

The Daily Portion

- Sivan Rahav Meir

Leaving marks that last a lifetime

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One night at the Western Wall in the midst of Selichot prayers, I wondered when the thousands of teenagers around me would get up the next morning. It was already after 1 o'clock in the morning and they were still chanting, if not roaring, piyutim (liturgical poems). They would probably be late for school the next day, but this unique experience would provide a lesson and leave a mark on them that would last a lifetime.

We learn not only from classes and lectures; we educate ourselves through internalized experiences and events.

The Torah portion of Vayeilech is concerned precisely with this idea. It describes the mitzva performed when the entire nation gathers together in Jerusalem at the close of the sh'mita (Sabbatical) year to hear the reading of the Torah. Everyone must come. All ages, even babies, even if they do not understand the content of what they are hearing. Why? In order for the experience to leave a mark. "Let

their children also, who do not understand, hear and learn to fear the Lord your God." How is it possible to teach fear of God? It's the atmosphere that leaves a mark, that engraves an indelible impression on the heart. The power of the moment affects us for generations to come.

The holidays of Tishrei are the perfect time for education through experience. From the Selichot and the piyutim to the building of the Sukka, from the seuda hamafseket (festive pre-Yom Kippur meal) to the nigunim (devotional tunes) sung during these days, from special holiday foods to the particular customs of each family. Even children of cell phone and computer screens get excited, with a twinkle in their eyes, from hearing and sometimes blowing a real shofar and from shaking an actual lulav & etrog. This is the time to absorb unforgettable lessons that will leave marks on our children and on us that will last a lifetime.

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