

The Best Guarantors

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May 17, 2012



“Draw me after you / we will run” (Song of Songs 1:4). At Sinai, when the Jews were ready to receive the Torah, God said to them, “What? Am I supposed to give you the Torah without any security? Bring some good guarantors that you will keep it

properly, and I will give it to you.”

Jews: Our ancestors will be our guarantors.

God: They themselves need a guarantor! Avraham questioned Me: “How will I know?” (Genesis 15:8). Yitzchak loved Esav although I hate him (Malachi 1:3). Yaakov thought I mistreated him (see Isaiah 40:27).

Jews: Our prophets.

God: I have complaints against them, too: “The shepherds sinned against Me”* (Jeremiah 2:8). “Israel, your prophets were like foxes...”** (Ezekiel 13:4).

Jews: Our children are our guarantors.

God: Now, that’s a guarantor! “From the mouth of infants and babes You founded oz (strength)” (Psalms 8:3)—this is Torah (ibid., 29:11).

What happens if the borrower doesn’t pay? The lender collects from the guarantor. “If you forget [My] Torah, I will ‘forget’ your children” (Hosea 4:6). Therefore a person has to bring his child into the Torah and educate him in it (*Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 1:4:1).

Receiving the Torah is not only about learning Torah. It’s also about teaching Torah. Why? Because although gaining deep mystical and/or rational insight into the Divine is the purpose of Creation, you are not the only one meant to gain such insight. Everyone is. By “everyone,” we mean not only those alive today, but those who will follow us in the future, including our children.

Rebbe Nachman told us that, ideally speaking, each person should spend two to three months learning a particular lesson of *Likutey Moharan*. During that time, one should view all of life through the prism of that lesson. The Rebbe also said that Lesson #282, better known as *Azamra* (“I will sing”), is a

lesson that one should live by all the time. What is the primary point of *Azamra*? Judge everyone favorably, including yourself.

From time to time, more often than we care to admit, we all do the wrong thing or bad things. That, the Rebbe tells us, does not make us worthless or mean we are worthless. It means we are human. The real person— you or someone else—is the good the person has manifested, even if only in thought, even if only in passing. The results of such an attitude are outstanding: one doesn't quit trying to be a better Jew because of a series of real failures; one is more understanding and kinder towards others, in word and in deed. In fact, Rebbe Nachman says, when you judge someone favorably, you cause Heaven to judge that person favorably, opening the person's way to *teshuvah* (return to God).

One segment of the population that often gets overlooked when we seek to live *Azamra* is our own children. We are told to “establish many students” (*Avot* 1:1), and there is no reason that our children should not be among them. The first rule in teaching Torah is “Be patient in judging” (*ibid.*). Use your ingenuity to recognize your child's—your student's— strengths and virtues. (Often, you'll have to tap into those strengths in a tedious, roundabout way. That calls for more ingenuity—and patience.)

Favorably judging our children (and others) creates an atmosphere of peace and respect that allows them to learn from us, so that when we speak, they listen. They learn to want to live a Torah life, and they do. So the Torah is perpetuated and our guarantors are not called upon to pay. Most of us are not going to teach in a yeshivah, and even fewer will head a yeshivah. The average person will “establish many students” over the course of generations, as his or her children raise their children to live a Torah life.

* By prophesying in the name of Baal.

** By not praying enough for the Jews.

a gutn Shabbos!

Shabbat Shalom!

–Based on *Likutey Halakhot, Nezikin 4:24–25*