

PIRKEI AVOS CHAPTER 2 MISHNAH 6

הוא היה אומר, ... ולא הקפדון מלמד,

He used to say: ... nor can an impatient person teach;

The *mishnah* teaches that someone who is impatient should not teach. What is it about impatience that disqualifies a person with that trait from teaching? The Tashbatz, R' Shimon ben Tzemach Duran, offers the following insight. The Gemara in Yevamos (117a) cites the *pasuk* in Mishlei (27:19) that states: כן לב האדם לאדם – As water reflects a face to a face, so the heart of man to man. Rashi explains that water reflects a person's face. If he smiles, his smile will reflect off the water and if he frowns, his reflection will also frown. The same is true between people. If one loves another person, that love will be reflected back and if one hates another person, that hatred will be reflected back.

This *pasuk* together with Rashi's explanation is a succinct summary of mirror neurons. What we see and perceive in the face of others shapes how we look at them and on the flip side, if we show love and compassion towards others, that feeling will impact them and it will be reflected back to us. Instinctively, we know this to be true. When a baby is crying, what do we do to soothe the baby? We don't discuss feelings with the crying baby. We don't attempt to discuss its feelings and what exactly it is that is troubling the baby? We don't try and reframe their situation so that they can see it in a more positive light. We smile and make noises with the expectation that our smiling face will soothe the baby and, if the baby is old enough, smile back.

As we get older and deal more with adults rather than babies, our mindset shifts. We think that it is our words that make the difference and that we can talk people into a different mindset. I am certain that at some point in your life you were upset about something and some well-meaning person listened to your concern and told you not to worry about it. Undoubtedly, you thanked them profusely for the advice because you completely forgot to be calm and not worry. After thanking them you simply flipped the switch in your head from "worry", to "don't worry" and then continued merrily along. Of course, that advice doesn't work and yet, we do it often.

Interestingly, according to *halacha* when making a *shiva* call, we are instructed to sit quietly with the mourner and wait for the mourner to initiate the conversation, if he wishes to converse. The point of a *shiva* call is not to formulate some insightful comment to assuage the mourner's pain. It is not to say a *vort* or some insight on the *parshah* to make the mourner feel better. It is not even to distract the mourner by getting him to talk about the latest news or gossip. The main point is the non-verbal

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communication that the mourner is not alone. Visiting the mourner is intended to communicate that one is there. Tragedy and loss are isolating and the mourner should be aware that support, if wanted, is available.

A teacher must have patience for all of his students. Even when it seems that the student is uninterested and defiant, the teacher must persist.

“And if those children are unresponsive, maybe you can’t teach them yet, but you can love them. And if you love them today, maybe you can teach them tomorrow.” Jeffrey R. Holland

This is the essential call for teachers, both formal and informal. Patience and faith in your students is the key to their success and for that reason, one who is impatient, cannot successfully teach.