



FEDERATION



Rav Hirsch: The Master Educator

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Machzike Hadath and Rosh Beit Midrash, Hendon

וַיִּסַּע מִשָּׁם אֲבְרָהָם אֶרְצָה הַנֶּגֶב וַיֵּשֶׁב בֵּין קְדֵשׁ וּבֵין שׁוּר וַיִּגְר בְּגֵרָר: (בראשית כ"א)

Interspersed in Rav Hirsch's commentary on the Chumash are some remarkable insights into Rav Hirsch as the master educator.

Avraham travelled southward and **dwelt** between Kadesh and Shur and he **sojourned** in Gerar. Dwelling (*vayeshuv*) implies permanent residence whereas sojourning (*vayagar*) implies temporary abode. Which was it, and why did he change?

He explains as follows – initially Avraham sought isolation, for himself and his followers, from the large cities of mass population. He therefore journeyed to a place in the Negev, distant from the hustle and bustle of the metropolis. Materialism is not conducive to the success of Torah and success of Yisrael in the merit of Torah. The command of *Lech Lecho* was predicated on a withdrawal from a comfortable city life and he was therefore drawn to the desert.

He settled between Kadesh and Shur, in an isolated location, but insulated though he was, he made periodic trips to maintain contact with population centres not too distant, such as Gerar, the capital of the Philistines. He chose to leave the land of Canaan and travel to the land of the Philistines, as they had a higher level of morality.

The choice of style and mode of residence was influenced by the promise of a child. Avraham considered that the best environment for his son's

education would be one of separation from the main cities in the seclusion of the Negev. It was essential to protect his son from the dangerous temptations of the street.

However, total segregation from the populace around would be detrimental. He considered exposure to the outside world, albeit in small doses, essential for the development of his child, and if deprived of this, his son could be at risk. Just as someone who has been mollycoddled and protected in a warm room is suddenly exposed to the cold exterior is liable to catch a cold, so also a youth who has been over-protected by his parents, when suddenly subjected to external influences, is more likely than not to be in jeopardy. Hence it was incumbent for the spiritual heir of Avraham to be acquainted with the wider world, replete with its immorality and false ideologies.

To provide immunity from disease it is necessary to inoculate with a microcosm of the disease itself. Hence exposure in minute doses to the imperfections and dangers inherent in the eclectic society is vital for the potential leader. Similarly, excessive inbreeding can intensify genetic defects and can prevent the growth of a healthy and balanced person.

Thus, Avraham built his family foundations by **dwelling** away from too much access to harmful influences but near enough to **sojourn**, and make short excursions into the broader civilisation to develop his child's perspective and horizons so that he would have all the skills to become the leader and inheritor of his pioneering father. The key to successful parenting and education is to find the appropriate balance between isolation on the one hand and exposure on the other hand.

This perennial dilemma, which faces parents and educators in all generations is as germane today, if not more so, as it was in the generation of Avraham and the generation of Rav Hirsch.

RIDDLE ANSWER

Yerushalayim.

In the Akeidah there is a pasuk that refers to the place Yeraeh and in last week's sedra we had Shalem as in Malki-Tzedek the king of Shalem. The Medrash says that Hakadosh Baruch Hu was in a quandary what to call the place since he did not want to 'upset' either of the two gedolim so he made a compromise and combined the two names together to create the name Yerushalayim.

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