

Anash Chinuch

REACHING OUR YOUTH

INDIRECT INFLUENCE IS RECEIVED MORE READILY AND DEEPLY

The nature of youth and children is that influence that comes indirectly is received more readily and more deeply than influence that comes through imposing upon them the yoke of a command or a decree. (*Igros Kodesh*, vol. 18, p. 296)

HOLD BACK FROM REPRIMANDING

...According to what is explained in Tanya and Chassidus in general regarding the matter of *המוח שליט על הלב* ("the mind rules over the heart")... sometimes it is necessary to exercise restraint over the feelings of the heart, and it is crucial to hold oneself back for the time being, even from giving reprimands that would be valid according to the Torah... (*Igros Kodesh*, vol. 11, pp. 135-136)

TEENAGERS ARE BY NATURE MORE TENSE

[Influencing the son *be'darkei noam*, and maintaining peace] is more the responsibility of the parents than of the son, since the parents are older, and they have more life experience...

Moreover, and this is the main thing: the son is in his teenage years. This means that he is naturally more tense. Not every person merits to have his mind rule over his heart and complete relief from tension. As a person grows and matures, the mind rules over the

heart to a greater extent. (*Igros Kodesh*, vol. 24, p. 18)

YOUTH ARE CRAVING MEANING AND PURPOSE

If ever, at any time or place, it was necessary to give purpose to day-to-day life – that is, purpose according to Torah and tradition – it is all the more so the case in this generation. Certain ideas and ideals, from the extreme left to the extreme right, have resulted in widespread disappointment. This discouragement affects mainly the youth who have not seen life illuminated with the values of *Bnei Yisrael*, the eternal nation. They feel they have been left in a void, empty of all substance. The most undesirable consequences arise when life enters a pattern widely known as "a grey world," and there is no special campaign providing the opportunity for the youth to reveal their [concealed] inner strengths: the strengths of courage and *mesirus nefesh*.

Parents of these young people – after requesting forgiveness of their child – have a manifoldly great obligation to fulfill the deficiencies in their children's chinuch up until this point, according to what our sages of blessed memory say, "If not now, when?" What will they respond when their day of judgment comes and their children ask, "Why were we not given eternal and fundamental values that would provide meaning in life and encouragement to battle a difficult and grey existence?" (*Igros Kodesh*, vol. 22, pp. 189-190)

DON'T DAMPEN YOUTHFUL ENTHUSIASM

You write that you are unhappy that the students are *davening* at length, since it doesn't coincide with their conduct in other areas, and you are worried that they are being "showoffs." Your arguments may be correct; however, it is obvious to anyone who studies the nature of today's youth that they in particular are going through a period of crisis. Therefore, one should be very careful to avoid anything that might weaken the strength of their opposition to the "winds [of heresy] blowing in the world." So even when it comes to matters that it is premature for them to get involved with on their present level, still, since it adds another detail to help them stand firm against the "winds blowing outside," [by depriving them of it,] you carry the responsibility for removing or weakening the matter. (*Igros Kodesh*, vol. 5, p. 325)

KNOW HOW TO ANSWER QUESTIONS FROM A SECULAR PERSPECTIVE

[Regarding a son who is living the same life as his father, a life of Torah and mitzvos]: One must make efforts to respond to his questions, in order that he will be able to serve Hashem with *simcha* (joy) and liveliness...

However, there is another son who has no connection to the lifestyle of his father, from "a new period," a generation *אשר לא ידע את יוסף* ("that did not know Yosef"). It is clear that his

questions do not come only from a lack of knowledge, but that a way of life according to Torah and *mitzvos* is something new and foreign to him, and not according to his spirit.

Yet the Torah instructs that even this kind of son, since he is “your son,” it is your responsibility and privilege to respond to his questions and to bring him under the wings of the *Shechina*.

By being involved with all kinds of Jewish sons, we establish *Tzivos Hashem* (the army of Hashem), and we will merit the true and complete redemption with *Moshiach Tzidkeinu* very soon... (*Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 31, pp. 67-68)

THE STUDENTS WILL TAKE IT A STEP FURTHER

When he makes demands of his students and *mekablim*, he should be a *dugmah chayah* not only for what he demands of them, but also for the entire way of life he is speaking about. As our sages put it, he should be טופח ע"מ להטפוח (“moist

enough to transmit moisture [meaning that he can only inspire others to an average level of inspiration if he is exceptionally inspired, just as a material must be extra moist in order to moisten something else]). The students learn by *kal vachomer* [an a priori logical inference]: if it is permissible for their teacher to commit a certain sin, then it is permissible for the student in several more areas. (*Igros Kodesh*, vol. 22, p. 343)

A SMALL DEVIATION FROM THE PATH

A person does not take the incorrect path all at once and end up in the depths of the forest. Rather, it starts from one small step astray in the wrong direction. The sooner he catches himself straying from the path, the easier it will be for him to return to the correct path.

This fundamental principle is especially important in relation to the Torah chinuch of a Jewish child. It is important to start from the nursing years with all

the details, without compromise. At times it may seem as if a certain detail in *chinuch* is not so important that one should insist upon it with all one’s might. Or perhaps one might think that it can be postponed until a later time. However, in reality this is not so, for in the future the matter will be much more difficult to straighten out and correct. The same applies in the positive direction as well: each improvement, even of the smallest nature, during childhood will lead to a tremendous increase and growth during the adult years.

This is also one of the main foundations that our Rebbeim, our *Nesi'im* ... considered to be the foundation of a Torah chinuch for all Jewish children: ... That from the very beginning, *chinuch* should be entirely according to Torah – *Toras Chayim* (“the Torah of life”), Torah *temimah* (“the pure Torah”) – which is complete in all its particulars and without compromise. (*Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 20, pp. 645-646)

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

- Chazal say that one must not impose excessive fear in his home, for it can bring to many *aveiros* and tragedies (*Gittin* 6b). Furthermore, the Gemara teaches that when reminding one’s family about lighting candles and other pressing mitzvos to be taken care of on erev Shabbos, it should be done in a pleasant manner.*

- One should not confuse firmness and consistency with harshness. Education must be done with much warmth and sensitivity, yet the child has to hear that this is something that “is,” and is unchangeable.*

- Part of looking at our children as Hashem’s children entails looking at oneself as Hashem’s child. Improving one’s self-esteem and self-respect facilitates and enhances all relationships, especially with one’s own children.*

- Additionally, and just as essential, is that parents be living examples of what they expect from their children. This means in thinking, feeling, speaking and acting. In fact, in order to succeed, you must do more than you would like them to do. Children look up to their parents and expect more from their parents than they do from themselves. Sending mixed messages to our youth can confuse them and make it more difficult for them to overcome the temptations that they will one day have. (Yud Alef Nissan farbrengen of תשמ"ב)*

- Just as the challenges are so great today, the spiritual achievements within the reach of today’s youth are tremendous.

- Emphasize the positive. Instead of always rebuking the negative, focus on the positive things your children do or say.

- Be *b’simcha*. Children are ultrasensitive to things that their parents do and say. When returning from a farbrengen try to share your inspiration, excitement with your children.*

- Be a role model. If this is what you really want, this becomes what your children really want. Our children are very sensitive to what excites us. Are we excited by going shopping or going to a *shiur*? Are we discussing money, fashion, and gashmius matters day and night? Or are we discussing Torah and *avodas Hashem*?

- Take pride in maintaining your standards. Because you are living a different lifestyle than your surroundings, the pride, *geon* Yaakov, has to permeate the atmosphere of the home. *

- While much attention is focused on the teen years, when many at-risk children begin exhibiting symptoms of distress, in many instances the slide began far earlier, when children failed to acquire the basic skills they desperately need to achieve success. ***

- Please keep reminding yourself not to take any of

this personally. It is not about you. It is about your child’s maturation and development. The Rebbe instructs us to spend time, each day, thinking about the *chinuch* of children and doing all we can to inspire them to follow in the ways of the Torah... but we need to remember not to worry about the outcome. So long as we do our *hishtadlus* with dedication and humility, we can be sure that Hashem’s *brochos* will come. Even if we haven’t yet figured out how to make the perfect vessel - the perfect or most effective methods of educating our children - we must do the best with the tools we have and continue seeking inspiration, guidance, and *koach* from the Torah and those who can teach and inspire us to live by its directives. Yet, just as it is with *parnassa*, once we have done our *hishtadlus* in making a proper vessel for Hashem’s blessing in educating our children, we must not worry about the outcome. In fact, it makes no sense to worry about it anyway, because inasmuch as creating a vessel for blessing is in our hands, the outcome is, was and always will be only in Hashem’s hands.**

- Do not feel hurt, rejected, or even jealous that your child would rather spend time with their friends than with you. As we say in Hebrew, “*Zeh ha’chayim*” – this is the way of life. It is all a bittersweet part of your child’s journey from your home to adult life. Even though it is often difficult to

do, keeping your emotions at least partially in check will help you make wiser decisions. ***

· Always remember that you are still your child's moral compass. Their friends may affect the clothes they wear, their mannerisms, and the music they prefer. However, in the deeper realm of values, parents still dominate – by far. Research studies keep reaffirming the point that parenting matters. You have not lost your influence. Be sure you are exercising it wisely and tactfully.***

· Never, ever insult or put down your child's friends. Do not label them and do not call them names. You are far better saying things like "I'm not judging ____, but I've noticed that since you've been spending time with him/her, your grades have been slipping. Is there anything you'd like to discuss with me?" Again, keep reminding yourself not to allow things to get personal. ***

· When we see something wrong, we feel the urge to respond immediately. Without a doubt, it is good to correct wrongful behavior on the spot—if we can do so in the right way. Nevertheless, there are times when our closeness to the situation is such that we are not in the best position to deal with the problem right away. In such a situation, it might be wise to say nothing or to say, "I am upset with what you did, and for this

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very reason I don't want to discuss it right now. We need to sit down and talk about it, and we'll do it when we both have had the time to think calmly about what happened."***

· Our children will learn more from what we do than from what we say, but guidance in the form of constructive criticism is an integral component of parenting. Our challenge is to couch the criticism in a constructive way so that: 1) Our children internalize the important messages that we wish to convey to them, and 2) The end result is improvement and a desire to grow, not increased friction and tension that may harm our relationship with our beloved children.***

· Try asking your child a targeted question that would be unique to him or her, and preferably one that follows on information you know about him/her or conversations that you have had. Here are some examples: "How was your chemistry exam today?", "Were you able to resolve things with Esther?", "Did the school (finally) fix the air conditioning?" Asking questions like these are really a statement that you care about your child – enough to remember the details that are so important to him/her.***

· If you ask a generic question, do not blame your child for giving you a generic answer. I often suggest to parents that they try to ask their loved ones (spouses are included in this category) at least one targeted question when they spend time together. ***

· Make yourself available to spend a few minutes of quality time alone with each of your children every day, and do an activity or spend more time together as often as possible.***

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Chabad House Compass Magazine Volume 2, Kislev 5770

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***Rabbi Yakov Horowitz

MAKING YIDDISHKEIT THEIR OWN BY RABBI LEVI KAPLAN

Why do we say "*Elokeinu Velokei Avoseinu*"? It sounds c"v as if there were two *Aibershters*--our *Aibershter* and the *Aibershter* of our fathers--although we all know of course that there is only One *Aibershter*.

Each of us starts off with *Elokei Avoseinu*, and then, there comes a point in every person's life when they start developing their own, personal, unique relationship with the *Aibershter*, and that is *Elokeinu*. It is the *Aibershter's Ratzon* that it be this way. The premise of this idea is that at a certain point, parents are not supposed to dictate this process, and it is time for the child to have his/her own spiritual journey for "*Elokei Avoseinu*" to become *Elokeinu*. A child needs to be given the opportunity to experience the independence of connecting to Hashem on their own and at their own pace.

When does this shift happen?

The Frieddiker Rebbe mentions in his memoirs that the Alter Rebbe's father and the Alter Rebbe began developing their relationship with the

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Aibershter at the ages of 12-13. We see this in other sichos as well with other Rabbeim and

Chassidim (for example the story of the Rashbatz in Hatamim).

It is also at this age that the mind of a child begins to really develop and understand things on a deeper level. However, because of the rapid changes that are happening in their bodies, they become more introverted and think more about themselves, rather than pay attention to things around them. This is why they often miss social cues at this age. Learning at this stage happens from within, not from outside: they learn on their own. Consequently, many pre-teens have a difficult time being mekabel: They are able to learn a lot on their own, but they have a hard time listening to a *shiur*. Therefore, the goal of *mechanchim* and parents of pre-teens is to ensure that before a child reaches that age, they should have the skills needed to learn on their own.

MAKING YIDDISHKEIT THEIR OWN

BY RABBI LEVI KAPLAN

For example, Bar Mitzvah preparations, such as learning a *maamar* or Tanya *be'al peh*, preparing a *parsha* or *pilpul*, etc. must be done on their own, as no one can memorize it in their stead. It is therefore a great time to encourage children and give them incentives to learn independently, such as certain numbers of pages in *Likkutei Sichos*, etc. It is very important at every age for parents to encourage children to learn on their own, but it is especially important for pre-teens.

Pre-teens and teenagers go through a lot of emotional upheavals due to hormonal shifts and often need time on their own. Consequently, if a child is not in the mood to talk, and just wants to be isolated for a while, it is very important to let them have their space and privacy. A parent should always make sure that their child knows that they can come to them to talk about anything without being judged, scolded, or put down, but they should never force a child to talk when they are not ready.

Although every child is unique, in general, when a parent has a conversation with a pre-teen or teenager, it should be the goal of the parent to listen on two levels. The first is to be an active listener: pay attention, make sure to understand what was said, make eye contact, have body language that is in harmony with what they are doing, and look directly at the child, not at someone else or your phone. The second, which is even more important, is to try to understand what the child is really trying to tell you. Very often children speaking about uncomfortable things speak in riddles, so it is not just listening, but also trying to interpret the nuances of what they are trying to say and being supportive. Only if you listen and understand correctly will it be possible for you to help your child.

Sometimes a child may ask a simple question in Emunah, but the parents

hear the question as something being asked by a mature adult and consequently get alarmed. However, often in such a case the child does not fully grasp the implications of the question. It is important to express to your child that there were many chachomim throughout the generations, and practically every question has already been addressed, so it is just about knowing how to find the answers. Showing a child a text where a question they raised is dealt with, can validate them in a special way: "You have the same question the Rambam had," etc., Children should know that it is totally acceptable to ask questions, and that the important thing is to seek answers from the right places, such as *Sichos*, *Igros*, etc. You can even say "Let's start typing the question in Google", and see that Google will finish the question for you as you are typing it, indicating that this is a famous question to which there are answers. If you don't know the answer to a question, it is okay, and a child should learn from your example that even when you do not have all the answers, you nevertheless continue learning and recognize the truth of Hashem and His Torah. Often, what children need is to feel validated and answering a question on a more basic level as would be age-appropriate is sufficient. However, one should always make sure the child is never criticized for asking a question, as this could create a rift *c"v* in their future commitment to *Yiddishkeit*.

Also, as Chabad Chassidim, we should always turn to the Rebbe for his opinion, such as by asking, "What does the Rebbe say about this?", "Perhaps the Rebbe discussed this question?", etc. Speaking to a child in this manner shows them the importance and usefulness of turning to the Rebbe for guidance.

Edited for print by Miss Esther Rochel Elkaim

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INSPIRATION FROM ANASH

"We had 4 teenagers in the house at the same time. They were two years apart. What I used to do was make it my business to just be around when they would be home from Yeshiva. I knew that if I said I wanted to talk to them, they would simply ask "Ta, how long will this take?!" So instead, I used to get into sweats and sit on the couch like a klutz and just read something just to "be there". The kids would roam around and soon enough they would plop their head on my shoulder and chat. Although it only lasted 2 minutes, they need that refuelling. I encourage you to be there and ride that wave with them. And when they do talk to you, be there. It's timing. When they are ready, they will approach you."

- Rabbi Yakov Horowitz

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