

Communication

Kibud Av v'Eim, honoring parents, is an all-important mitzvah, one that many people accept as a code of humanity. Parents raise us and we reciprocate with respect. The Torah's concept goes much deeper. We respect our parents because Hashem commands us to do so. They are shutfim, partners, with Hashem in our creation. We thus owe them respect. I would like to divert from the usual and focus on another form of respect, one which I feel is lacking in our society: respect for children. We are all busy. Whether it is a wedding, Bar-Mitzvah, or organizational function; a chavrusa, shiur, or lecture, we make time for every mitzvah and chesed, but what about our children? If we do not find the time for them - they will find someone else who will, and I am quite certain that the alternative will not be acceptable. Our children are craving for one thing: us.

This idea is poignantly demonstrated by Rabbi Pesach Krohn in Echos of the Maggid. It is a story about a troubled young woman who had been seeing a prominent psychologist for help with her personal problems. After a number of sessions, the therapist noticed a pattern: She hardly ever spoke about her parents. This was unusual. One day, when the woman made an indirect comment about her father, the doctor grabbed the opportunity, and commented, "You know, you have not said much about your father in our discussions."

The woman lowered her head to the floor and was silent. After a few moments, she began to cry softly. The doctor waited as she slowly composed herself and began to speak. "I just remembered a painful incident that occurred in my youth. It happened many years ago when I was a child. We were sitting at the Pesach Seder table and I had taken the Afikoman. My father was fully aware that I had it, and after the meal he turned to me and asked, "What do you want in return for the Afikoman?"

The young woman waited a moment as she gathered up her resolve to continue. "I remember looking straight into my father's eyes and responding, "I want a conversation with you."

This is what our children crave, parents with whom they can talk, parents who will listen, parents who will empathize. The toys, gifts and trips with which some of us try to bribe our children, are meaningless. All they really want is our attention, and recognition.

There is one more thing that I may add. As Torah Jews we seek every opportunity to study Torah, attend a shiur, pair up with a chavrusa, but do we also find the time to learn with our children? Indeed, there are many programs that provide the opportunity for once a week learning, but is this sufficient? Our children need us. It is an investment that will ultimately pay out in dividends that are inestimable.