



TOWARDS MEANINGFUL PARENTING

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Teaching Chessed To Our Children: Lessons from Avraham Avinu

The Torah is not only a record of history — it is a guide for life, including how we raise and educate our children. One striking example is Avraham Avinu, who mastered the middah of chessed and carefully taught it to the next generation. Even while still recovering from his Brit Milah, Avraham sat at the entrance of his tent, attentively watching for travelers in need of hospitality. When he finally saw guests approaching, the Torah describes his immediate and thoughtful response: he ran out to greet them, offered them water to wash their feet, and invited them to rest under the tree. Bereishit 18:6-8 then details his purposeful and swift actions in preparing to serve them.

וַיָּמַהֵר אַבְרָהָם הָאֵלֶּלֶּה, אֶל-שָׂרָה; וַיֹּאמֶר, מִהֲרִי שְׁלֹשׁ סָאִים קֶמַח סִלָּת--לוֹשִׁי, וְעֹשִׂי עֲגוֹת. וְאֶל-הַבֶּקָר, רֹצֵעַ אַבְרָהָם; וַיִּקַּח בֶּן-בִּקָּר רֶדֶד וְטוֹב, וַיִּתֵּן אֶל-הַנַּעֲרָה, וַיִּמְהַר, לַעֲשׂוֹת אוֹתוֹ. וַיִּקַּח חֲמֵצָה וְחֵלֶב, וַיִּבֶן-הַבֶּקָר אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה, וַיִּתֵּן, לַפְּנִיָּהִם.

Avraham hurried into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Quickly, make three seahs of fine flour into kneaded cakes." And he ran to the herd, and took a tender and good calf, and gave it to the young man, and he (the young man) hurried to prepare it. Avraham also took butter

and milk, and the calf that had been prepared, and set it before them.

Rashi explains: "אל הנער" - זה ישמעאל לחנכו במצות — the "young man" whom Avraham instructed to prepare the calf was none other than his son Yishmael. According to Rashi, Avraham deliberately involved Yishmael so that he could learn and be trained in performing mitzvot.

One may ask, why doesn't Avraham teach Yishmael at the very start of the mitzvah, instead of midway through it? The lesson is clear: to educate a child, the parent must first perform the mitzvah themselves. Only after demonstrating proper behavior should the parent involve the child. Examples in action have a far greater impact than verbal instruction alone.

Indeed, Yishmael internalized the mitzvah and carried it out with the same urgency and care as his father: "וימהר [הנער] לעשות אותו" — *"And the young man hurried to do it"*

On the other hand, if a parent simply instructs the child from a chair — "Welcome the guests," "Set the table," and so on — without first modeling the behavior, this is not true education. It is mere obedience training.

The child learns to follow orders, but not the deeper value of the mitzvah.

Notice how the story unfolds as a true family project: Sarah prepares the cakes, Yishmael prepares the calf, and Avraham serves the meal to the guests. Each family member has a role, contributing to a single act of chessed. This structure not only ensures the task is accomplished efficiently, but it also teaches children responsibility, participation, and the value of working together for a mitzvah.

Children learn best when they see acts of kindness in action. Modeling chessed in daily life — whether helping a neighbor, giving tzedakah, or offering support to a friend — provides a living blueprint for our children.

We see this principle in action in more recent times as well. Rabbi Mordechai and Henny Machlis famously hosted over 100 people at every Shabbat meal in their home. Their daughter, Elisheva Rosenthal, comes every year to speak to the OU Israel Bat Mitzvah program. She shares with the girls how growing up in such a home shaped her own passion for chessed. Each child in the family had a specific role in preparing for the massive Shabbat meals. Elisheva recalls that it never felt like a burden; rather, the

children felt needed, important, and part of a larger act of kindness.

Many times, parents debate whether to take on more chessed. After all, how will it impact the family? Will there be less time to devote to the kids? Following this model, however, we can turn chessed into a family project. In doing so, our children not only do not lose out — they gain so much in responsibility, empathy, and in building their own middah of chessed.

In conclusion, the story of Avraham, Sarah, and Yishmael, together with the real-life example of Rebbetzin Henny Machlis's family, reminds us that chessed is best learned through doing, not just watching. Parents who model, guide, and actively involve their children in chessed teach more effectively than words alone ever could. ■

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