/her indispensable place in the chain of tradition is inspired to invest time and effort to be the conveyer of Torah to the next generation. ■

רפואה שלמה דוד חנוך בן יהודית איטה