

PARASHAS VAYEILECH**Actions and Words**

They come streaming into Jerusalem from all over Israel, everyone, men and women, the young and the old, even the smallest suckling infants. They gather around the glittering Temple under the canopy of the brilliant Judean sky, one vast gathering focused on the royally bedecked platform in the Temple courtyard. A hush falls over the crowd as the king gravely mounts the platform and begins to read from the Torah to the people. The spectacle unfolds with a strange blend of solemnity and festivity in the air, leaving indelible images in the minds of the multitude.

Why did all these people come to Jerusalem? Because the Torah, as described in this week's portion, mandated periodic national assemblies to inspire the people and reaffirm their special relationship with the Creator.

The Torah is very specific about when these dazzling spectacles are to take place. Every seventh year during the Festival of Sukkoth, immediately following the close of the Sabbatical year, when all the land lay fallow, unplanted, unplowed, undisturbed. Why at this particular time?

The commentators explain that this august convocation was meant to be a learning experience, to impress all the people with the universal acceptance of the lessons and teachings of the Torah on. In such an environment, each individual, no matter how young or humble, would be inspired to follow the example of the multitude and embrace the words of the Torah.

But as all parents and educators know, actions speak more loudly than words. The most effective teaching method is by example. Therefore, if the periodic assembly of the Jewish people was to teach the children the importance of adhering to the Torah despite all obstacles, there could no better time than immediately after the Sabbatical year, when all agricultural commerce had ceased abruptly in accordance with the commandment of the Torah. When the young people saw the major sacrifices their elders were willing to make for the sake of the Torah, they knew that their professed enthusiasm for the Torah was the genuine article.

A man once sent his young son to school in a distant city. The man had spent a long time collecting great books he felt would help the boy

develop his intellectual faculties, and as they stood on the platform by the waiting train, he handed the boy the tightly wrapped package.

“My son, these are the works of some of the greatest writers that ever lived,” he said. “Absorb them, and you, too, may become a great person.”

The boy nodded dutifully and took the package, although it was obvious that he did not relate to what his father was saying.

Father and son spoke for another fifteen minutes, and when the departure whistle sounded, they embraced and bid each other farewell.

As the train pulled out of the station, the man noticed the package of books lying at his feet. His son had forgotten to take it.

The man bought a ticket and boarded the next train with the package in hand. Six hours later, he arrived at his son’s school, sought him out and handed him the package.

The boy was mortified. “I’m so sorry that I forgot it, father. The last minute rush, you know. But why did you have to travel so far yourself to bring it to me? Surely, you could have sent it by messenger or the post!”

“Of course, I could have, my son. I saw that you are still too young to appreciate the treasures within these books. But I knew that if you saw me travel six hours just to bring them to you, you would realize that they are of tremendous importance to your future.”

In our own lives, most, if not all, of us are forever involved in the business of teaching in one form or another. We try to influence our children, our families or members of the community to accept our opinions, our values, our ideals. We argue, we bend ears, we write letters to the editor, we exhort, we cajole, anything to disseminate our perspectives to those people that share our world. All these things help to a certain extent, of course, but nothing is as effective as teaching by example. If we ourselves live in scrupulous accord with the values and ideals we profess, it is inevitable that others will respect what we have to offer and recognize its value.