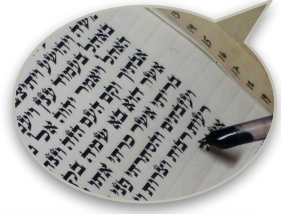




# The Collective Conversation

Weekly Torah Essays from the  
Young Israel of Scarsdale Community



Sefer Vayikra

Parshat Emor

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## The Man in the Mirror

By Jeff Kapelus

When scanning the available *parshiot* for the Collective Conversation, I was excited to see that *Emor* was available. Why? I have *lained* regularly on the *shalosh regalim* for more than four decades and a portion of *Emor* is the mainstay of this *laining*. I estimate that I *lained* that part of *Emor* nearly 150 times!

When I *laine* I research interpretations of the *parsha*. For years, I focused on the portion of *Emor* read in the context of *Yom Tov*. Now, however, I'm excited to have the opportunity to craft a *dvar Torah* from *Emor* in its entirety. Here are two highlights.

### ► Leading by Example

*Emor* opens with the words, "The Lord said to Moses: Speak unto to the priests (kohanim), the sons of Aaron, and say unto them ..." (*Vayikra* 21:1)

Why does the Torah repeat the verb 'say'?

According to *Rashi* the repetition is meant to admonish the adults and remind them to teach their children to avoid defilement (*Yevamot* 114a)

The above dictum, which constitutes a primary biblical source for the concept of education offers insight into the nature of education and leadership, providing the following two lessons:

1. The word used by the Talmud and *Rashi* in this explanation—*לְהַזְהִיר* (*lehazhir*, to admonish) also means to shine. Hence, "to admonish the adults about the youngsters" can also be read as "to illuminate the adults about the youngsters." The *Lubavitcher Rebbe* taught that education is not only about an elder teaching a youngster; it is also an illumination for the educator. The *Rebbe's* insight is profound: parents learn from kids, teachers learn from students, bosses learn from underlings — education in all its forms is a 2-way street.
2. *Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetsky* distinguishes between two words used often in discussions about raising children: *חֲנוּכָּה* (*chinuch*, education) and *הַשְׁפָּאָה* (*hashpah*, influence). *Chinuch* is a form of direct teaching. The teacher fills the child's cup with valuable information and knowledge. *Hashpah* comes from the root word *שָׁפַע* which means abundance. *Hashpah* is what overflows from the full cup and influences those in the immediate surroundings.

Children study their parents in ways that parents may never imagine, and naturally imitate their behavior. Parents who, perish the thought, talk in *shul* are raising the next generation of *shul* talkers. Parents who remain focused on the business of *davening* invariably raise children who *daven*. Similarly, if a parent is polite to waitstaff or performs acts of *chesed*, the children will generally follow suit. Conversely, poor behavior by anyone of senior standing is often mimicked by those of junior standing.

It's all about leading by example.

A clever child once told his parents, “Your actions are so loud, I can’t hear what you are saying!”

There is a story about a principal who called a father to discuss his child’s behavior. “It seems your child has been stealing pencils from the other children in school.” The father was righteously indignant and replied to the principal, “Why in the world would my child steal pencils from the other children? I bring home all the pencils he needs from the office!”

That’s the power of *hashpah* — the highest form of teaching and leadership is providing an example.

Coach, boss, teacher, parent, older sibling-anyone of senior standing must remember that someone is looking up to them and often mimicking their behavior.

► **The faults you see in others might be your own.**

The sages noted a redundancy when the Torah teaches, “a break for a break, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” and then restates “just as he shall have inflicted, so shall be inflicted upon him” (*Vayikra* 24:20).

The Talmud interprets the second half of the *pasuk* to mean “whoever disqualifies another by finding fault has discovered his own defect in the other person.” (*Kedushin* 70a). Similarly, the *Kometz HaMinchah* observes that “the faults you attribute to others are probably your own.” Modern psychologists refer to our sages’ insight as projection.

Projection refers to unconsciously attributing the traits we do not like about ourselves to other people. Simply put, what we hate most about ourselves tends to be what we criticize most in others. Rabbi Abraham Twersky explained that we view the world through a filter and the selectivity of that filter reflects our character. “Our psychological defensive system operates to minimize our discomfort,” writes Twersky. “It is easier to accept a character defect within oneself if it occurs in others as well. [Consequently] saying something derogatory about someone else is an indication that we, too, have that character defect.” Or, as the Baal Shem Tov said, “The world is a mirror. The faults you see in others are your own.”

Sociologists often propose this exercise: When you find yourself criticizing someone, replace their name with 'I' and restate the critique. It is a sobering exercise in self-awareness. People who learn to see the good in others are happier. Perhaps, over time, we can learn to focus more on the positive traits in ourselves and others and improve the “selectivity of our world-view filter”. It is a simple step towards a happier, healthier life.

**Jeff** and Phyllis, and their son Max, moved to the YIS community a quarter of a century ago. Here, twins Madelyn and Jason were born and were proud recipients of local Jewish day school education. Jeff has been very active in the greater Jewish community, including his leadership roles in security and teaching life lessons thru youth sports. One more thing: we are still waiting for a local kosher sports bar!

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