In this weeks Parsha, Abraham summons his most senior and trusted servant, Eliezar, to his side and intrusts him with a great and important task, that of finding a wife for his beloved son Isaac. Abraham makes Eliezar promise, with Eliezar's hand on Abraham's thigh, that he will not take a wife for Isaac from the Cannanites, the descendents of Ham, an accursed people, but will instead journey to Haran, Abraham's birthplace, and find a wife for Isaac there. Eliezar accepts the mission as laid out for him by Abraham and promises to find Isaac a bride only from among the women of Haran. The commentary *Tzenah Ur'enah* explains, that Abraham did not want Isaac to marry a Cannanite lest the Cannanites should say that God did not want to fulfill the promise to give the land to Abraham's descendants, who had to marry Cannanites to inherit it. This is in accord with God's commandment to Israel to fill the land, not from marriage with those already there, but with the issue of their own loins. Thus, as the commentary explains, Eliezar placed his hand in solemn oath upon Abraham's thigh, which was believed the source of ones offspring.

Gunther Plaut points out that this Parsha marks the beginning elements of Judaism's strong feelings about mixed marriages, who one should marry and who our tradition has deemed off limits for marriage. So often we turn to the Torah and we find warm and non-controversial teachings. In such cases it seems that it is the least we can do to agree with the Torah, to embrace the lesson it gives and make it a part of our own lives. Today's Parsha is not such a lesson without controversy, it is not an easy topic for the Jewish community, indeed in these multi-cultural times, the notion of prohibited marriages are controversial in most ethnic communities. We who struggle with the modern Jewish implications of mixed marriages know that it is not even a topic one can discuss without reservation and consideration in a Jewish professional setting. Yet the Torah confronts us with it, it is right there on the page, 'don't marry a person from them, but instead marry someone from them.' In all of our uneasiness with this topic, who are we, as Jewish professionals, to skirt it or dance around it?

One could look at the scenario as present in the Parsha and argue that, even if it is speaking of a prohibition against mixed marriage as Plaut suggests, it is not in

reference to any form of mixed marriage we encounter today. Indeed, many commentators, of which Abravanel is the most boisterous, contend that while the Cannanite women were off limits to Isaac, women of other nations were not prohibited to him for marriage. In this respect, some would contend that the Parsha is not an applicable argument against mixed marriage, for today's Jewish communities. Plaut makes the difference even clearer when he states, "that the issue for Abraham and Isaac was ethnic or racial purity and today it is a matter of religion and family which are at stake." Even if that were the case, the Parsha, particularly though Abraham's action of choosing Isaac's bride, provides an important lesson for Jewish communities confronting the issue of mixed marriages. Shimshon Raphael Hirsch a 19th century German-Jewish commentator, explains that Isaac cannot marry a woman from the surrounding Cannanite people for the very same reason that Abraham was sent away from his country, because the impulse to assimilate would be too great for Isaac to endure. It is here that Hirsch helped us transcend the biblical implications of Abraham's provision, and see the modern day applications of what he wants for his son. Abraham wants his son to remain Jewish, he knows that the temptation is always there to stray away from faith, but he struggles to at least make the decision of a Jewish home, and Jewish family easier for his son. In this way parents in our communities today, that want the same for their own child must accept, as Abraham did, full responsibility for providing an enviroment that will induce their children to remain Jewish.

When I was a teenager my parents were strong believers in the idea that the people you marry are the people you date. Thus they sought to guarantee for me, as Abraham sought for Isaac, marriage to another Jew. They sent me to Jewish camps, signed me up for Jewish youth groups and sent me on trips to Israel. The Hillel study of Jewish life on campus was our guide for the universities I should apply to. Their message was clear, we want you to marry another Jew and we are willing to spare no expense to somehow ensure that this happens. My parents were not unique in their mission, I know from discussions amongst my classmates that many of our parents did

the same thing and more, to somehow steer us toward a Jewish spouse. Many of our parents were not much different than Abraham. While he arranged Isaac's marriages when Isaac was forty, many of our parents have subtly been arranging who we will marry since our infancy. You marry the people you date, and Abraham, my parents and some of your parents felt that if you never provide the opportunity to date a non-Jew, your child will never marry a non-Jew.

Unfortunately, somewhere in the law of averages this theory breaks down, it worked for Abraham, but then he did not have suburbia, public schools, and the influence of the media to contend with. The issue in our day involves so many more factors than it did in the time of Abraham, but perhaps the most significant is the matter of choice. Isaac was not really in a position to choose to marry someone else. He married who his parents wanted him to marry and the blood line was continued. But in today's society, the ultimate choice remains, where it should, with the son or daughter not the parents. Nevertheless, I believe that there is a great deal that parents can do to help make marrying Jewish the obvious choice.

Rabbi Joseph Hirsch writes that, "80% of the parents he knows get the kids they deserve, psychologically and Jewishly, parents who drag their kids to synagogue with them every week, keep some type of Jewish dietary law, push Jewish education, forbid inter-dating, send their kids to Israel and to Jewish camps and youth groups, have much more Jewishly oriented children." Parents are responsible for their children, at least until the point that their children won't allow them to be, and thus the responsibility for who their child marries belongs to the parent. If we believe that a parent is responsible for educating their child, rearing their child and keeping their child safe and healthy, then parents are also responsible for the end product of parenting, who their child marries. I do not contend that parents should arrange marriages, or accompany their adult children on dates. No, the work must be done in the child's youth. Parents can no more abdicate this responsibility then they can, that of providing food and shelter for their family. Because indeed the teaching of Jewish values, of the value of a Jewish family is as much a form of shelter and nourishment for

their children as is a four bedroom house and a well stocked refrigerator. Abraham's example of taking complete responsibility for all aspects of his child's life, of making it easier for him to resist the temptation of assimilation is not far removed from what parents today must accept as their responsibility. We pour hundreds of thousands of dollars into the life of a child, for everything from retainers to ballet lessons, from little league to the Ivy league, how much more would it cost to also provide a Jewish home, a Jewish social environment, a lesson in the value of a Jewish family? The difference cannot even be measured in dollars or time because the time and dollars are already being spent. The measure is the degree to which parents take responsibility for who their children will grow up to be.

This is the message of this weeks Parsha, it is a story of a parent taking complete responsibility for his child, both now and in the future, it is a lesson in making the tough decision of having a Jewish home and a Jewish family easy in a child's youth so that it will be valued and desired in adulthood. This is the modern legacy of Abraham's selection of Isaac's bride. This is the teaching we must take from this Parsha and bring to our congregations, religious schools and communities, that if your want your adult son or daughter to marry Jewish then you as a parent are responsible for creating that desire, no less so than Abraham was in his day for selecting a bride for Isaac, and making the continuation of his family as Jews the most obvious of choices.