

IMPRESSIONS

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Because Teachers Leave a Lasting Imprint

Shalom Aleichem

By Chana Nestlebaum

It was a long trek from the man's village in the far reaches of the Land of Israel to Yerushalayim, where he was headed with his *bikkurim*. The excitement had worn off miles ago, and now the man was filled with nothing more than a desire to get there already.

In each place along his route, everyone he passed—even hired workers in the middle of their tasks—stood up to greet him with a jubilant “Shalom Aleichem!” Instantly his weariness disappeared, replaced by the feeling of exultation. His arrival had been eagerly awaited. With overflowing energy and joy, he continued on to complete his journey.

One remarkable aspect of the scenario above is that it depicts the Gemara's statement [Chullin 54b] that a worker is obligated to stop his work and greet those passing by on their way to bring *bikkurim* to the Beis HaMikdash. However, workers are otherwise not allowed to stop work even to greet a *talmid chacham*. Why are those bringing *bikkurim* given priority? One reason may be that if they did not receive this warm welcome, they might lack motivation to make the journey in the future.

HaRav Henoch Leibowitz, *zt"l*, explained that even though bringing *bikkurim* is a mitzvah whether or not those doing so receive greetings from those they pass, those who see them have not fulfilled their duty if they do not offer their greetings. In other words, even though the pilgrims are doing just what they are required to do and no

more, the Gemara sees encouraging them as a requirement.

As educators, we are like the bystanders on the way to the Beis HaMikdash. Our students pass through our class as they journey toward their ultimate goals in life. Sometimes they are already tired of the journey when they get to us, and sometimes they are just doing their best to stay on the path. They need our hearty “Shalom Aleichem” to give them the sense that we're glad to see them, that they're valued and recognized. They need to feel that we're rooting for them as they travel along, whether it's a struggle or a breeze, as they head toward a life of Torah and mitzvos.

A *talmid chacham* will be a *talmid*

chacham whether people acknowledge him or not. But a weary traveler needs encouragement, and those in the position to give it are obligated to do so. Likewise, *mechanchim* need to find ways to encourage their students. In a letter to *Hamodia*, Rabbi Aryeh Rodin of Congregation Ohev Shalom in Dallas, Texas, related this *vort* and recalled a seventh-grade *rebbe* who used to watch his students play basketball at recess. When asked by a colleague if he enjoyed the sport, the *rebbe* said he did not, but he had one student who struggled with Gemara but shone on the basketball court. Watching the game, he said, helped boost the student's self-esteem.

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Maximizing Your Impact

- Acknowledgment is more important for the average person than the super-achiever.
- It is well worth the effort to catch a student doing something right—something well.
- Energy tends to flag when we're in the midst of the effort. That's when encouragement is most important.
- Our students pass through our classrooms bearing the fruit of their efforts and heading toward a long life, *iy"H*, of *avodas Hashem*. We've done our job when they leave us re-energized, ready for the next leg of the journey.

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