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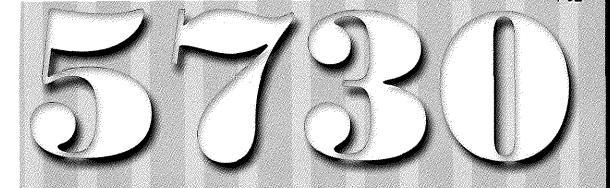
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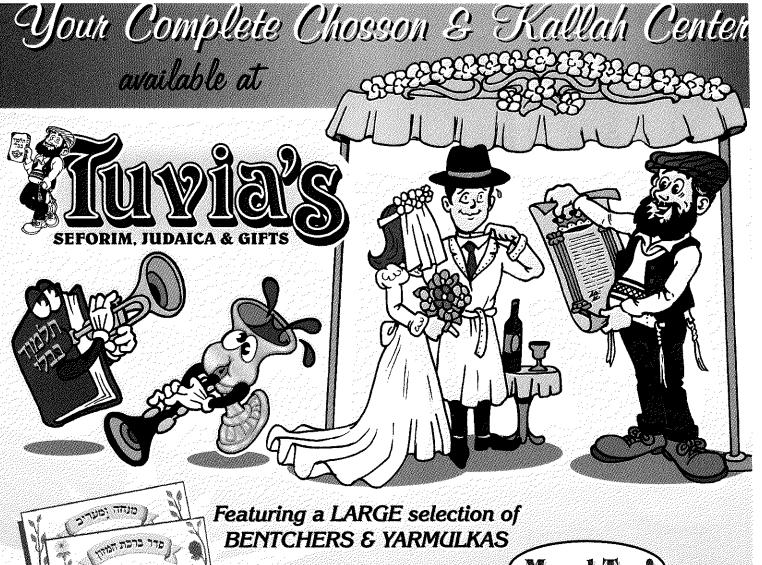


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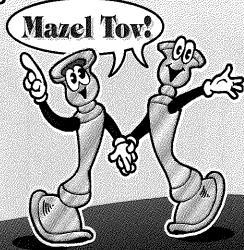
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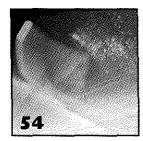
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"Children on the Fringe... and Beyond:" THE READERS RESPOND

- 6 INTRODUCTION, Rabbi Nisson Wolpin
  - 7 Readers' Forum
- I. From the Mouths and Pens of Gedolei Yisroel
  - Basic Principles of Parenting: PostScript, Rabbi Yehuda Mendelson
  - On Being a Trusted "Friend" to Your Children, Rabbi Shimon Schwab
  - 6 Readers' Forum
- 7 II. THE CHINUCH SCENE
  - Some Kids on the Brink Can Be Saved, Yisroel Wolpin
  - 20 Readers' Forum
- 29 III. PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE
- 35 IV. THE KIDS SPEAK
- 43 V. Prevention
- 46 VI. GUIDANCE
  - 46 Teamwork, David Mandel
- **52** VII. LEARNING FROM THE ISRAELI SCENE
  - Drawing Lines in a Moving Field, Moshe Schapiro
  - A Safety Net of Telephone Lines, Sarah Shapiro (an interview with Rabbi Moshe Speiser)
- **6** VIII. Bringing Them Back to a Torah Life
  - "Better Late Than Never," Rabbi Aaron Brody
  - Consequential Conversations (Without Being Confrontational), Rabbi Ahron Kaufman

### Introduction

etting a benchmark in numbers of copies sold is not always cause for unqualified celebration – a case in point, the November '99 issue of *The Jewish Observer* on "Kids on the Fringe...and Beyond." After the initial press run (plus 1,000 extra for Agudath Israel convention delegates) was released, and newsstand and bookstore copies were snapped up, the editorial office was inundated with requests for more copies as well as multiple orders. A second press run was ordered, and almost completely sold out. Undeniably, the response was gratifying in a way. But deeply troubling at the same time.

Gratifying, because it confirmed that the topic is compelling and deserving of attention; because the meticulous planning and patient nurturing of the assignments were well invested; and most of all, because the response has obviously gone beyond purchasing copies of the issue in record numbers to promoting thinking, discussing, and acting on the themes of the articles. But the magnitude of the response was also troubling, because it made one wonder: Are there actually tens of thousands of families out there that are suffering from "Kids on the Fringe," or that feel threatened by early-warning signs? That's obviously not the case. Is some of the interest, then, a voyeuristic curiosity, a seeking out of sensationalism? This possibility presented itself on a brief trip to Jerusalem in January – for a moment or two, anyway.

My host was visited by three American boys, all three graduates of an American "ivy league" institution, currently learning in Mirrer Yeshiva. No sooner were they settled around the dining room table, when one asked, "How's The Jewish Observer special issue doing?" How often do they see JO that they should care? I wondered. "Why do you ask?"

The questioner looked at his friends, then responded, "I only speak for myself, but I'll bet that what I say goes for them, too. I know someone who fits the issue's theme, and I'll bet everyone else in yeshiva knows someone, too." His companions nodded in agreement.

"Does it really bother you that much?"

He described a yeshiva high school student from his suburban community who was struggling to remain mainstream in spite of inner turmoil and outside distraction. In fact, the 16-year old fellow is now in Jerusalem...and he went on with several telling details.

"Pasternitzky!?" I asked.

"Yes. How do you know?"

"His mother called me last week, to share her son's struggles and her attempts to help him. The facts coincide precisely." Everyone knows someone....

From curiosity to a sense of immediate association to fear...readers, and the public at large, feel concern for lost souls and kids at risk; but panic is certainly misplaced. The overwhelming number of our children are doing well. But the precipitous fall of those few who are floundering is alarming. And as Rabbi Eliyahu Meir Klugman said in the November issue, quoting Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik "Every yachid (individual) is an entire Klal." Awareness of this exerts a strong pressure on us as parents and as members of Klal Yisroel. And finally – and most significant – we can all benefit from the guidance of Gedolei Torah in bringing up our children. Thus the urgency of this topic for all of us.

s mentioned, letters and telephone calls came in, communicating relief and catharsis that others recognize their pain...hope that an aware community will be responsibly reactive and proactive...prescriptives for avoiding traps and pitfalls...appreciation for the benefit of expert counsel from *Gedolei Torah* and guidance from professionals, both in *chinuch* and therapy, in how to strengthen the family and help kids, and how to improve the welfare of individuals on the fringe...and beyond.

The letters were also instructive – a number of them shed light on aspects of the overall theme that were either omitted or incomplete in their treatment of the topic addressed. Again, an entire issue could be filled with a re-examination of the theme, based on the fresh material received, and indeed, that is the thrust of this issue.

After selecting articles and letters for publication, we have grouped them according to the categories indicated in the Table of Contents. Obviously, we do not endorse every opinion expressed in the letters, but we do feel that they are all valuable in that they help shed light on the issues. On the pages that follow, we present introductions to specific sections along with some readers' responses, full-length articles, and comments of our own.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Name changed to protect the family's privacy.



#### WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

I am very impressed with the November issue of *The Jewish Observer*. It was well researched and it touches all the important points and should have a great effect on a need that is urgent and immediate. You certainly reach the pulse of our community and react accordingly.

RABBI HERMAN N. NEUBERGER
PRESIDENT
Ner Israel Rabbinical College
Baltimore

### HEAVINESS OF HEART, SKIP TO MY STEP

The November issue of *The Jewish Observer* brought heaviness to my heart – and a skip to my step. Heaviness to my heart, because I now better understand the circuit of pain that surrounds every uninspired teen, who feeds his undernourished soul with overwhelming thrills. But a skip to my step, because I see a *tzibbur* that is facing the problem head on – and investing minds and money in efforts to solve it – in a way that I have not seen in a long time.

YAAKOV ROSENBLATT Lakewood, NI

### **NEEDS MORE JOS**

I would like to order an additional 15 copies to be sent to me for our *mechanchim* and library.

I congratulate *The Jewish Observer* for this contribution to our awareness of the lives of our students and their communities.

RABBI CHAIM POLLOCK, DEAN Michlalah Jerusalem College

### "NOT MY YOSSELLE" VS. "AT LEAST SOMEONE CARES"

Your special issue "Children on the Fringe..and Beyond" was a gem. Surely by now you have received plenty of accolades. No doubt, just as surely, you must certainly have received a full measure of flack as well.

There are those who will say that the problem you so eloquently describe unfortunately exists. Assuredly, it needs to be addressed, but not in the public arena. These are the people who, while certainly well meaning, likely have had little personal exposure to this type of problem. Simply put, "It is not my Yosselle." On the other hand, those people who have even a modicum of exposure to the issues you describe, are likely those in former category.

Yes, a magazine full of articles will in of itself not solve the problem. But beyond the thoughtful information provided, and the wide range of concrete useful suggestions, of which there are many, just knowing that there are people who care is sufficient. For if there are people who care, and enough of them, then these problems undoubtedly can and will be addressed.

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great many correspondents underscored that the inclusion of the views of "Gedolei Yisroel on Education, Parenting..." made the issue a collector's item, worthy of regular review.

### From the Mouths – and Pens – of Gedolei Yisroel

A menahel of a mesivta high school reported that he had called his Rosh Yeshiva from his own yeshiva days for guidance in dealing with a recalcitrant student who showed no signs of conforming to yeshiva standards. After much discussion, the Rosh Yeshiva asked, "What would you want to do with him?"

"I'd expel him," replied the menahel.

"I see no alternative," agreed the Rosh Yeshiva.

The next afternoon, the Rosh Yeshiva telephoned the menahel and told him to hold back on the expulsion. "I saw the Chazon Ish quoted in The Jewish Observer issue on Kids on the Fringe. He very clearly states that it is a matter of dinei nefashos (a matter of life and death), and you can't expel the boy."

"But it's too late. I already did! And besides, he's incorrigible. He'll ruin others."

"No, it's not too late. Call him back. And then convene a meeting of all the rebbe'im who have ever had this troubled bachur in their class. Let each recall his experiences with him – the successes and failures, the pluses and the minuses. See if anyone can come up with an approach to helping the young man instead of just sending him away. Then, if nothing else

is feasible, you can expel him."

Some readers found the thrust of the quotations from classic sources leaning toward

sources leaning toward permissiveness, which of course was not truly representative of the outlook of

the sources quoted. Life as a Jew calls for discipline and self-control, and children certainly need guidance in these areas, as well as a sense of structure. Indeed, it is worth reprinting here a passage from the interview with Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetsky wליט"א, which appeared on page 25 of the November issue, to underscore this responsibility:

JO: Besides the explosive growth of the yeitzer hara presence in the home – vividly conveying vulgar, immoral, illicit images, via TV, video and the Internet – is there any explanation for the fact that the number of chareidi children on the fringe – and beyond – has exploded in the last several years, far more than anything Torah Jewry in America has experienced since World War II?

Rabbi Kamenetsky: One need not go beyond the corrosive effects of the entertainment and information media in search of a source for recent destructive trends. Even homes that do not harbor such media can suffer from corrosive seepage from the general marketplace of ideas and values.

Another factor, however, is also at work: the extraordinary emphasis on luxurious living that has engulfed our society.

Among those who have already attained their desired level of "good living," many seem to become completely involved in self-indulgence and the trappings of affluence; others, who have not yet realized their dreams, focus their hopes and their efforts on doing so. In either case, people are losing their sensitivity to spiritual matters, and their sensibilities are becoming dulled as they become immersed in material longings and pursuits.

If such is the *Zeitgeist*, should we be shocked if children go astray and abandon Torah life?

We were in communication with Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe שליט"א, whose sefer on the topic was the basis of an article on Parenting, regarding some of the implications of his directives. He responded with a more expansive translation of his Hebrew-language text (as follows) for the textual emendations he authorized, leaving no doubt as to the critical importance of parental authority, control and discipline in raising children effectively, even as love, patience and acceptance are crucial.



### Basic Principles of Parenting: POSTSCRIPT

The November 1999 issue of The Jewish Observer featured abridged selections from a book on parenting, Planting and Building in Education, which is an English translation of a sefer on the topic by **Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe** שליט"א, one of the foremost living educators and mussar personalities.

The article stimulated several questions, which were brought to the attention of Rabbi Wolbe for comment.

In response, Rabbi Wolbe asked **Rabbi Yehuda Mendelson**, who serves as the Menahel of the Bais Hamussar in Yerushalayim, as well as Menahel Ruchni of Yeshivat Givat Shaul, to add the following words of clarification to the extracts published in the Kislev issue:

he mitzva of chinuch rises or falls according to our basic acceptance that children are a pikadon (trust) which Hakodosh Boruch Hu entrusted to our care until they are independent. They are not given to us for our personal pleasure or to further our own interests. Remember that a minor is not obligated to perform mitzvos and is not held accountable for his actions. We are obligated to see that as an adult he can be an adam gadol or aishes chayil.

It follows that our actions must be pristine: in our home life, in our Torah study, in our *tefillla*, in our speech. This is the obligation of a guardian.

It further follows that the child must be the sole focus when judging the appropriateness of every aspect of *chinuch*: which actions at what age will educate this particular child to correct *middos*, attitudes, and *hashkafos*, etc. as an adult. The focus must never be egotistical, never based on our bad *middos* – anger, jealousy, honor-seeking, etc. Nor can we use our children to "reenact" the successes or disappointments of our own lives.

Punishment is not a personal "reaction" or retribution, but rather the consequence of improper behavior. When we punish, we *teach* that bad behavior is unacceptable and why. If this is not the outcome of punishment, but rather rebellion and hate, then we have missed the mark.

In today's climate, especially in Israel, it is almost impossible to educate with physical punishments. This is probably another aspect of *yeridas hadoros* and *ikvasa d'meshicha*. Still, we must discipline children, giving over clearly what is right, wrong, or intolerable.

Hitting children is not a proper derech and plan of education. This is not referring to a parent who occasionally hits a child to regain control of the situation. Rabbi Wolbe specifies just such a contingency in the Hebrew edition. This paragraph was inadvertently deleted:

"Occasionally, there is an unusually pressured situation at home. For example, it's bedtime with a houseful of kids. Pandemonium is reigning. Mother is completely fatigued from a full day. The mother applies a few slaps and quiet returns. This is 'first aid.' I am talking about the inappropriateness of beating as a prime method."

A little thought will show that spanking in such a situation, or for example when a child runs into the street, will not seriously damage our basic, long-term relationship. I would also note two other paragraphs where the reader might be misled:

Consistency (pg. 21) – "request" should read "demand" throughout the paragraph. "... while inspiring the child to honor the request" should read "... while still making it clear that the

demand must be fulfilled."

Threats (pg. 22) – "until the child hears and appreciates what we are asking," should read, "... until he listens."

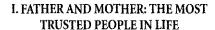




Throughout the ages, Gedolei Yisroel have expressed themselves in general principles as well as specific details in regard to parents' obligations to raise their children as Torah Jews. While each Gadol may have stressed different points, certain elements are common to all of them. We deem it a privilege to present the following comments by the late **Rabbi Shimon Schwab** אנ" of K'hal Adath Jeshurun of Washington Heights: part new insight, part chazora (reinforcement) of the messages conveyed in articles featured in the November issue, all of it enlightening.

### ON BEING A TRUSTED "FRIEND" TO YOUR CHILDREN

### Traditional Chinuch in Modern Times



First, let us establish the Torah definition of parents and the roles of father and mother in their efforts to raise their children. What is the role of father according to the Torah?

In Bereishis, Yosef Hatzaddik says, "Hashem has made me a father of Pharaoh." Rashi explains the word "father" as chaveir upatron – companion and protector. An ideal father is supposed to be precisely that – friend and protector of his child.

Later on, in *Devarim*, we learn about the *meisis* (seducer). The Torah says, "If you will be seduced by your friend who is dear to you as your own life." *Rashi* interprets the words "friend who is dear" as *zeh avicha*— this is your father. Again, one's father must be his dearest friend. Rav S.R. Hirsch "" explains that the word *re'a*— friend— derives from the word *mireh*— pasture. A friend is one who offers himself or herself like a pasture for another to graze on.

The first time the word *re'a* appears in the Torah is in connection with Yehuda's friend Chira, who is referred to in *Parshas Vayeshev* as "his friend the

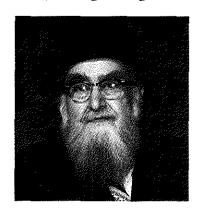
The above article is based on an address delivered on May 17, 1990 (22 Iyar 5750) at a convention of Torah Umesorah, the National Society for Hebrew Day Schools. Originally published in its entirety, in *Selected Speeches* (CIS, 1991), the above excerpts were reprinted with the family's permission.

Adulomite." I once heard an explanation by Rav Michoel Forschleger who asked why the Torah emphasized the friendship between Yehuda and the man Chira. The Torah wants to tell us that a friend is a person to whom one would disclose one's innermost secrets, even if one has done an aveira. Chira is mentioned in the Torah as the friend of Yehuda to teach us this important definition of friendship. This is what a father is supposed to be – a child's "best friend," in the sense that he is a person with whom he can discuss everything and anything. We may presume that this concept of father according to the Torah refers to one's mother as well.

The basic need of a child is a sense of total security; to be held by the father's hands or in the mother's arms. It has a desire to be loved, encouraged, and appreciated. For this reason a parent has to be a *chaveir*, a *patron*, and a *re'a*. In short, a parent must be the child's closest and most intimate confidant and advocate.

### Trust in One's Parent: the Foundation of Emuna

idrash Rabba in Parshas Shemos on the pasuk, "Hashem said, I am the G-d of your father," makes an amazing statement. This is where Moshe Rabbeinu has his first encounter with nevu'a (prophecy) at the burning bush; the Midrash says,



"A fool believes everything." The Midrash continues to say that Moshe at that time was at the age of 79, but he was a newcomer to nevu'a. In order not to frighten him, Hashem spoke to him in the voice of his father: "Moshe, Moshe." When Moshe heard his father calling him, he answered, "Yes, father, what do you wish?" Whereupon Hashem told him, "I am not your father, I am the Gd of your father." So the Midrash concludes, "A fool believes everything."

Pessi (fool) comes from the word mefateh – to seduce. A pessi believes everything and trusts everybody. He is naive like a child. One must beware of being a pessi as far as one's relationships with other human beings is concerned. However, in our early childhood each one of us is born as a pessi. We put our total trust, faith and confidence in what our parents tell us. This is why Chazal in the same Midrash tell us, "In Arabia a youth is called fool."

Rav Hirsch says that when we speak of emuna in Hashem, it means to establish the same kind of relationship to Hashem as we had as little children to our fathers and mothers. The same sense of total and absolute trust, confidence and security that we had as infants we are supposed to have in relation to Hashem. When it comes to listening to the word of G-d, each one of us must be a pessi, holding onto a simple and absolute belief just like a child. The supreme level of nevu'a that Moshe

Rabbeinu eventually reached — "There never rose again a navi in the magnitude of Moshe" — was based on the emuna which he had as an infant to his own father. This total emuna in what his father told him about Hashem was the foundation of what Moshe became later in life. This is why Hashem used the voice of Moshe's father to introduce to him the highest level of nevu'a.

Here is an awesome challenge for Jewish parents. The chinuch of a Jewish child starts in the crib. As soon as it is able to understand, our Chazal tell us that parents should talk to it "belashon hakodesh – in the language of holiness"; namely, to tell the child there is a Creator Who has created us, Who knows us, Who watches over us and Who gave us mitzvos to keep. And as soon as the child is able to talk, his father and mother have to teach him or her the fundamentals of emuna in the Torah (תודה צוה לנו משה), emuna in Hashem (the first passage in Shema). The first stories a child has to hear are the life stories of the Avos, the events of Yetzias Mitzrayim, the giving of the Torah and so forth.

### Teaching and Serving as a Model

It goes without saying that one of the basic conditions of successful *chinuch* is that the parents become the role models for the child. When we are commanded, "A person shall fear his mother and father," this *pasuk* is preceded by the words, "*kedoshim tiheyu*—you yourselves have to be *kedoshim*—holy." Only if parents are living examples of the first *pasuk* can they expect their children to take them seriously, to respect and obey them.

There are two kinds of chinuch, and they go side by side. One is through teaching, for which we are instructed on Pesach, "רוהבות לבם" — you shall teach your son." This is the model for the chinuch of teaching, for the rest of the year. The other is the chinuch that emanates from our own example — to impress our children by that which we do ourselves together with them. This lesson, which is called באמן ידעו דורותים , we impart to them especially on Sukkos when we do not have to speak about the wanderings of our forefathers in the desert but just sit in a sukka together with our children.

The angel told the wife of Mano'ach, the future mother of Shimshon, that she was not to drink any wine or eat any grapes because she would bear a child who is supposed to be a nazir. The husband, Mano'ach, asked Hashem to send the angel once more so that he could teach them - "What shall we do once the child is born?" How shall we bring up the child as a nazir? The angel appeared again telling him, "Whatever I told your wife to beware of, you shall also keep." You, too, shall eat no grapes and drink no wine. Although you are no nazir, you must behave like one for the sake of the child. The question of Mano'ach was, How can I rear my son as a nazir if he sees

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his father drinking wine? How can I tell my son, "Don't do as I do but do as I say"? Whereupon the angel answered, "The child must see that you yourself do not drink wine so he will emulate your example." Otherwise, no chinuch for a life of nezirus will be possible.

Of Love And Discipline

hildren need to be loved. But not the schmaltzy, smothering kind of parental affection which over-

Our Sages decreed Maos Chittim.

protects, overpowers and stifles the child's growth and development as an individual person. Rebuke and even punishment are also aspects of love, just as kisses are. As the Torah tells us, "As a father admonishes his son so Hashem your G-d admonishes you."

And Shlomo Hamelech in Mishlei (29:17) teaches us again and again, "Rebuke your child and he will give you pleasure," or "Reprimand your child for then there is hope." In Melachim I (1:16), David Hamelech is criticized by the Navi concerning his rebellious son Adoniyahu. "His father never hurt his feelings by saying to him, 'Why are you doing things like that?"

There are two kinds of mussar. One is verbal, as it says, "Listen to your father's rebuke." It starts when a child is very young, with telling an infant a firm "no" when necessary. And then again, when the child grows a little older, it might require some scolding to make the child feel sorry he made his parents angry, and anxious to regain their love.

There is no getting away from it! "Mussar" also derives from the word yesurim (suffering), and that means, in our case, corporal punishment. Don't get me wrong. I do not mean spanking or caning, which was practiced by some parents and teachers when I went to school. First of all, as long as parents are angry they are not supposed to hit their children. While it may make the parents feel better, relaxing their tensions, it does little for improving the behavior of their child. Just the opposite is true. They should be aware that what they are teaching their child is the ugly character trait of anger. Additionally, they are communicating that the stronger can hit the weaker with impunity. Both of these bad middos the child will very quickly adopt. So the first rule is never to hit a child when one is angry.

The second rule is to introduce punishment by saying in a normal voice, "I am very sad about what you did, and I am sorry to have to hit you on your hands in order to take away from you the aveira you did." The purpose of hitting is not to hurt the child but to help him atone for his wrongdoing by causing him to feel ashamed. Therefore, hitting should never be done in front of others, including siblings. The parents who preserve a child's self-respect can hope to reap a rich harvest.

### Recognizing Who's In Charge

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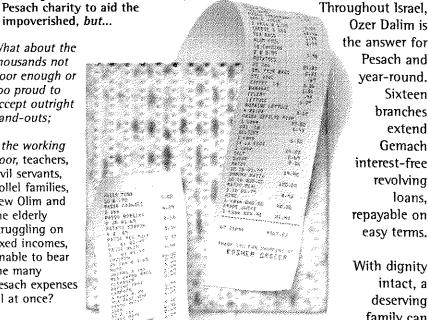
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However, the child must be impressed with the feeling that the main persons in the house are the father and mother, not the child. The parents are the masters of the house, to be honored and obeyed. Therefore, it is a mistake for parents to ask their children, as an example, "What would you like to eat, chicken or fish?" It must be understood that children eat whatever parents give to them. They know best what is good for you. The Jewish household is not a restaurant, neither is the mother a waitress nor the father a busboy. The same goes for going to bed on time. We are talking of reasonable parents who are not unnecessarily strict, but when the time comes for the kids to go to sleep, there must never be a discussion. Certainly, the process of going to sleep must be a pleasant experience with a story and song, Shema and a goodnight kiss. But we must not allow our children to enslave their parents by their uniustified tears.

The second lesson is that in front of the child, father and mother always have the same opinion. Their arguments must be aired out behind closed doors and quietly so. When parents disagree (and they do not always have to agree), and certainly if they shout and abuse each other in front of the children, that sense of security and trust which is basic, flies out of the window and is gone with the wind. On the other hand, when children will hear how the father says, "please" or "thank you" or "excuse me" to the mother, and vice versa, the child will pick up a habit of courtesy and gratitude without any special effort on the parents' part. Children will also learn from parents' behavior not to take for granted any favors done for them by others.

The most important lesson which children have to learn as they get older is alluded to in *Parshas Bamidbar*. The Torah tells us how the members of the tribe of Levi were counted – "With a count of names from one month and up, they are the Guardians of the Holy Watch." *Rashi* comments that this means that the little infants of the Levites

were already called by the title of honor they would achieve as adults. Because eventually those thirty-day-old babies will surely become "Guardians of the Holy Watch" when they grow up.

How can we be so certain of the outcome of the little Levites? The answer seems to lie in the fact that the Levites of that generation knew the secret of successful Torah *chinuch*. The parents told their child, "I love you more than everybody in the world except ... *Hashem*. Do not forget that I love *Hashem* more than I love you." This

was put into practice by the tribe of Levi as described in the pasuk: "He who could say regarding his parents I did not see them and as to his children, he did not know them, for they [the tribe of Levi] kept Your word, and Your covenant did they guard" (Devarim 33,9). When Jewry faltered at the golden calf, the Levites were able to separate from the others because of their parental love, and to heed the call of Hashem. This was the secret of successful Jewish parenting as demonstrated by the Levites.

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### Positive Strokes vs. Negative Pokes

uring the years the child is growing, parents have to grow together with the child. The friendship has to become more intense; the older the children become, the more encouragement they need. Children thrive on recognition and praise. The words "I am proud of you" or "I noticed you are getting much better," or "You have just done a great mitzva" - all this is music in the ears of a child. And let us not make a big ado over small issues. Parents have to learn not to see or to hear every little fault. Parents must never exert parental pressure like wardens in a prison, allowing their charges no freedom.

In Parshas Mishpatim there are two pesukim dealing with striking and cursing one's father. But these two pesukim are interrupted by another pasuk. This pasuk refers to a kidnapper who steals a human being and enslaves him. Here we find an allusion to the psychological causes that may make a son or a daughter stoop so low as to hit or curse their parents. And while it is not at all an excuse for the crime they are committing, here is a warning for parents not to treat their children like kidnapped hostages, constantly breathing down their necks, stifling their initia-

tive, suppressing or ridiculing their youthful plans and aspirations. Parents who act like slave drivers might one day trigger an open rebellion, and the results would be disastrous.

### II. EDUCATORS: PASSING ON THE HERITAGE OF GENERATIONS

any of these points which we touched upon in connection with the *chinuch* of children by fathers and mothers also apply to the chinuch by professional mechanchim, rabbeim and melamdim, only on a much broader scale. The strictly personal relationship between parents and children is raised to a higher level in a classroom. We read, "One generation to another praises Your works." When does the Mesorah actually take place? We may very well characterize a classroom in a yeshiva or a Beth Jacob school as a segment of one generation passing on the Mesorah to the next. The mechanech is a representative of the dor (generation) and the mechanech who imparts Torah and emuna and middos tovos to his students is engaged, so to speak, in a historic task. As the spokesman of the former dor he gives over the Mesorah to the new dor.

In Avos we are told that a Torah teacher is called "Rebbi alufi u'me'yuda'i," meaning "My teacher, my superior and my friend." And the Mishna teaches us

a well-known *kal vachomer*. "If *David Hamelech* learned only two things from his teacher and he showed him great respect, one who learns even one letter from a teacher must certainly respect him."

The old question is always asked: The *kal vachomer* is not logical. Achitophel had taught Dovid two *halachos*. So how can we derive from that to give honor to a teacher from whom we learn even only one word or one letter?

The answer is as follows: Achitophel, who was a *rasha*, taught "only two things." While the true *rebbe*, even by teaching his student one *pasuk* or one word or even only the *Aleph Beis*, creates for the child a firm basis of *emuna* and fear of G-d for all his future development. It is not "two things alone."

I remember as a very young child when our old rebbe taught us to read Shema Yisrael. He started his lesson like this: "Now we are learning the most important pasuk in the whole Siddur." And then he raised his old raucous voice with great kavana and said with a trembling tone, "Shemaaaa... Yisra'eeell ..." We were shaken. The fear is still in my bones. He was not teaching us the reading of "a few words alone," but he implanted the seed of emuna peshuta in our young minds and hearts forever.

So it is a good kal vachomer.

### Key to Respect in the Classroom

Te sometimes wonder why our talmidim do not show proper respect to their teachers. Perhaps the answer lies in the following: The Mishna mentions three things almost in one breath. "Let the honor of your student be dear to you as your own, the honor of your friend be as the fear of your teacher, and the fear of your teacher be as the fear of Heaven."

If I want my talmidim to practice the latter (fear of their teacher), then I have to fulfill the former conditions. First, "Let the honor of your friend be as great as the fear of your teacher," and most importantly, "Let the honor of your student be dear to you as your own." The



student who is invited to the Shabbos table of the rebbe, the talmid who feels the rebbe is concerned about his health and about his personal problems, the rebbe who calls the parents and reports every little improvement of their child, the rebbe who knows how to ignore small matters and concentrate on the main ikrim of learning Torah, will be rewarded with establishing a splendid teacher-student relationship.

Also, in our modern age, our Rebbeim suffer from the fact that many children who go to yeshivos are the victims of the wrong chinuch received from their parents. We need desperately a school for parents to guide and advise them on how to be mechanech their children. The lack of derech eretz and the degree of chutzpah in some of our institutions is appalling. However, children who have lost respect for their parents cannot be expected to show respect for their teachers. The children are not to be blamed! Unfortunately, so very often fathers shower money on their unruly children just in order not to be bothered by them. Very often, busy mothers and fathers have little to do with their children. The parents are too preoccupied with themselves to focus attention on their children.

In our age, the emphasis of our yeshivos and day schools should be laid on improvement of middos, i.e. shemiras halashon, avoidance of jealousy and hatred, foul language, lightheaded behavior, anger, arrogance and speaking untruths. This, as well as the acquisition of middos tovos - honesty, courtesy, gratitude, granting others the benefit of the doubt, and the important need of making a kiddush Hashem through behavior and appearance wherever one goes - should be stressed. These are the topics that should be studied, practiced and worked on alongside the sugyos in the Gemora, with the same emphasis as the halachos of the Mishna Berurah. I do not deny the importance of all the Jewish disciplines, but at this time, the teaching of middos is extremely urgent and should become first priority.

What is needed is to channel the chutzpah, which is the earmark of the

pre-Moshiach age, into the roadbeds of moral strength to practice Torah and mitzvos and tzenius and honesty in spite of what the street, the neighbors and peer pressure may dictate.

In the desert, all the tribes were counted. The Torah uses the same words for all tribes, במספר שמות. Except with the tribe of Shimon, where the pasuk starts, "תפקודיהם במספר שמות." According to Chazal, Shimon was composed of teachers of the Torah to the children. The word מקודיהם means that they deserve honorable mention. They

are specially counted because of their importance for the Jewish people.

The Torah teachers of today certainly deserve that same distinction. Three times in our daily prayers we invoke the mercy of *Hashem* on "the remnants of the *sofrim*," which means teachers of Torah. These are the *matzdikei harabbim*—the benefactors of the multitudes—in our times, as they used to be in the past. They deserve our deepest gratitude, our utmost dedicated moral support and our most fervent *tefillos* for their success.

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### BALANCING THE REJECTING "LEFT" WITH THE EMBRACING "RIGHT"

The mitzva of kibbud v'yiras av v'eim (honoring and fearing one's father and mother) is as binding on us now as any other mitzva of the Torah. Parents should be made aware that they are obligated to train their children in this mitzva even more than they are obligated to train them in other mitzvos. The Torah requires that children both honor and fear their parents. This is because the Mesora, the transmission of the Torah from Sinai, is entirely dependent on the proper fulfillment of the mitzva of kibbud av v'eim which ensures that the tradition is faithfully and accurately handed down from father to son. It is clear, then, that the mitzvos of kibbud v'yiras av v'eim are more than commandments concerning the proper behavior of child towards parents. The very existence of the Torah depends on these mitzvos. Lack of kibbud v'yiras av v'eim would cause the Torah to be uprooted from Klal Yisroel as surely as an axe cuts down a tree (Meshech Chochma, Kedoshim; Abarbanel, Vo'eschanan).

If parents expect their child only to love them and not fear them, then the child's acceptance of their wishes will be dependent on his own will and limited understanding, and he will lack the ability to accept their authority when it comes into conflict with his own desires (*Maharal*, *Tiferes Yisroel*).

The two factors of semol docheh (repelling with the left hand) and yemin mekareves (bringing close with the right hand) when applied together in the correct balance as intended by Chazal (and explained by all Gedolei Yisroel), achieve a two-fold result: a) they give the child the ability to honor and revere his parents, as

the Torah commands, and consequently, he will be accepting of their wishes; b) they allow the parents to discipline their children whilst at the same time showering upon them their parental love. Children nowadays do need plenty of *kiruv* and *chizuk* — closeness and encouragement. Nevertheless, a consistent pattern of discipline is vital to enable the *kiruv* and *chizuk* to be effective.

I have heard this personally from the author of Aitzos V'hadrochos (Rabbi Y. Greenwald under the guidance of the Steipler ב"ל) – a child who feels secure in his parents' love will be able to accept their discipline and guidance as well.

These two factors must be constantly interchanged throughout the child's maturation. Too much of semol docheh without the warmth of yemin mekareves will result in an aggressive, resentful, and often violent adult. Too much yemin mekareves without the restraining influence of semol docheh will result in spoiled, unhappy and undisciplined adult unable to cope with daily problems, and married life.

There is a much-quoted passuk in Mishlei (13, 14), "Chosech shivto sonei b'no," which unfortunately is very well known in its mis-translated form: "Spare the rod and spoil the child." In actual fact, the correct translation is, "He who spared the rod hates his child." There are two explanations for this. Firstly, if a parent "spares the rod" and does not apply corrective discipline, his child will grow up rebelling against his parent to the extent that they will come to hate him (Midrash Rabba Shemos ch1).

The second explanation is that by "sparing the rod," the parent is showing that already *now* he hates the child; he does not love him sufficiently to suffer the unpleasantness of having to punish him in order to guide him on the right way. In much the same way, no parent who truly loves his child will shirk from removing a splinter that his child has, despite the child's screams and protests (*Malbim*).

RABBI A. POLLAK (Author of Torah Powerhouse, Feldheim Pub.) Salford, U.K.

### **GUIDELINES FOR DISCIPLINE**

Yasher kochacha on such a wonderful Jewish Observer (Nov. issue).

Two points not mentioned in the articles: 1) While expanding on the approach of avoiding hitting children, Reb Chaim Kanievsky שליט"א (Orchos Yosher – chapter on chinuch) goes to length to dispute this view.

Rabbi Kanievsky does, however, stress that one should not hit his son too frequently, so it should not lose its effect, but he does not advise that one should refrain from hitting him altogether.

2) Rabbi Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg שליט"א spoke in public in America, saying: "Many people come to me in Eretz Yisroel and ask me what to do with their son who is going off the 'path.' I ask them, 'Did you make your children stand up for you when they were young?' (as the Torah demands as part of the *mitzva* of honoring one's parents (Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 240:7). They all invariably answer, 'No,' and I say to them, 'Then it's your fault! If you don't train them to respect you when they're young, why should they listen to you now?" (I heard these shocking words myself.)

I heard a very similar thought from Rabbi Matisyahu Salomon who said that those people who think that they shouldn't make their children stand up for them (because the law is that if a father is willing to overlook his right to be honored, his honor is forgiven), think that they are smarter than the Torah. If the Torah thought it necessary to make a mitzva for children to stand up for their parents, then there is obviously a very good reason to do it, and we should not just forgive it.

I also asked one of today's *Gedoeli Hador* about making your children stand up for you, although others don't make their children stand up, and he told me that you should make them stand up once a day.

NAME WITHHELD BY REQUEST The author is on the faculty of a Mesivta High School, in the New York area.

### II The Chinuch Scene

Some letter-writers faulted the *chinuch* system for children's difficulties and their ultimate defection – too high standards; too little allowance for variations in strengths and weaknesses, in intelligence, in areas of interest, in mental processing, or in ability to concentrate; no accommodation for individuality of expression.

Some of the observations might be valid; others were patently defensive, a matter of passing the buck. And some obviously were projecting the writers' agenda, quite apart from focusing on prevention of disaffection among our youth.

True, these letters were prompted by the November Jewish Observer but the pages of this magazine are not the forum for their publication. Our contemporary yeshiva system has its roots in the vision of Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner, which was based on the directives of his Rebbe, the Vilna Gaon. From Volozhin - together with the Hungarian yeshiva system, which was founded in Pressburg by the Chasam Sofer - grew the network of yeshivos that was responsible for the growth of Torah during these past two centuries...first in Europe, and then in Eretz Yisroel and America. While adaptations have been necessary, they have guided themselves by the lodestone of Volozhin and Pressburg. The design and function of our day schools, yeshivos ketanos, and mesivta high schools may well be molded by a variety of factors, but ultimately they are meant to prepare our children to aspire for the contemporary counterpart to Volozhin and Pressburg.

Time and again, the question arises: How does one endeavor to meet individual needs without compromising the direction and the ultimate goal of the system? The Jewish Observer believes that this is a question for the custodians of the Mesorah, the caretakers of the system, those who care for the purity of the legacy, as they care for each and every designated heir to its teachings. Accordingly, letters with questions, criticisms and suggestions regarding chinuch have been referred to a group of Roshei Yeshiva with the

confidence that – because of their deep concern with the problems they present – they will evaluate these issues and will אייה share their suggestions for how to deal with them with key people in *chinuch*.

Understandably, members of the faculties and administrations of our schools cannot possibly pick out each child burdened with a personal or emotional crisis, nor are they equipped to deal with every kind of situation that might arise. How propitious, then, is the call issued by the

Mashgiach of Bais Medrash Govoha (Lakewood), Rabbi Matisyahu Salomon שלשי, at a recent Torah Umesorah Convention, that the faculty of every high school-beis midrash include a designated mashgiach/guidance counselor to serve as a mentor for the students at each level in the school.

ome letters directly faulted teachers, *rebbe'im* or principals for a variety of shortcomings – some probably real, others imagined, and yet others irrelevant. Beyond question, the men and women who are currently entering the field of Torah education are doing so by a choice fired with idealism, not as a last resort, forced by circumstances. Indeed, one might say that the vast majority of today's Torah educators are of this caliber. The degree of dedication that marks their efforts and the concomitant level of success that they realize are unparalleled in the American experience.

Some suggestions for improvement and for dealing with trying circumstances could probably bring about positive change. One particular formula, oft repeated, would undoubtedly be most effective: cut all classes in half, and double the take-home pay of all *rebbe'im* and teachers. The ability of a *rebbe* to address children's needs individually is more than doubled when dealing with fewer children; this needs no elaboration. By the same token, a *Rebbe* whose mind is free of financial concerns and who is without need for seeking supplementary sources of income, will have the discretionary time and freedom to concentrate on individual children and their needs, outside of school hours.

In sum, smaller, more manageable classes, coupled with a decent minimum wage will certainly bear appreciable fruit in terms of greater involvement and success, permitting teachers to take their classroom concerns home, in mind and heart, thinking of ways to help each kid...instead of bringing home-pressures to school with them.

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### Some Kids on the Brink Can Be Saved

#### A REBBI'S VIEW

s a Rebbi / Maggid Shiur for the past seven and a half years in a yeshiva that has many bachurim on the fringe or at risk (we've also catered to many who were not), I found your November issue right on target.

To put the blame on the system in yeshivos and mechanchim is unfair and inaccurate. Yeshivos like Lakewood, Brisk and Mir in Eretz Yisroel are bursting at the seams, as are many top mesivtos and yeshiva gedolos in America. That does not result from a failing system.

Some bachurim claim that they went down because of their powerful yeitzer hara. Everybody is endowed with a strong yeitzer hara, but they muster the willpower to fight. A person who is negative about himself because of family problems or other reasons will sometimes lack the willpower for the struggle. The triumph of the yeitzer hara per se is the result, not the cause of his succumbing to pressures.

I have found boys leaving Torah and slipping in *Yiddishkeit* because of what they perceive to be a lack of success in learning. They don't enjoy pursuing an endeavor at which they are doomed to fail. Learning becomes an unyielding pressure, and they seek to escape from it. The *yeitzer hara* sets in because there is no Torah to fight it.

Several incidents illustrate this point. A few years ago, an article described some 200 boys hanging out on *Simchas Torah* doing things unbecoming of

**Rabbi Wolpin** is a *maggid shiur* in the Yeshiva Gedolah of Midwood in Brooklyn.

Yiddish kinder. One former talmid said that he was there, as were a number of boys who had been in his class in elementary school. I asked him if any of them were from the top part of the class. His answer – they were all from the bottom. Apparently, the top part were being catered to, and felt good about themselves.

Several years ago, a very lebedig, elaborate niggun played in my mind. I was trying to place it. Then I realized that I had gotten it from a bachur who had been my student that past summer. Even though he had applied himself to his studies during the winter, he was becoming shaky in the summer. I called him over to speak to him in learning. As part of the conversation, I mentioned that he has a good head.

"Who says I have a good head?"
"Rabbi...., your next-year maggid
shiur told me this week."

"Really, he said that?"

The bachur continued to learn behasmoda for the next two hours. A couple of Shabbosos into the next year, I walked into the Beis Midrash to daven Mincha. This bachur rushed over to me to say Shalom Aleichem. He started telling me how much he loves his new Rebbi and his shiur, and he was therefore chazering shiur all afternoon on his own time.

I had davened Ma'ariv in his yeshiva several times after that. This bachur was always singing this happy niggun to himself. His Rebbi thought of him as having a good head, and he had to prove it. The more he tried, the more successful he was, and the happier he became.... Until he was singing a cheerful, leibidiger niggun on his way

to learning. That's how this niggun stuck in my head. Again demonstrating that success in learning promotes further learning; lack of success can YTT cause someone to drop in Torah and mitzyos.

#### Focused Tutoring Can Make a Difference

Then a boy is not doing well in class, his self-esteem usually goes down, and with it, often, his will-power to fight his yeitzer hara. An experienced tutor or Rebbe could diagnose this boy's learning problem. Most weak students aren't weak in every area. Some are not good listeners, but have good comprehension and ask astute questions. Or, they may have good retention, or other pluses, but can't keep up with the pace in the classroom. An effective tutor could boost a boy's self confidence, and as a result, he'll start learning better, and of course his Yiddishkeit level will begin to soar. A good, experienced tutor is expensive. In many cases, however, you can't afford not to hire one. As a bumper sticker put it: "If you think education is expensive, try ignorance."

Five years ago, a Rebbi in a chassidic yeshiva tried to convince the father of a sweet, young bachur that his son could benefit from tutoring. The father was not interested. Said the Rebbi to the father, "Your son is now an ehrlichr bachur. What would you say if by the end of the year he begins combing his hair and trimming his beard?"

"Not my son."

"You never know what one more year of accomplishing nothing in learning can do."

The father relented, and the Rebbi

engaged a tutor for the boy. He learned with him for the next two years, bringing out his strengths in learning, making him feel better about himself. He is currently a chassan and plans on learning in Kollel after he gets married. There are countless similar cases where focused tutoring thwarted the root causes of someone going down.

#### Tailor-Made Environment

nother possibility is a special yeshiva environment, where success is promoted through focusing on the bachur's ma'alos (strengths) in learning. When a bachur enters the yeshiva where I teach (Yeshiva Gedolah of Midwood), there's a good chance that he wasn't successful previously. The talmid is not told, "Don't you dare get up from your seat for the next two hours." Scolding and pressuring has failed with these boys. Instead, a talmid is told, "Let's see what you can accomplish in the next two hours." Usually, the boys get into learning little by little, until they learn intensively enough for "Hame'or shebo machaziro lemutav, The light of Torah makes them into better human beings." This can be a slow process. With patience, however, it can work.

Does it work for everyone? Of course not. A number of years ago, we came up with a list of the boys who had been in our yeshiva three years earlier. Eighteen of the twenty-five students were either learning in Kollel, or a yeshiva, or are ehrlicher ba'alei battiim who set aside time for Torah. To be sure, a number of these eighteen were quite strong to start with. Someone who is fully succeeding in a high-pressure yeshiva should continue there. Someone who is a mechallel Shabbos, or beyond the fringe in other ways, is too far-gone for this approach. In addition, there is a risk that he might exert a negative influence on others in this type of yeshiva. This solution is possible only for boys who are starting to fail, for this approach is the easiest for them to feel successful.

In short, the problems often begin with lack of accomplishment in Torah study. The prevention and possible solution can also come through Torah,

if it's presented correctly: the right amount in the right way.

The Gemora says in Bava Basra, "Barasi yeitzer hara, barasi Torah tavlin."

Hashem says, I created a yeitzer hara and created Torah as a medicine. Torah is the best medicine; studying Torah is the best therapy.

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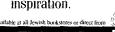
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### PREVENTION THROUGH INFORMED FAITH

Your Nov. '99 issue was both shocking and extremely scary. Here in *Eretz Yisroel* we have not been spared either and feel equally helpless and frustrated from the situation we see before our eyes. *Hashem yerachem aleinu v'al kol Yisroel, amen.* 

Amongst your many suggestions for prevention, I was looking for mention of one subject – but did not find it – *emuna*, basic beliefs.

Let me explain. In our generation, there is a startling fact. Many of our young ones, and even a good number of adults, have never learned or been taught the fundamentals of emuna! Having been raised as FFB's, parents and educators often take for granted that their children and students are ma'aminim b'nei ma'aminim and therefore concentrate their efforts on teaching middos (character), learning abilities, all the subjects of the curriculum, whilst the yesod hayesodos (the basic foundation) is almost totally ignored.

Perhaps things would be different if we were to introduce into every school or veshiva curriculum a new subject yesodos ha'emuna. If the Ramban, the Chovos Halevavos, and many other Rishonim v'Acharonim found it necessary to write and teach emuna u'bitachon (belief and faith), then shouldn't we? Let us set up structured and systematic lessons in our schools, dealing with and discussing Torah min haShamayim (Divine source of Torah), proof of validity of Torah sheb'al peh (Oral Law), hashgacha peratis (Divine Providence), chasdei Hashem (G-d's lovingkindness). Let us teach and learn

be'iyun (with depth) the Thirteen Principles of Faith of the Rambam.

Let us learn and teach how to see the Ribbono Shel Olam in the world around us using the tools and suggestions of the Sha'ar Habechina of the Chovos Halevavos and learn to become excited and awakened by the wonderous chachma (wisdom) and hashgacha in flowers, trees, animals and our own bodies. Let us use the tremendous books of Rabbi Avigdor Miller שליט"א as classroom texts and not just as optional library reading.

Any course, seminar, or yeshiva catering to ba'alei teshuva would not have an ounce of success if not for the lectures, shiurim and symposia spent proving all aspects of the yesodos ha'emuna, and openly addressing the questions and doubts. Would not any of our FFB children be just as fascinated and motivated by a series of lectures on Torah codes, for example, or finding that all historical events are hinted at in the Chumash?

Children and youth who would be taught everything relevant to this basic subject, would feel confident and comfortable with their Jewishness and would certainly be much better equipped to deal with the trials, tests and tribulations of life, as *Chavakuk* has told us, "V'tzaddik b'emunaso yichyeh – the righteous lives by his faith."

DOVID POTASH Rosh Kollel Nachlas Bnei Shimon Jerusalem

### TIME TO LEARN TO TRUST THE MENAHELIM OF OUR SCHOOLS

In the unique Jewish Observer of November '99, "Children on the Fringe," Rabbi Ahron Kaufman points out that "The remarkable ba'al teshuva movement is growing every day. Paradoxically, the number of people growing up in religious homes who are walking away into emptiness is also increasing. What factors are present in our contemporary society that people could both be attracted and repelled at the same time?"

As a teacher at Aish HaTorah-Manhattan for the past three years, and as a

lecturer at over one hundred Discovery Seminars across the U.S.A., Canada, and England over the past seven years, I've seen, and hopefully been a factor in, the return of many people as ba'alei teshuva.

As a melamed for eight years at two well-known Brookyn yeshivos, and eight summers at a large heimishe bungalow colony with children from over a dozen yeshivos, and as a parent and grandparent, I've acquired a pretty good idea about our homes, community, and our chinuch system. I would like to try to answer Rabbi Kaufman's question.

Our approach to potential ba'alei teshuva is to introduce them to Jewish thought and practices in a gradual way, one step at a time. If a potential ba'al teshuva is encouraged to proceed into areas of Torah study or religious commitment before he or she is ready for them, it increases the possibility that they'll fall out before they have even gotten in. This derech mirrors Rabbi Simcha Zissel of Kelm who says regarding the pasuk/Chazal "Hochayach tochi'ach - afilu me'ah p'amim" (correct/rebuke someone even one hundred times): that if you want to bring someone from nonobservance to observance, you are required to structure their gradually increasing observance into a one hundred small, baby-step program, if that's what it takes.

This same concept is what's required in the *chinuch* of our children. As Rabbi Wolbe says (Nov. JO), "If parents demand too much, making requests that the child is not mature enough to obey, they sabotage the educational process. Expectations beyond the child's grasp will not stimulate development." This problem exists in many homes. That's where the major changes need to take place. That's what the JO mainly addresses. It also exists in our boys' *chinuch* system.

When a parent comes to a *menahel* or a *melamed* and says, "Why aren't you learning *Mishnayos* with my 7-year-old? My nephew in the \_\_\_\_\_\_ yeshiva already learns *Mishnayos*, and knows it well!" Or when a parent complains that the parallel class learned three more

pesukim than his son's class, or that another yeshiva is better because they start Gemora a year earlier, or that his 12-year-old son isn't learning enough Tosafos, that parent is sabotaging his child's and his child's classmates' educational process.

Mishnayos shouldn't be a blink-ofthe-eye transition from Chumash to Gemora. According to Chazal in Avos, it's a five-year subject, just like Chumash. Why don't we try delaying has'chalas Gemora a year or two? Why not delay learning meforshim a year or two? What's going to happen?

Baruch Hashem nobody goes to work at 14 or 15 years old like in the old days in Europe. There is time for lomdus from age 16 and up. The beginning of-the-end for many boys who have left learning altogether, and some who have left frumkeit altogether, was, partially, because they were failures in Gemora somewhere between ages 10 and 15. An extra year or two of Mishnayos is not only a yedi'os (resource of information) builder; it's a confidence builder.

A half-dozen prominent elementary school menahalim have individually and personally told me that they know that we start learning Gemora with boys that are too young but they can't do anything about it because of competition among schools to start younger and younger. This unhealthy competition is caused mostly by pressure from parents. The same problem exists with 13- and 14-year-olds who are learning meforshim instead of Gemora. The result of this is many boys are learning what is inappropriate for them. They are unhappy. Combine that with the bigger problem of a bad situation at home, and they are in danger of falling out, fully or partially, of frumkeit.

Another part of the education equation was mentioned by Rabbi Kaufman. "There are many areas to discover and learn, and the excitement and fulfillment generated by *Chumash Be'iyun, Navi, Kesuvim*, Jewish History, *Hashkafa, Halacha, Mussar*, and other topics are real, and true to the essence of Torah.... We should encourage our children to discover these topics earlier..." (Nov. JO page 38)

Navi? Kesuvim? Jewish History? In which yeshiva do they teach or learn that? What percent of 20-year-old young men have learned Yechezkel or Ezra? Why do heimishe bachurim ask me if Yirmiyahu was at Churban Bayis Rishon or Sheini? Why do half the boys that I've asked not know the translation of "U'fdei ch'numecho Yehuda v'Yisroel"? Rabbi Kaufman's idea is right, but children won't "discover" something that they've hardly been exposed to. We need to give the menahel of our son's Yeshiva the same lati-

tude we give to the *menaheles* of our daughter's school.

There is a ba'al teshuva in San Diego whom I met a number of years ago who was completing his fourth mesechta. He's in shul every morning at 6 a.m. with his chavrusa. He never touched a Gemora until he was 16. (I'm not recommending that we wait until 16 to start Gemora. Chazal in Pirkei Avos say 15 is o.k.) He knows how to learn well. He's learning what is appropriate for him. He is happy. He probably won't fall out of frumkeit.

כסייד

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ELIYAHU BERGSTEIN Monsey, NY

#### A MENAHEL'S SUGGESTIONS

I found especially insightful the article by Rabbi Michoel Levy, "Buying Time." In my own yeshiva days, my mashgiach said that given the ability to do so, he would deep-freeze all teenage boys from ages 13 to 18 and have them wake up already grown-up (almost). He said he would gladly be mochel the missing Torah to avoid the risk of these dangerous years. He stated this over twenty years ago when the world was clearly a different and better place.

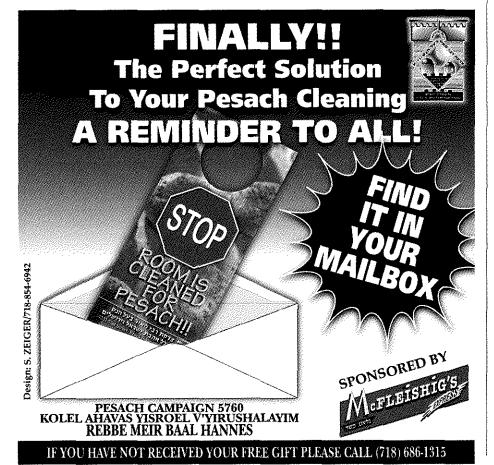
• Regarding the expulsion of children

from yeshivos, I can only state that the prevailing Da'as Torah is that under certain circumstances, it is imperative to expel a child from yeshiva. Don't think that this comes at no cost - it comes at a tremendous cost! The damage caused can never be fully understood or appreciated. A large part of the problem is that an expelled bachur finds it nearly impossible to get into another yeshiva. There are a few yeshivos that will accept this boy, but then that yeshiva gets stigmatized as a reject yeshiva and insures itself only difficulties in attracting quality talmidim needed to create the atmosphere of a makom Torah, which is most beneficial for the at-risk teen.

As a bold suggestion to this dilemma, I would respectfully suggest that every yeshiva adopt for itself the following policy enforced by the *Moetzes Gedolei Torah*: every yeshiva must accept one student expelled from another yeshiva for every student that it expels. This will open up spaces for the expelled *talmid* and this will cause the yeshiva to

think twice before expelling its existing talmidim. A special Vaad Hachinuch through Project YES could place these students in the yeshiva best suited for the talmid and the yeshiva. If this is in fact Daas Torah, then it must be followed by all yeshivos who claim to live by Daas Torah and the words of our Gedolim.

- Teenagers deserve respect. I beg all rebbe'im and menahalim: please be concerned with kavod ha'adam more than with kavod haTorah. Not every slight at you is a slight of kavod haTorah. Appreciate your talmidim for the good they do, for the Torah they learn. Respect them for the positive. In short, you need to develop your sense of humor. Please realize that there is hardly any derech eretz in the world today. Your talmid will gain derech eretz from your restraint, not your complaint.
- The parents of children must choose a yeshiva for their child that is best for the child, not best for them. Don't put a child into a situation where he won't succeed. Parents, please be responsible. I will never forget the child who did not take his medication for depression and concentration for two weeks because his father was too busy to get to the post office to send it.
- On the most painful issue of drug use, in our yeshiva we concluded that only a policy of zero tolerance is acceptable. However, just paying lip service to this policy is not sufficient. Regular drug testing must become a reality. My dear *menahel*, trust me. It is in your yeshiva! Please be responsible.
- · Lastly, we must create a yeshiva to deal with these Yiddishe neshamos. Money cannot be an issue, our children are priceless. The yeshiva should be away from all population centers - perhaps a Catskill camp site. A full Beis Midrash with Roshei Yeshivos and quality talmidim (tuition free possibly) should be on campus learning three sedarim daily. A thirty-minute daily seder with high-school and Beis Midrash chavrusos should be implemented. All meals and breaks should be coordinated to provide as much out-of-seder exposure as possible. The Beis Midrash men will serve as worthy role models for these



talmidim. Drug testing must be in effect, and, again, zero tolerance must be the rule. We need to give these children a last chance, but they must be willing to take advantage of it.

My years of *chinuch* have certainly taught me some humility. I don't claim to know all the answers, but I hope that some of these ideas will generate thought, discussions and *Be'ezras Hashem* make a difference.

A CONCERNED MENAHEL

### FACING "A FEW HURTING QUESTIONS"

Your November issue, so well written by the authors of each article, cries out for help. The issues cause us to pause and think. However, it also has me asking a few hurting questions that perhaps all of us in *chinuch* take some time to reflect upon.

- Are we catering enough to the below ninety student?
- Are we exposing and stimulating our talmidim enough in Navi, Chumash, Halacha, and Mussar? These subjects especially benefit a student who has some difficulty in understanding a complicated shiur in Gemora.
- Are we guiding our students who cannot for whatever reason become Roshei Yeshiva to some vocational studies after reaching the age of twenty, twenty-one, so that he remain a frum "balabos" who will always be kove'a ittim laTorah?
- Are *mechanchim* giving enough time and personal caring and encouragement to the students?
- What are we doing to build selfesteem in a student?
- Are we adhering to the well-known concept of "Chanoch lana'ar al pi darko"?
- Equally important as parents, are we spending worthwhile time with our children during their free time from school, which includes after-school hours?
- Are we offering enough support and caring for those who, unfortunately, are lacking family support? (I do not mean financially.)

True introspection in regard to these questions can save hundreds of talmidim, refine our society, raise the self-esteem of the individual, prevent many shalom bayis problems, and enhance society as a whole.

RABBI JERUCHOM L. SHAPIRO
ADMINISTRATOR
Beth Jacob of Boro Park
Brooklyn

### THE REBBE AND THE CLASS COMEDIAN

"Hey! You Rebbe'im and teachers are all the same. You just don't care!" blurted out an eighth grader to me after I had sent him out of Mincha one day. He was the class comedian, who once again had been disturbing the tefilla. My sixth sense told me that it would be better not to discipline him. Instead, I told him that I was taken aback and personally hurt by his unjustly comments. I put my arm around him and told him how much we really do care about each and every talmid.

We spent the next hour talking on the front stoop of the yeshiva building where he apologized for his outburst, and that he really didn't mean to be *chutzpadik*, except that he felt very frustrated with his problems and peer pressure. He broke down about the pressures that he

was going through. Judging by the way he always joked around, who would have ever guessed that anything bothered him?

He mentioned to me that his parents are too busy working to have any time to spend with him! "Why don't you take out an ArtScroll *Gemora* to learn at night?"

"With a VCR, TV, Internet, Gameboy & Nintendo 64 in the house, ArtScroll doesn't stand a fighting chance!"

He very much appreciated this 'one-on-one' rebbe-to-talmid discussion. He thought it was a very neat suggestion that he should take out an ArtScroll Gemora to learn between 8 and 9 pm when everyone is usually learning Daf Yomi. In this way, he would feel very important and part of the tzibbur. I suggested that he be a little more serious during Mincha, and that everyone would notice him changing.

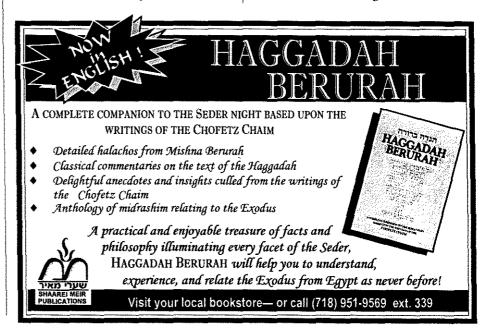
We both learned valuable lessons that day: 1) Every *talmid* must be taken serious – even the comics! 2) *Rebbe'im's* confession: we care very much about each and every *talmid*!

RABBI MOSHE SHOCHET

Brooklyn

### BASIC HALACHOS OF CIVILITY: CRUCIAL TO RAISING CHILDREN

Yasher ko'ach for bringing to the forefront the disheartening issue of "at-risk"



children. It is understandable that a boy who is not academically gifted would want to seek other venues where he feels like a "somebody" (especially if *middos tovos* and other talents are not strongly acknowledged in his yeshiva). Did the *Baal Shem Tov* not recognize the need for a new vehicle for avodas *Hashem* for this very reason?

On the other hand, this does not explain the commonplace disregard for authority or the "ess kumt mir" attitude among youth at large. There is another side to the story which few are addressing publicly - the issue of children's "responsibilities," not only their rights. Chinuch requires a balanced approach, as Chazal state unequivocally; this includes the setting of limits and expectations and applying loving discipline as needed. In a Jewish home, moreover, the first expectations are kibud u'mora av v'eim, which train a child to be receptive to chinuch. The entire Mesorah rests upon observance of these mitzvos! Additionally, the child who holds his parents in esteem will likely have self-esteem. We must realize that example alone is not enough (e.g. Eisav and Avshalom); a child needs "hergul" - habituation - to develop proper *mid*dos. In fact, the rationale behind all mitzvos is that "a person is shaped according to his actions" (Sefer HaChinuch #16). If we produce "loveable"

children – children who are respectful and obedient – we won't need courses on how to love "difficult" children. This is the secret in homes where the *Mesorah* is intact.

### The Role of Project Derech

After ten years involvement in Project Derech, with the endorsement of our Gedolei Hatorah and the guidance of esteemed rabbanim and mechanchim, we have gleaned many "chiddushim" which I hope you will allow us to share with your readers. Above all, we have witnessed amazing changes transpire in children who were taught Hilchos Derech Eretz in a loving way. (Over 180 schools will attest to the power of these halachos, as will family therapists who have incorporated it into their practice.) Perhaps most amazing is how "difficult" children will often "attach" themselves to the program like a drowning man to a lifesaver! In truth, children crave security, while parents crave respect for their parenthood in order to fulfill their roles as mechanchim. Not only do the mitzvos provide "tools" and boundaries" which establish respect, but without them, we are as powerless as secular adults. In an era extolling youth, independence and self-gratification, why should a child respect his elders?

We know that every facet of a Jew's life

is dictated by halacha and that every mitzva contributes to shleimus. Are we apologetic when we teach kibud av v'eim? Yora De'a 240-241 governs parent-child relations; these *mitzvos* comprise the Jewish laws of parenting. Can we truthfully expect nachas in homes where kibud u'mora av v'eim have become "meis mitzvos," where children transgress them on a daily basis? Can a home without these mitzvos be a home with kedusha? Honoring parents is likened to honoring Hashem, yet parents forgo their honor before it was ever established! Do children serve their parents, or is it vice versa? Are parents even aware that they may not forgive chutzpa or bizayon allowing offspring to argue like prosecutors!?

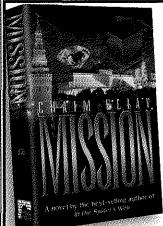
(In old-fashioned homes, on the other hand, parents are still viewed as "kodesh kedoshim" and "s'mol docheh" remains an option for instilling yiras av v'eim. This may include a small potch, or a drop of soap on the tongue to cure chutzpa. Chassidim, in particular, have retained many minhagim ensuring kavod for parents (inlaw). By instilling awe when children are young, honoring parents remains a cherished "privilege" and much heartache is averted.)

We postulate that the Mesorah in kibud av v'eim was lost with the Holocaust, which destroyed virtually a generation of grandparents, ד"ל. Since these mitzvos were taught by role-modeling, a gaping void was now left open. Democratic theories, compounded by affluence, produced a sure-fire recipe for spoiling children (who, at one time, due to the hardships of life, were forced to be "givers" rather than "takers"). The Chazon Ish foresaw that regular forgoing of honor by parents would lead to degeneration of the entire mitzva. To quote one esteemed Rav in Monsey: "In America, the mitzva is 'Kabed es bincha v'es bit'cha!''

#### Laxity in Basic Areas

Whether due to misplaced compassion, or unfamiliarity with *Yora De'a* 240, laxity in these *mitzvos* has grave repercussions. For example:

By cultivating humility, sensitivity, appreciation and self-control, these



### NEW FROM CHAIM ELIAV, THE BEST-SELLING AUTHOR OF IN THE SPIDER'S WEB —

eff Handler is sent on a business assignment to buy diamonds in Moscow. His grandfather has a different mission for him - to find a special pair of tefilin that were left in Moscow fifty years ago. The K.G.B.'s suspicions are aroused. Jeff feels as if he is

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mitzvos train a child to become a mentch. They are prerequisites to kedusha and shalom bayis.

Without yira, acceptance of parental wishes will be based upon a child's own will and understanding, and he will be unable to subjugate himself fully to authority. This jeopardizes the Mesorah itself (Maharal, Tiferes Yisroel). For example, rather than obey a rebbe muvhak, he will pasken emotional issues from a sefer.

The ben sorer u'moreh is the proverbial "spoiled child" who, unaccustomed to parental discipline, never develops the attribute of self-discipline. Unable to cope with daily life and marriage, he will surely be unprepared to care for aging parents!

To earn *s'char* in *olam habba*, one must be aware that he is fulfilling a *mitz-va*. Those unaware of the extent and the details, will reap their reward in this world only.

The reward for kibud av v'eim is: "L'ma'an yarichun yamecha u'l'maa'an yetev lach." What parent doesn't want this for his child? Yet we neglect the Torah's prescription. Rashi warns us that Yosef's life was shortened for allowing dishonor to his father (Shemos 20,12) Rochel Imenu did not live to see her sons marry, for paining her father by stealing his idols. (Zohar, Vayeitzei)

By not teaching our child subjugation to elders, we are inadvertently infecting them with the sickness that Sefer Chovas HaTalmidim calls "machlas hayeshus the disease of egotism." He writes (chapter 6) that one of the primary reasons why so few gedolei hador arise from our generations is because children grow up thinking that it is perfectly all right to contradict their parents and teachers, which leads them to believe that they, in fact, have a clearer outlook on life than do their elders. The key to kinvan (acquisition) of Torah is humility. Without humility, these children grow up lacking the key "ingredient" necessary to become true Torah scholars.

Let us remember that real *simcha* is the *simcha shel mitzva*. The Chofetz Chaim indeed warns that, in the next world, parents will see the *tzar* (anguish) they caused their own children by "misplaced compassion." He himself taught his children: "You must be careful with even the smallest of your actions.... Everything you do should be right — not maybe right or probably right." The key is to start training children while they are young, before habits become ingrained (Daughters of Destiny, page 49; Mishna Berura 343:3).

The *Torah* contains all wisdom. We need only reveal it and practice it.

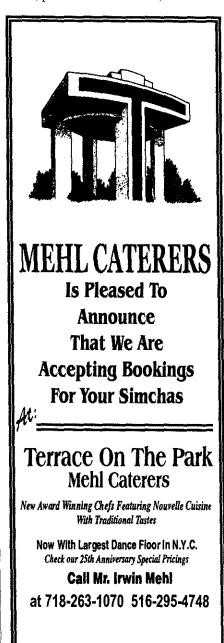
AVROHOM ABERBACK (Project Derech) Toronto

### RAISING THE STANDARDS – FOR PARENTS AND EDUCATORS

As parents and as mechanchim, we have become habituated to ignoring or denying the tragic outcomes described in the "on the fringe" issue of The Jewish Observer, Baruch Hashem, there are today organizations and professionals reaching out to the community with its recent Special handbook and Project YES, CAHAL, JAADD, MASK, as well as "special" yeshivos whose menahelim and staff are assuming an enormous responsibility. Mi ke'amcha Yisroel! But the webbing in our "mainstream" yeshivos has become too loosely woven: too many of our children fall through (or get tangled in) the net. Much more can be done to come to the assistance of a community in distress, whose fringes, as the Observer attests, are unraveling. Let me offer a few observations and proposals:

The statistics that tie academic failure and dropout rates to failure to learn to read are well-known. The *Yiddishe velt* enjoys a double challenge, for we must teach/learn not just reading, but *kriya* – reading Hebrew (and, on top of that, often approach *limudei kodesh* – religious studies – in both Hebrew and Yiddish). The importance of phonological awareness – the ability to hear and associate sounds with letters – must be brought not just to school, but home. Without any special training at all, many parents already engage their children in this process; there are many, though, who do

not, but who, if taught a few simple games and activities – as simple as playing "rhyme words" (in English, in Yiddish and in Hebrew!) – could help their children to develop these vital pre-reading skills. Parent education – a one-hour session on PTA night, for instance – could address this with optimum results. Studies consistently demonstrate positive results. (Moreover, as with marriage and parenting skills in general, the time to teach is before the reality hits home, before our children become husbands, wives, parents and teachers.)



In our schools, we need reading programs, reading specialists, reading games, reading diagnostics, and reading and more reading in both English and limudei kodesh. Letting our children limp through the early grades without knowing how to read/without knowing kriya dooms them to academic gehinnom with, chas ve'shalom, tragic social/spiritual consequences as well. How many rebbe'im and magidei shiur can attest, sadly, that they have talmidim who can daven solely ba'al peh, talmidim who have difficulty reading (not reciting) the tefillos if presented with a Siddur, who can say over a shiur they've heard, but feel ill at ease on the daf? This does not mean that children should be held back until they can read (English or Hebrew); it means that we can no longer pass off failures-to-teach as failures-to-learn. As more than one pundit has - with some exaggeration, but not without truth - observed: there are no learning disabilities, there are only teaching disabilities. Let us not accuse and sentence the victims.

Selected older bachurim/yungelleit would be trained and expected to provide services in our yeshivos to assist the children (and their often over-extended rebbes/teachers). These older boys/young men would, in effect, serve as on-site guidance counselors, as a support system for the boy whom the rebbe feels compelled to throw out of class, and as a support system for the rebbe as well: "Yingele, you need to speak with Reb Ploni," instead of "Go stand outside the Menahel's office until I call for you."

These young men would not be expected to provide counseling, as would a social worker or psychologist; they would, rather, be more like "Big Brothers," each with his own special talmidim to guide and assist. With the proper training, these guidance counselors/mashgichim could be a critical source for referrals to more professional counseling (where deemed appropriate, in consultation with the hanhala and the parents) and for guidance/eitzos for the rebbes themselves. Their role would be neither to whitewash nor to accuse; their function would be to help their boys

remain in yeshiva and in class: to *chazer* (review) the lesson, to help him organize his looseleaf, to talk the child through his misbehavior, to set up a behavior modification reward system if appropriate, to bolster his self-esteem, and to help in other meaningful ways.

Those yungeleit who would become part of this support system must themselves be professionally trained (in a series of well-designed classes, not a college degree program); and they must commit to a schedule upon which the rebbe'im and talmidim can rely. To be sure, such an undertaking is not for every bachur, some boys should of course be learning yom v'layla - day and night. For many others, however, this training would complement their learning and give them valuable added experience when it comes time to find a parnassa. Such a program could only enhance a bachur's ability to work later as a rebbe or in an amplified mode of guidance. And for the youngsters who are so often at the brink of failure because of inadequate organization, inadequate self-control or, even, inadequate ability, these young men could represent the difference between falling off the edge - beyond the fringe - and hanging in/finding a way back.

It is not difficult to suggest that a new yeshiva, a new string of yeshivos, should be supported, yeshivos that are truly sensitive to and address the strengths and weaknesses of the individual talmid. This is not about lowering standards; it is about raising them - raising our standards for ourselves as parents and mechanchim, raising our level of intolerance of failure; polishing our brightest jewels even as we polish those who do not yet - and may never - gleam. It is about loving our talmidim, about lifelines, not trip-wires. When we are truly prepared to reach and to teach al pi darko - when Rav Preida is not an old model, but a role model - then we can begin the process of reclaiming our own. This is not Special Education. This is special education, the education to which every single Yiddishe kindt should be entitled. Maudlin it may seem to say

that every child is special, but it is true – not just in his home, but in the *klal*, and one day, *be'ezras Hashem*, in the classroom, as well.

Hayom katzar, vehamlacha meruba: not only the labor, but the cost will be great. As a community, we must acknowledge our obligation to see that our children flourish, that we give them the tools they will need in order to build for their own children. And we must be prepared to pay a steep price if we are to assure the most favorable outcomes, for surely we will pay even more dearly, far more dearly, should we decline.

M. BIRNBAUM
Brooklyn

### A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT – ALL DAY LONG

The beauty of Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe's words are awe-inspiring – if only I could have that skillful blend of a gentle and caring educational experience for my child in his elementary *cheder*. At home I use many of those same difficult pleasantries to coax my son into attending early morning *minyan* and *shteiging* in general. But, oh, what he's up against once he's in school, dealing with his "frum" English teachers and administration. I feel like he comes home battle scarred each day and indeed I have to bandage his wounds (emotional and not physical), daily.

Let's not close our eyes to the quality of guidance that comprises the afternoon of our son's day in the best chedarim. I don't accept the blanket excuses, "It happens in every school," and "The boys are wild after a long morning of limudei kodesh," etc. We don't need harried military personnel. If the load is too heavy on top, then lighten it. Constant scolding, assignments and expulsions and insufficient time to listen to the students' side of numerous incidents contributes greatly to the fallout of our children. Instead of counting fatalities later on, let's try to heal some open wounds while they're aching. After that, perhaps we can even practice preventive medicine.

NAME WITHHELD BY REQUEST

### REALLY CARE

While there is a huge need to bring this crisis into sharp focus, there is a simultaneous need to publicize the resources which are available for dealing with these problems

I have personal experience dealing with challenging (male) teens. The conventional mainstream yeshiva system nearly made rejects of my sons. Not until my husband and I transferred our boys into more nurturing flexible yeshivos, which made the Rebbe-talmid relationship the main concern, not the number of blatt Gemora learned, did our boys return to Yiddishkeit. In the Yeshiva of South Shore (Ateres Yaakov), the rebbe'im never stopped fostering this relationship, and they mastered the art of pushing away and pulling near at the same time. In TAB, the neshama of one of my sons was reborn, as he warmed up to the light of Torah offered with love and encouragement. And in R'tzahd, one of my sons discovered that learning could be rewarding and exciting, instead of a pressurefraught experience resulting in anxiety and depression. These three yeshivos are enormous assets to our community and they deserve our support.

Besides these yeshivos (and others like them), there are many psychologists and psychiatrists in the Brooklyn area who can be expert shalichim in helping to diffuse the tensions often encountered in dealing with difficult teens. In addition, there are rabbanim who can offer parents a great deal of practical advice and support. Parents must be willing to ask for referrals, to share information, and to seek a Rav's counsel without fear of embarrassment or shame.

We must all daven for our children that we see only Yiddishe nachas from our sons and daughters.

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# III Parents' Perspective

number of readers mentioned the poignancy of "Thoughts of a Mother" as a gripping presentation of the heart of the issue: the pain and sense of hope burning in her soul...as well as many other individual articles that shed light and gave valuable guidance to parents groping for understanding and hope.

Parents also reported on how they benefited from the guidance of the *Gedolei Yisroel*. "Mrs. Pasternitzky" (mentioned earlier as the mother of a problematic 16-year old) had called the editorial office to share an incident with us:

Mrs. L, is a regular at the minyan where I daven, invariably coming to shul earlier than I do. This past Shabbos was an exception. She walked in just before the Rav's drasha, and she looked visibly agitated. I recalled how the yarmulke on Dov, her teen-age son, seemed to be slipping from the back of his head to a spot between his eyebrows — a clear message of his disenchantment with yeshiva life. "How's everything?" I asked her.

"O.K. Everything's fine," she muttered.

"And Dovie?"

"You hit it. I finally got him to join us at the Shabbos table last night. My husband picked up the wine goblet to say Kiddush, and looked him over. He paused, and said, 'Why don't you tuck your shirt tails in instead of having it all hang out?' Well, there was an explosion, and after that we – my husband and I – spent the rest of the night arguing over the necessity of his remark."

"I have an idea," I offered. "Come over to my house tonight, and pick up the November Jewish Observer. Take it home, both of you read it, and then get it back to me."

The next morning, Mrs. L. dropped by to return the copy of JO. "We both read it from cover to cover last night. After finishing it, my husband sighed, and said, 'I get it. I've got to be more accepting, and be b'simcha.' First thing in the morning, he called out, 'Hey kids, come over here. Let's plan the day together. Great Adventures? The Mall? Whadayasay?"

Another Message for Parents

Por other parents, there is a message submitted by the father of a boy who had almost slipped away but was ultimately brought back and fully anchored in the family's Torahbased way of life. The father, a successful teacher of Torah, writes the following (translated freely from the original Hebrew):

Our Chazal teach us that a child is born with a yeitzer hara – an evil inclination – which continues to develop as the child grows older. His yeitzer tov – his positive drives – do not access his personality until he or she becomes bar/bas mitzva. When a child has been exhibiting idiosyncrasies or deviant tendencies from an early age, growing in intensity with him as he grows older, his yeitzer tov faces a fierce battle as he matures, unless he gets some strong, sympathetic help.

That's where parents come in.

We plead to *Hashem* that He should be compassionate with us "as a father has mercy on his children." Even when we are at our worst, we invoke G-d's infinite mercy by using our own parental concern, tolerance, and sympathies as the paradigm of what we want from Him. What a burden that puts on us as parents! It means that we have to find a place through our shredded skins, in our bruised hearts, to identify with the miseries of our errant children.

Who suffered from an errant son more than *David Hamelech* did from Avshalom, who rebelled against his father – in effect, deposed him, and would have gone so far as to take his life, if he could? Beyond doubt, once he was apprehended and killed, Avshalom was destined for *Gehinnom*.

In his plea for Divine mercy for his son, David laments for the loss of "O my son, Avshalom, my son, my son Avshalom!" – putting all of his prodigious powers of prayer to work, entreating G-d to save his son from the depths of *Gehinnom...*each pronouncement of Avshalom's name – seven in all – freeing him from another of the seven rungs of Hell.

Somehow, the same is expected of parents who are in a *Gehinnom* of their own, because of their son or daughter who has gone over the edge. What an awesome expectation!



### AVOIDING THE ERRORS OF SECULAR PARENTING MOVEMENTS

I cannot agree more that these children need, as do all children, mature parenting and education based on love and acceptance.

To this end, I would stress, however, that it is essential that we do not make the error of the secular parenting movements of the last few decades.

These movements also stressed the importance of understanding children, listening to them and supporting them. The result of this one-sided parenting approach is seen in my counseling practice daily, as bewildered, loving parents come for help in parenting their rude, out-of-control adolescents. While the parents are busy empathizing, their children are swearing at them, and worse!

The Torah approach to parenting emphasizes the importance of honoring and respecting parents. The halachos of kibbud av v'eim are a training ground for self-control and success in all interpersonal relationships. For the past decade, Jewish secular parents have been flocking to parenting classes based on Torah parenting in order to un-do the disastrous effects of secular parenting strategies! These classes teach parents how to show love, respect and empathy to their children and how to teach their children how to show respect and caring toward their parents! Respectful, well-behaved children are at lower risk for parental abuse because they are definitely easier to show love to!

Parents of hard-to-raise children need more than encouragement. Exposure to a wide range of options in parenting techniques can be helpful. Con-

sistent, fair, respectful discipline is usually required; lack of effective discipline skills can lead parents to feel helpless and powerless in their own homes, and this feeling puts parents at large risk for engaging in abusive behaviors toward their children. (My book, The Delicate Balance, offers a gentle but firm program of discipline, which is apropriate for most children.) However, some children need a modified approach to discipline, and Dr. Ross Greene in his book, The Explosive Child, offers some excellent guidelines. Some children will benefit more from medication than from a change in parenting approach. Medical and naturopathic physician can be of assistance for behavioral difficulties stemming from chemical or physical causes. Early intervention can help minimize risk in adolescence or adulthood.

> SARAH CHANA RADCLIFFE (Author of The Delicate Balance, Aizer K'negdo, Teen Esteem) Ierusalem

### DON'T PUT 'EM TO SLEEP ON THE WRONG SIDE OF THE BED

As we all know, bedtime can be a hectic, tension filled time. There is homework to be finished, bedtimes to be adhered to, and wound up children to be settled. Much as I tried, I found that my children were too often going to sleep "on the wrong side of the bed." In order to end the day on a pleasant note, I established the following routine:

At bedtime, each child who is old enough to participate, must tell me something good that happened to him/her that day. I then tell them something that he/she did of which I am proud. For example, ten-and-a-halfyear-old Mordechai had fun playing football with his friends at school, and I am proud of him because he made breakfast for his baby brother. Nineyear-old Bracha enjoyed playing with her baby brother, and I was proud because she cleared the supper table nicely without complaining. Sevenyear-old Asher liked supper, and I am proud because he bentched nicely out loud. Miriam had fun playing with her friend after school, and I am proud because she colored nicely with her younger brother. Four-year-old Yisroel also liked supper, and I am proud because he "helped" me make supper (as only a four-year-old can!).

Sometimes, the children need suggestions and reminders – if all else fails, they have a nice, warm house to sleep in; think of all the homeless people!

Sometimes children may feel so disagreeable that they refuse to concede to anything, but the lesson is still there. And what is that lesson? I feel that a negative attitude is often "in style" with today's youth, and that this is extremely destructive. An exercise in recalling at least one positive aspect of the day, despite anything that might have happened in the interim, is extremely beneficial in combating this trend.

NAME WITHHELD BY REQUEST

### HOPE AND PRAYER: A PRIVILEGE AND A GIFT

Perhaps what struck me first was the artwork. Or maybe it was the prestigious contributors. The subject is compelling: Children at risk.

This hasn't happened to us. Yet. But I really don't know why or why not, because after having read this issue of *The Jewish Observer* cover to cover, twice, I fully realize that it could. The mother's letter in the beginning of the issue made my heart ache.

It was honest, painful and gutwrenching.

More than all else, I recognized that there, but by the grace of G-d, go I. That unspoken fear that gnaws at the heart of any caring and committed parent. The realization that it can, and does, happen in the finest, the *frumest* and the best of families. I have certainly been guilty of some of the same negative actions and reactions mentioned in article after article.

The home that my children grew up in has been, at times, filled with frustrations, fulfillments, grief, joy, success, failures, ups and downs. And more than all else, it has been filled with life. And because life carries with it so much of what can be both enriching and threatening, we are humbled. But in an age of entitlement, my children have grown up with the one major factor that identifies this generation above mine.

Much. Many. Things. Affluence. I can remember wearing the new pair of Shabbos shoes to shul on the first day of Pesach, ever mindful not to crease them too much because I knew they had to last. I just knew it. I owned one, perhaps two, Shabbos dresses. We were not poor. One just didn't need more. One coat or jacket and if you were lucky, a Shabbos one. (Check your school's lost and found box to see what children will leave behind. It is very telling.) One does not speak of Seminary in Israel in terms of "if," but "where." One does not mention the word Kollel in terms of "how," but rather, "how long?" And the word sheitel is now spelled with a "c" (custom). And I am as guilty of it as the next.

Are there exceptions to the rule? Of course. But they are exceptions. The term *mesiras nefesh* has been redefined.

We have never before, as a nation, enjoyed the wealth that we experience now, and yet, our children are impoverished. We are no longer one *shul*, one school, one community, with diverse opinions. We no longer have to "make things work" for the sake of "*Eilu v'eilu divrei Elokim chaim*." We have the where-with-all to create our own (fill in the blank) school, *shul*, *mikveh*, yeshiva. After reading the articles, one cannot help but be struck by the loneliness that this has created.

Our children are the true victims. The blame lies in the mirror. And if we are not willing to face this, as true as it is, we do them a further injustice.

And then we wonder why shid-duchim (another designated issue in the making?) are fraught with such difficulty. We pass judgment, turn noses, and raise eyebrows. If honesty is not used until now, why are we shocked with the amount of shalom bayis problems among these very same young men and women?

We, the members of the Sandwich

Club, carry the additional challenge of juggling the past, as well as the future, generations. And by the time we fully understand what an enormous responsibility we carry, the opportunity is often lost.

What of the legacy that we leave our children? Have we shared with them the gratitude we feel in their having enriched our lives? Have we taught them to soar? Will the schools we choose for them encourage their potential, or do we succumb to what looks good on the "resume" of life?

Do they see us as appropriate role models in our homes, when we are interacting with parents and our own siblings? Is our love of *Hashem* reflected in the way we live? Are we too quick to blame the *rebbe* or *morah* for faults that really lie within us? And what of our business practices? Are they stellar in both word and deed?

Is there room for one more suggestion? Is it possible that we can form support groups for families in crisis? Perhaps a local *shul* or school. Can there be a drop-in center for teens or families or both? Can we sponsor inclusion programs to benefit both parent and child?

Does defining the problem help to serve as part of the solution? Are there ways in which others can serve in advocacy positions? Will sensitivity training in schools, work?

Perhaps the answer lies in working together.

The home, the family, the school, the *shul*, the neighborhood.

To always remember *Tehillim un treirin*. A whispered prayer to the One who always listens.

HaTorah chozeres le'achsanya shela. We have to believe it.

Hope is a privilege and a gift. It's not ours to give away.

NAME WITHHELD BY REQUEST Cleveland

### SUPPLEMENTING THE PARENTS' ROLE IN THE SCHOOLS

How is a father, struggling to make ends meet, who leaves for *shul* before the children rise, and comes home no earlier than 7:00 p.m., expected to give any meaningful time to the three, four, five or more children clamoring for his attention, and for help with homework? In my case, there were times I saw my children on *Shabbos* only; fortunately, in addition to my wife, my children's *rebbei'm*, teachers, and *chaverim* all played a role in their growth.

If my situation is not too uncommon, then it would seem that our community must provide the wherewithal to enable *yeshivos* to have smaller classes, to hire *mashgichim* and counselors who can provide the individual attention that some children need, but are simply unable to get in a home where *parnassa* (earning a living) is difficult when the fathers – and, often, working mothers – are so often away from home.

YEHUDA SANDEK Brooklyn

### CHAZON ISH'S TEFILLA

The Jewish Observer (Nov. '99) mentioned a tefilla written by the Chazon Ish, which was printed in English only. In the Kovetz Igros Chazon Ish, #74, it appears in Lashon HaKodesh, as well.

In response to readers' request, we present it in both Hebrew and English, for insertion in *Shema Koleinu*.

יהי דצון מלפניך ה' אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו שתרחם על בני \_\_\_\_, ותהפך את לבבו לאהבה ולידאה שמך ולשקד בתורתך הקדושה, ותסיר מלפניו כל הסבות המונעות אותו משקידת תורתך הקדושה, ותכין את

מל הסבתי המביאות לתורתך הקדושה.
May it be Your will, Hashem, our G-d and G-d of our fathers, that you have mercy on my son, \_\_\_\_\_, and direct his heart to love and to fear Your Name and to be devoted to Your Holy Torah; remove from before him all circumstances that prevent diligent study of Your sacred Torah; establish all the conditions that lead him to Your holy Torah.

#### PARENTS AND PRAYER

Both my wife and I read the article "Thoughts of a Mother" with tears and understanding. Our family too, has been

traumatized by a wayward child. In our case it is a beloved daughter, who attended one of the premier Bais Yaakov institutions, and somehow chose to associate with a very poor element that ultimately has led (at this point) to a debasing lifestyle that has our entire family in turmoil.

All the emotions, the sleepless nights, the tears, the prayers, the deep and continuous pain, and the attempts at help

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that the Mother speaks of are familiar to us. The twisted thinking on the part of our child, who sees none of the anguish we suffer, parallels that of the child in the article.

The questions we have about the process that led to the estrangement of our daughter from the Torah path are tortuous and unresolved. The love we shower continually on this child (under the guidance of a *Gadol*) may one day prove fruitful, but as of yet is unrequited. Our thoughts are constantly of our sinful daughter, and we pray that she will choose to find her way back to the path of righteousness and a Torah true happiness.

Some time ago we came across a prayer that is inserted in the *Amida* prayer in the *Hashiveinu* paragraph, which speaks of *Teshuva*. After the words והרוורנו ברושובה שלמה לפניך we add the following:

יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו שתחתוד תתירה מתחת כסא כבודך להחזיד בתשובה שלמה לכל פושעי ישראל זבכללם תחזיד לי (פלוני בן / בת פלוני) כי ימינך פשוטה לקבל שבים. בחך אתה ה... When we say this prayer we mention the names of other wayward souls, in addition to our own child. May G-d in His infinite mercy grant success to the Mother who wrote the article and to the all too many others of our community whose children are on, or beyond the fringe. May we soon see the day when our beloved daughter does *Teshuva* and returns to the Torah path. The *simcha* generated by the return of these souls would surely be strong enough to presage the coming of the *Moshiach* Noshiach Noshiach Noshiach Noshiach

Names withheld for obvious reasons

### APPRECIATES INFORMATION, "CHIZUK"

Just a short note to give you a "Yasher Koach" on your November issue.

I live in Philadelphia and there are no organized frum support groups to guide or direct families with assistance in dealing with teen rebelliousness. After reading your magazine, I was able to choose a frum therapist that would suit our situation. In addition, the numerous articles by other parents dealing with their own problems gave me great chizuk and hope. Unfortunately, it's not enough. When you're in a city that has no support group, you feel alone. Please consider continuing a section in your monthly magazine for families that need the help. There is a mageifa (plague) out there and it behooves a group like yours to offer whatever information that might lessen the pain and burden of families going through these problematic situations. There are many families in farther cities than mine who don't know where to turn and who feel helpless. Help these people help them-

With much gratitude for your kindness in giving me the telephone number of our therapist and for your warm words,

> A "Not-So-Frantic" Mother Philadelphia

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#### DAVENING FOR OUR CHILDREN

Sometimes, parents have the opportunity to teach their children, significantly enhancing their spiritual growth. Sometimes they are not that fortunate. In any case, *tefilla* is essential. Here are a number of suggestions for *tefillos* specifically relating to the *ruchnius* of our children – their spiritual welfare and growth.

The Mishna Berurah writes (46:10): "Constantly, there should be a prayer on the lips of the father and mother, that 'Our children should be learning Torah, be tzaddikim (righteous), and they should acquire middos tovos—exemplary character.' They should beseech Hashem with all their heart and all their soul, on their behalf, and on the behalf of their children, grandchildren, etc. They should concentrate intensely as they daven for these needs, especially as they recite the following tefillos:"

Birchas HaTorah: when requesting of Hashem to make the Torah sweet, in our mouths, and in our children's mouths.

Ahava Rabba/Ahavas Olam: when requesting: "Merciful Father, have pity on us, and instill in our hearts understanding, to listen, teach, observe, perform, and uphold all the words of Your Torah's teaching with love. Enlighten our eyes in Your Torah, connect our hearts with Your mitzvos, and focus our hearts to love and fear Your Name, and let us not endure eternal shame." (See also: Shl'a; Shar Ha'osios: Os Daled)

*Uva L'tzion*: when requesting that we should not toil in vain, and should not give birth to chaos.

We note the following additional *tefillos* that provide the same opportunity to beseech *Hashem* on behalf of our children, grandchildren, etc.:

Shemoneh Esrei: Hashiveinu Avinu: when requesting: "Return us Father to Your Torah and draw us near to Your service, and help us repent fully before You." The *Tur* (115) explains: "Father" is used here because a father is commanded to teach his son Torah. So, too, we ask our Father in heaven to teach His children Torah.

Sim Shalom: when requesting

Hashem to shine His countenance upon us, and upon all the Jewish people. This blessing includes the giving of the Torah, which grants us life in This World and in the World-to-Come. It also includes exemplary character traits, Divine compassion, and harmony.

Birkas Kohanim: the first passuk contains a beracha for children. "Yevorechecha" with sons, "Vyishmerecha" with daughters. (Yalkut, Rashi, first edition, and Daas Zekeinim). "Yo'eir" includes a beracha for sons radiating brilliantly with Torah. (Sifre, Targum Yonasan ben Uziel). The berachos encompass a multitude of needs, spiritual and physical. (See Sifre, 40-42, and Meforshim) It is a time of Divine benevolence, when Hashem transforms harsh decrees into merciful ones (Zohar).

Shemoneh Esrei, Shabbos and Yom Tov: when requesting "Kadsheinu B'mitzvosecha, Sanctify us with Your mitzvos, and grant us our portion in Your Torah etc. Purify our hearts to serve You sincerely."

Brich Shmei: when requesting "It should be Your will, that You should open our hearts to the Torah." Some even add: "And grant us children that perform Your will." (said before the Torah reading)

Yikum Purkan: "Establish salvation, graciously, mercifully, with ...children alive and enduring (eternally), children who do not stop learning and do not idle away from the words of the Torah." (said after the Torah reading on Shabbos)

Yehi Ratzon. following the beracha for lighting candles, Erev Shabbos, and Yom Tov. Chazal (Shabbos 23,b, cit. OH 263.1) teach us, that through this mitzva, we may merit children illuminated with Torah. Women daven for this as well as for children filled with honesty, divekus, yiras Shamayim, ahavas Hashem, and Kedusha. They ask Hashem to be zocheh that their children should illuminate the world with Torah and mitzvos.

Tefillas Hashl"a is a special Tefilla that eloquently expounds on the above ideas. The Shl"a recommends reciting it at all times, and especially Erev Rosh Chodesh Sivan, the month of Mattan Torah.

Rabbi Eliezer Ginzberg שליט"א, Rav of Agudas Yisroel Snif Zichron Shmuel, and Rosh Kollel of Yeshivas Mir of Brooklyn, suggested, (in a public address on Kol Simcha radio broadcasting from Jerusalem) that every Jew should daven for all the Jewish People, a special tefilla. He recommended Tehillim (Psalms) Chapter 128, because it relates to bringing up children.

May Hashem grant us our tefillos.

NOCHUM BODNER



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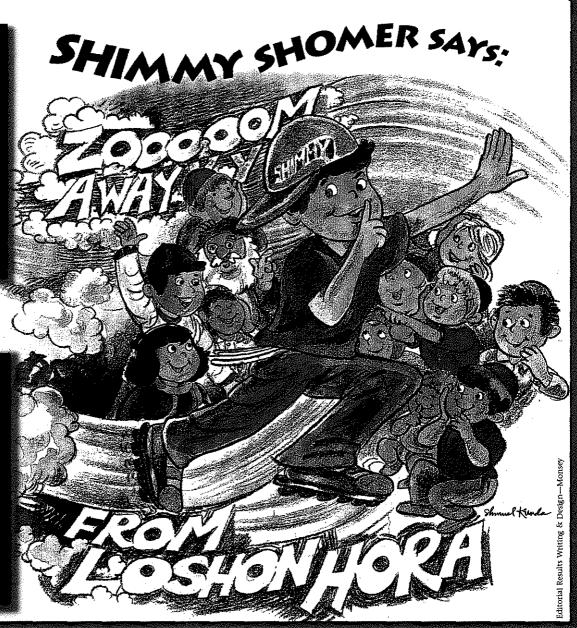
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### IV The Kids Speak

went the complaint, "except the kids." Several letters by teenagers have been selected from the many submitted and some have been deliberately omitted.

An extraordinarily well-written letter was submitted to *The Jewish Observer* by the *Mashgiach* in one of the most respected Mesivta high schools in the East on behalf of a former student. He says much that sheds light into a dark corner of a dropout's *neshama*, and much remains in the deep shadows, unexplained.

In the young man's own words:

Frankly, I excelled. Slowly, beginning in the middle years of high school I became severely disaffected, profoundly unhappy and developed a nascent antipathy toward religion. Naturally, I assumed that it was the particular Yeshiva I was attending and — in what would become a mordant yearly ritual — I switched out. Years quickly passed and yeshivos were unceremoniously abandoned and I steadily drifted away from Jewish practice. The rituals and proscriptions that had once been at the fulcrum of my life were discarded and transgressed. Tefillin went, Shabbos closely followed suit and I got my nutrition the all-American way, at McDonald's. I don't see the point in cataloging my every action but suffice it to say that many were entirely antithetical to Jewish belief and rite....

I know that my friends, classmates and relatives were dumbstruck. I heard their questions and saw their looks, ones that ranged from genuine disbelief to righteous indignation. Here I was with two loving parents, a gaggle of exemplary siblings, above-average intellect and no apparent social dysfunctions. I was the polar opposite of the archetypal "fringe kid...."

So why was he so defiant, so unresponsive to the expressed dismay of the onlookers?

What nobody realized was my pain. My hurt. I am confident that each and every child that heads to the fringe has a tremendous hole in their life that they are endeavoring to fill. Have you ever paused to consider the towering unhappiness and deep pain that it must take to drive a child to alienate him/herself from their family and engender the disdain of the community? Nobody strives to be pariah. In fact it is entirely counterintuitive to assume that a child from a warm, loving, family with open lines of communication and parents sensitive to his/her emotional needs will rebel to the fringe, the seductions of society notwithstanding. I have, ever

so slowly, come to realize that my parents, quite unwittingly, neglected my emotional well-being as a child. Unfortunately they weren't cognizant of their parental responsibility to actively make sure that I felt loved and inculcate within me a healthy sense of self.

His pain was compounded and his defiance became intensified by the way he perceived his parents' dealing with him – in effect, their ignoring his inner pain. He does not condemn them; yet he does fault them:

I grew up thinking that there was something wrong with me. An eviscerated sense of self and a horrible lack of selfconfidence was, and still is, the legacy of my childhood.

The letter in its entirety may give therapists and suffering parents a window into the thinking of this troubled young man (and perhaps help them understand someone close to them with a similar mindset).

I think that in my rebellion there were, and are, elements of self-medication/soothing, lashing out at my father by trampling on the religion that for me he had come to symbolize, and asserting myself. What I can say indubitably, is that these rebellions are rooted in pain, not *taa'vah*; sown by unhappiness, not television, and that these emotions are nearly always inextricably linked with uneven familial relationships. Yet much is left unanswered, and even misleading:

If the parents were cold, distant, or "clueless," as he describes them, how did they manage to succeed with their other children? Or is this particular young man – certainly articulate and intelligent – marching to a different drummer, perceiving messages and processing experiences in his own very unique fashion? If such be the case, his situation would call for individualized treatment that only highly sensitive or unusually cognitive mentors and therapists can prescribe. Not necessarily an indictment of his "cold, clueless" parents.

His final words, however, are surely worth taking to heart:

I implore each and every parent to read the article by Dr. Jerry Lob ("Hereby Resolved" – A Father's Kabbalos). And then read it again. My goal in writing this article is a modest one. If one parent is inspired by it to more conscientiously attend to their child's emotional well-being, I'll by overjoyed. If the rebbe who saw flashes of my ability to learn, but never cared to see the cracks in my heart and chastised me frequently until I cried in the beis midrash — or any like him — resolve to see their talmidim as people, I'll feel vindicated. If one child somewhere, anywhere, smiles because he/she has a healthier sense of self, I'll smile with them.



#### A PRINCIPAL QUOTES AT-RISK TEENS

Your coverage of "Children on the Fringe" was excellent. Your articles expressed the opinions of parents, professionals, *Rebbe'im*, and outreach workers quite effectively. You neglected, however, to quote one significant segment of our community: the at-risk teenager himself! How does he explain his rebellion and what does he recommend?

I interviewed eight such students at Yeshiva Derech Chaim here in Baltimore in preparation for a talk to parents on raising kids. Some of these boys were local while others came from Brooklyn or Monsey. I asked them what they would do once they were married to insure that their own children would turn out they way they wanted them to. Their answers understandably reflected their own positive and negative experiences and echo much of your findings.

For starters Yanky¹ said: "I'd never fight with my wife in front of the kids. It makes them feel insecure. They think it's their fault." The statement was unanimously agreed upon. As we continued, Moishe yelled out emotionally: "I'd never say to my kid, 'Don't ever come back to my house again,' even if he's shot up on heroin. We brought him into this world, he's ours." This expressed feeling of abandonment weighed heavily in the room but was agreed upon by all.

These teenagers were expressing their yet untested patience, love and understanding, which they seemingly were denied. As expressed so eloquently by Mrs. Debbie Greenblatt (*JO* Nov. '99): "Our children need to feel how pas-

sionate we feel about them." They need to feel "enjoyed"; that we enjoy their company.

The boys at Derech Chaim were saying that they want to have a close association with their children for they now see how critical it is. Too often we allow one bad episode to sour our overall relationship with our child. Even if it is the teenager who triggers the skirmish on the front lines, the adult must invest time so that it does not escalate into a "world war."

RABBI NAFTOLI HEXTER, PRINCIPAL Rabbi Benjamin Steinberg Middle School, Bais Yaakov Baltimore

#### HELPING TEENAGERS HELP FRIENDS

While reading the articles in the November Jewish Observer, something was bothering me. At first, I could not place it; but then it dawned on me: A whole issue of The Jewish Observer was dedicated to giving advice to teachers and parents about how to deal with teenagers who go off the derech. I did not see anything, though, to tell me how to deal with at-risk friends, if I had them. Am I supposed to inform teachers, or their parents? I know that it would probably not be lashon hara. What would happen, though, if the school deals with it in the wrong way? It would be my fault then, because it was I who went to the administration. Maybe the parents would not believe me, and get upset at me for not minding my own business. Am I supposed to keep away from the girl, for fear of being influenced myself? - or should we stay friends because maybe I will have a good influence on her?

The articles in *The Jewish Observer* were probably written for adults. There are many teenagers who read *The Jewish Observer*. Therefore, I do not think it wrong as a teenager to ask for some help in these issues. If you answer my questions, you will be answering the questions of others, too. Maybe, then, we teenagers will be able to help you – the adults – bring back our peers to the proper path again.

A STUDENT

#### **EDITORIAL RESPONSE:**

The above letter was submitted to Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetzky for comment. He conveyed in response that it is impossible to answer any of the questions posed in a manner that could apply to all similar situations. There are bound to be variables in each case that could make a crucial difference. Any student facing the dilemmas outlined in the letter would be advised to consult a *Rav* or similar authority figure who is knowledgeable, and with whom he or she feels comfortable. The student can then feel confident that he (or she) is behaving responsibly.

### PUSHING THE CONFORMITY ENVELOPE TOO FAR?

I am writing this letter in regard to the November issue of *The Jewish Observer*. I agree with almost everything that was written. As a teenager, however, I feel that there is an important issue that was not discussed.

Unfortunately, I know a number of people who are "on the fringe and beyond," and many of them started "going off" for the same reason: they feel that their parents/teachers/schools etc. are too demanding with them on issues that are not halachos, but rather chumros, especially in the way they look/dress. I have been told many times: "They don't like whatever I do, so forget it, I'm giving up!" Obviously, if something is accepted within certain circles, the children should abide by them. But, if you see that your child doesn't agree with these things and finds it hard to accept them, don't yell at your child again and again, because it won't help.

If a parent or teacher is constantly rebuking a child because the child is not as *machmir* as they are, it is just adding fuel to the fire. After being told "No" so many times, it becomes meaningless. Eventually, a teenager will do things that are contrary to *halacha* because they think that everything they do is wrong anyway, so they might as well do whatever they want. After all, even their parents are embarrassed of them.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Fictitious name

But why are so many parents very strict about the way their children look? Unfortunately, we live in a society that judges people only by the way they look. Did you every notice that when you ask someone about someone else, they almost always describe the way the person dresses? Is that the way we think of ourselves – if we don't look exactly like everyone else, we're not as good as everyone else?

If, for example, your son wants to wear a blue shirt instead of a white one, you're not going to let him because you're scared of what the neighbors will say! Believe it or not, there are plenty of boys out there, who are "shteiging away" and wearing blue shirts. And, unfortunately, there are boys who wear only white shirts and black pants, and are doing things much worse than wearing blue shirts.

A girl's name was getting messed up, so she began dressing in a more tznius-dik manner (i.e. with more chumros) and her name was cleared. As she said: "If only they knew what really was going on...." Why do we live in a phony society? We're only fooling ourselves.

The next time your child wants to do something that you would rather not let him/her do, if it's not contrary to halacha, say yes, and save your "no"s for more important things. Because if you say no, your child will either be another faker, or another teenager who just gave up on everything. Pick your choice.

A TEENAGER

### EDITORIAL RESPONSE:

Your letter raises several very different issues. Each deserves a thoughtful response. The first raises a difficult question with regard to parenting: How should a parent or a teacher deal with a child or student whose religious practices are within the realm of *halacha*, but do not meet the parent's or school's standard of observance? You note that constant ridicule is likely to be counter-productive. As you say, "After being told 'no' so many times, it becomes meaningless." I tend in general to agree that we must be careful with overuse of the word "no."

My father 'r' cautioned me many times as a young father as follows: "Du host a Nein. Ober heet sich mit dein Nein – You have the right and indeed the obligation to say "no" to your children, but be careful not to overuse your "no." It is a very valuable commodity."

But that brings me to your second subject. How important is conformance with dress? It is very similar to the question of how important is conformance with *chumra*. Let me explain. There is some inherent value in the issue of dress. Chazal teach us that in part we merited redemption from the golus of Mitzrayim because we, as a nation, retained a distinctive form of Jewish dress. It set us apart from an immoral and hedonistic society that surrounded us. How we dress, however, has yet another meaning. Dress is a form of symbolic speech. It often signals to the world what values we embrace and, even more important, which values we reject. If a youngster from a Chassidic or Yeshiva home abandons the attire that is symbolic of that group and chooses a small kippa, it speaks volumes about that youngster's religious weltanschauung. A youngster coming from a home where more casual dress is acceptable makes no negative statement when he or she wears that type of clothing. You are, thus, clearly correct that the "blue shirt" does not tell the whole story. There are thousands of outstanding bnei Torah who wear blue shirts, but when one abandons the white shirt for the blue, it may signal that something is amiss. We must be careful, very careful, not to read too much into minor changes in dress. We would be foolish, however, if we were to disregard them.

Finally, you are clearly correct that conventional garb can sometimes serve as a mask that hides very ignoble conduct. The adage that "if you keep all the small rules, you have license to break the big ones" has some truth to it. So we ought not to respect fakers who are wolves in sheep's clothing. But, we should remember that more often than



not, wolves wear wolves' clothing.

After all is said and done, we need to be sensitive and empathetic. We should be careful about being overly judgmental about such matters as dress and *chumros*. And we should avoid ridicule at all times. We have every right, however, to raise our antennae when others signal to us by word, deed or symbolic speech that they reject values that have enduring value to us all.

RABBI AARON TWERSKI (Member of the Editorial Board of The Jewish Observer) Upon invitation of the Editor

#### "THESE CHILDREN ARE THEIRS, FOR GOOD OR FOR BAD"

Your articles mentioned a sense of failure that the parents experience. But raising children isn't a test of one's abilities, one doesn't receive a pass or fail based on the quality of their child. Raising one's children to reach their highest potential is a lifeong task that shouldn't be aborted if the child cannot measure up. If a child's parents feel they can no longer influence their child, how can they expect strangers to?

It seems that this is similar to having a special child in the house. No, they may not ever become rabbis or even observe all the *mitzvos*. Yes, they definitely require a lot of attention and have a tremendous impact on the family. Yet, many people would never think of relinquishing their responsibility for these special children. These children are theirs to work with, for good or for bad.

Let us view these troublesome children in the same way. Their behavior may not be up to par with their parents' standards, but they must be helped to reach *their* full potential.

Bracha Hedaya Brooklyn

### WRITTEN BY A BOY ON THE EDGE, SUBMITTED BY HIS SISTER – SIGNED

I wish I could speak and be listened to. I cannot speak because I am too young.

I cannot speak for it's too late for me.

I cannot speak because I've lost the desire to keep fighting. It's too hard... too painful....

I don't want to try, have no more tears to cry. My emotions have bled out, I am left an empty shell. I am in your school, your *shul*, on your block. You don't want your kids hanging out with me. You won't let me play with your son. You won't let your daughter sleep over at my house. I try not to dream....

But I'll speak anyways, because I've made it. I am not better or more intelligent than my friends. I am not more personable or lovable. I am no warmer or deeper than my friends, and my insides hide no secrets of beauty or potential.

There were just some people, a handful or less, who gave me a penny, a tiny lift. Sometimes they lied to me, saying how well I did. But the little love that came with it was perfect and genuine. Some of us are thrown out of school early on. Some pass on by, but never catch on. Some do what we have to, or we'll be punished with any of grounding, smacks, even just a look in your eye, or all three. I can see in your eyes, oh, how they betray you! You can never hide what's in your heart, for your eyes give you up.

Some of us end up in schools that can help. School A works for some, but others still fail. After we graduate, or drop out like most, there's still School B, a last sinking hope. But please don't wait for us to get there. For they can only work with what's given to them.

We are always taught, wherever we go, that there's always a spark deep in our heart. That never goes out, that never dies. I know now that this is false. If you wait too long, it will die. You cannot deny this, for I already have friends that have passed on to a place where they finally have peace. For the first time in their tortured deaths, they can finally rest. Even if it's true that the spark never dies, it may be so covered up, the steel heavy door to the safe is closing on that dying flame. And if the dial is turned, it is lost forever, for the combination is death. The drugs that lead us to an early grave are only the tools of a dead soul's trade.

You can help us. You don't have to think. There's no magic system. Don't change or fight the system. Don't change the formula. Don't change at all, except for one thing: your heart.

Whether you agree or disagree with what the special schools are doing, please understand that they are doing their best. They are fighting a losing battle, for some of us are shells, dead inside by the time we get there. Don't wait for them to "fix" us. It's too much to ask. The fight is over.... We are lying, bloodied on the mat of the soul in the ring of life.

Just give one thing, your heart. I promise that some of us will see it in your eyes. But some of us have stopped looking. We only look down. Don't talk to me about G-d, Hashem, religion, my parents, school, anything!... Just listen. Follow us for a few minutes, whatever time you have, even fifteen minutes a week, find us. We'll be at home, Our Place on Avenue M, in the Village, in your shul (if we still go), but most important: In your school or class. We may understand, sometimes, that you must not let us destroy your classes or children. But please... don't just throw us out. Send us to someone who can help. Someone who has time to listen to our heart even when it has lost the energy to speak. Give us fifteen minutes. Explain things. And if we no longer listen, then just be there. Let us know we are not alone.

It's time to face the truth, this is a reality that will no longer hide. As long as you wait, we will not go away. If you truly believe in G-d, even if you don't, if you are human at all, don't watch us die. We, the dying, are a group. A group of lost souls. Still, inside I'm torn, for we are truly one, and parts of me die with each friend I lose. I learn in Yeshiva S. I went to "B" for almost two years. I went to "A" for almost three years, was kicked out of many schools and yeshivos that I'm sure you know of. Maybe you send your kids there, maybe you teach there. Maybe you are the principal who threw me out... Whoever you are, you can be the one to save the next me, I can just ask you for 15 minutes, or whatever time you have.

# ACCEPTING PUNISHMENT WHEN IT COMES WITH LOVE

At the present moment, I am sitting here at my desk, writing you this letter as part of my detention assignment. We have been given copies of several of the articles published in the *JO* regarding "the teen crisis." We were told to read the articles and write our thoughts on them, in a letter to the editor.

I am sitting "comptime" as a result of my being late to class three times since school started this year.

Instead of – as a punishment – my school taking points off our average, or having us write 1,000 times over, "I will not be late to class anymore," or other such time-consuming, useless punishments, my school hands out detention. Our school's goal is getting us to really think. Not just accept our Judaism as habitual. Rather, we think and discuss new ideas, different ways of life, etc.

We discuss ideas, problems, dreams as a class, and on an individual basis. We have *mechanchim* who truly care who we are and who we want to be. They help us to figure ourselves out.

Being a teenager is tough (I know), but it can also be the best years of one's life. Recently (this past week), I was reprimanded by my principal about my attire for that day. I'll admit I was slightly insulted. However, I had the whole day to ponder the mussar I had received, and to see the truth in it. Yet, to be honest, I was still hurt. However, not for long. That same night, we had a Chanuka chagiga. As all the students were dancing in circles, my principal entered my circle of friends, pulled me into the center and danced with me. I was so shocked. "Was this the same principal who had just criticized me?!" But upon further thought, I felt the message loud and clear. It was her responsibility as my principal and fellow lew to reprimand me. But the way it was done with such love.... Somehow, after that dance with my principal, the sting of her rebuke was not as strong. She was telling me: "Sometimes, kid, in life we make mistakes, but we still love you. You're still a great person." This love and spiritual guidance I receive from my school, my family, and my community, all this pushes me upwards in my struggle for personal growth. The ongoing struggle (or should I say "privilege") of being a Jew. Everyday is a new chance, a new challenge, a new beginning. This *chinuch* in keeping with that described by Rabbi Ahron Kaufman in your article on "Growth and Belonging" stimulates me and my peers to keep going on that onward trek up the mountain of life.

I think what our society needs more of today, is the care bestowed upon us here at our school. Society needs more "awesome" teachers, who will not just give inspiring lessons, but will also help us figure out, personally, what to do with these lessons. I've seen with my own eves, how care like this has actually prevented those of us about to slip over the edge from actually doing so. I've seen with my own eyes how this derech of chinuch has actually brought many who have already been "lost" to find their way, through the darkness back to the light. So much of the problems of the "teen crisis" would be alleviated if there were more chinuch systems like ours. I believe it's something to consider, and when done considering, to act upon. As Rabbi Ahron Kaufman strongly stated, "Kids want to feel a part of things. They want to feel needed. They want to feel love." How true! It is our

responsibility as an individual and as a klal to make sure our love and excitement for Torah, along with the feelings (aforementioned) that kids feel, is relayed to today's youth.

On a closing note, I would like to thank you in particular for the article on "Thoughts of a Mother." This article in particular had a real effect on me, as I'm sure it did on countless others. It is because we, the readers, feel personally connected to the author. She has been open to us, and shared with us her feelings, her story, her life as a mother. It has started the brush of painting the pictures in my mind. This is no longer just an issue - a problem needed to be dealt with. It is someone's life, and consequently, all our problems, all our lives. After she opened up to us, made us aware of how the situation is, first hand, we must act on this. Kids around us can be in need. We must open our eyes to those in need and give of ourselves to them.

> SHIRA BERKOVITZ Staten Island, NY

#### WHAT LIES BETWEEN ME AND THEM?

As I sat alone in my dormitory room, I flipped through page after page of lengthy analysis, only to find myself shaking my head in reaction.

Who wrote these articles? More



importantly, when was the last time they were sixteen years of age? For this reason alone, I was not surprised that I was dissatisfied with the analysis and solutions. The times have changed, more rapidly than one can imagine. More so, the present state in which today's youth can be found is a very temporary one.

However, writing *this* essay is the hand of a sixteen-year-old yeshiva student. I know what it means to be sixteen years old in the 90's, as we enter the new millennium. I am not the object of discussion. I am a thriving yeshiva stu-

dent who so far has conquered all that life has thrown my way. I have not had an easy life; quite the contrary. Take my word for it.

I have seen old friends and acquaintances make bad decisions. I have seen where they ended up. They are the object of discussion. Whenever I meet up with any of these friends of mine, I ask myself, "What stands between the two of us? Wasn't I faced with similar dilemmas and decisions? What caused me to decide as I did?" This is the question baffling all of us; what differs in the process of mak-

ing drop-outs form the process of making b'nei Torah?

For me, the answer is quite simple. I will explain with a different question and answer. What stops a forty-year-old man from walking into a non-kosher restaurant when nobody is looking? Maybe a number of things, but the determining factor in his decision was the World-to-Come. What will he answer to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* when asked, "I gave you everything you needed, and cared for you. Why did you disappoint me?" He may choose to answer that he didn't see *Hashem* and didn't realize it, but we know the truth.

What stopped me from making the wrong decision in this battle of life? What will I answer to my second-grade Rebbe who spent hours teaching me to read and write? What will I answer to my third-grade Rebbe who invited me to his house Friday night to experience a real Shabbos seuda? What will I answer to my fourth- and fifth-grade Rebbe'im who pulled me over to the side, and cared extra about what was going on at home? What will I answer to my seventh- and eighth-grade Rebbe'im to whom I owe my life for guiding me on the true path of Hashem? What will I answer to my ninth- tenth- and eleventh-grade Rebbe'im who have strengthened my character and broadened my Torah perspective? The list goes on, and on, and on....

But most importantly, what will I answer my dear mother, may *Hashem* grant her peace, health, and prosperity?

She would give her life for me, and she has on many an occasion.

So I pose a question to my readers: do all children have an answer to this question? Maybe they will answer, "I didn't know they cared." It is your job as parents and teachers to let us know you care! Don't allow the youth to resort to this answer, and hence, you will not be giving yourself this problem.

This is the viewpoint of a sixteen-yearold yeshiva student, the viewpoint of the youth. I hope I am listened to, to avoid the plummet of the next generation.

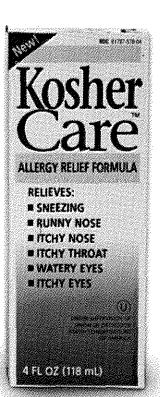
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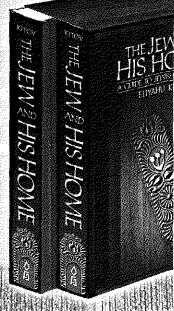
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### Prevention lecture series or classes on parenting may strike the reader as emergency means, something to resort to when all else seems to be failing in bringing up Yossi and Chani successfully. Yet which conscientious Jew does not seek to improve in such critical areas of mitzva observance as tefilla or limud HaTorah? Greater preparation, more investment of heart, deeper concentration – these can all enhance one's prayer, one's Torah study. Not marks of failure, attending a lecture series or workshop in tefilla or limud are badges of honor, marks of the serious, dedicated oveid Hashem. And even if one has achieved a degree of success in bringing up one's children, does-

n't this most demanding and exalted of life assignments beg for guidance, to help improve one's performance – investing preparation, resources of heart and concentration – in raising one's children? Isn't it worth attending lectures in hadracha and chinuch? Somehow, the message has been picked up in Israel¹, where such classes are common and well attended, but has yet to make the scene on any appreciable level in the

Writers to *The Jewish Observer* have submitted a number of suggestions for prevention of the deterioration of children's status, several of which appear on the pages that follow.



### HELPING BOYS AFTER SCHOOL

Approximately four years ago, my husband noticed that many children were falling by the wayside. He observed that by the time the boys (this letter is about boys) were in high school, too often, it was "too late" to prevent their downward spiral. He realized that these "children at risk," as he called them, had to be addressed in the elementary school years. After much organizational work (over six months), he rounded up *menahellim*, *askonim* and laypeople and started what, in Monsey, is called "The Chazara Center."

The center works as follows: The rebbe would call their respective menahel (elementary school) and discuss certain problem children. The reason they are problems is not the issue in this letter, but what should be done for them. The menahel, after discussion with the parents, would then contact the administrator of the "Center," who will then pair the child

<sup>1</sup> An article on this topic, by Malka Kaganoff is scheduled for publication in the April '00 *JO*.

with a seasoned *rebbe* (not a tutor) that matches his temperament (personality, *Litvish* or *Chassidish*, etc.). The great difference lay in the fact that the child is only tutored for one-half hour (as opposed to one hour—don't forget, these kids are tired after a whole day at school) three times a week at a *shul* in the child's neighborhood, so that the mother, often busy with supper and the other children, does not have to bring or pick him up. The child can go himself and is generally thrilled to go.

The feed-back is phenomenal. The child knows the material, can even contribute to the class, and is no longer lost. Most importantly, the child is happy with himself, so his behavior changes. Plain and simple, he is a happy person, no longer seeing himself as a failure. The *menahellim*, *rebbe'im* and parents see a change almost immediately. The child's progress is monitored carefully by the Center, *menahel*, *rebbe*, tutor/*rebbe* and, of course, the parents.

But, how does it run? The *yeshivos* interested in this program pay a membership fee, which allows them to send "x" number of children to the Center. It is in their interest that the children do well and not disrupt the class. The parents pay according to their ability. The cost is \$12.50 per half-hour with a professional *rebbe* (much lower than the going rate). If the parents cannot pay this amount, the Center raises the money. The *rebbe* is paid by the Center and the parents pay the Center. The only people paid are the *rebbe'im*,

and the two administrators (who really get more *Olam Habba* than money). What is needed is a totally selfless and committed individual that will do his utmost to raise the necessary funds. There are more than one hundred children enrolled.

The key is to reach these children before they get totally lost in *Mishnayos* and *Gemora*. Once they are behind there, it is so much more difficult to find them. The main thing is that this really works!! Ask the parents, the *rebbe'im* and the *menahellim*. It's hard work, very hard work, but saving a Jewish child is worth it.

Chaya Strassfeld Englewood, NJ

#### CONFIRMING WARNINGS REGARDING KIDS ABROAD

I've been doing outreach at the *Kosel* and the Israeli universities for 18 years. For over twelve years now, I've added the Jerusalem night scene to my routes. For these twelve years, some yeshiva students – both boys and girls – have roamed the streets and cause a disturbance. I've told administrators and Rabbis in Israel and in the States about the problem.

Why has it taken you twelve years to publish this information? ("Can'Doing Their Year in Israel' Do Them In?" by Yeshara Gold) It's a terrible *chillul HaShem*. They create a very difficult situation for me and others, as I try to *mekarev* Jews with little or no background who see these yeshiva students

(sic) hanging around.

The bottom line is that the educational institutions do not take care of the students placed under their charge. Instead of letting them roam the streets at night, they should create programs and activities that would keep these students interested in a good environment.

JEFF SEIDEL, DIRECTOR

Jerusalem Jewish Student Information Center

#### CRUCIAL ELEMENTS IN PARENTING

In response to your November issue, which stresses caring, love, and tolerance as a preventive and solution to many youth-related problems, I would like to make some humble remarks.

First, showing love is certainly vital no matter what the child's age. Especially when we must reprimand or punish constructively, the child must realize the parent is doing so out of love. That way, the child will come to terms with the criticism, accept it, and certainly not resent it or the parent.

Secondly, no matter what, a parent is a parent and not a pal! Even with all the love and kindness a parent bestows on a child, he is a parent – not a pal. He must train and educate his children that reverence of parents is the basis of a *mitzva* of Torah source: "Ish imo v'aviv tera'u." A child may not sit in his father's or mother's chair, and may never contradict them in a direct manner. He may not raise his voice to a parent, or even validate their opinions by saying he agrees with them.

Thirdly, not only do children have to learn the *halachos* of honoring parents, parents must know them thoroughly in order to teach their children what is proper behavior and attitude.

Fourthly, a parent must demonstrate love and respect to his own parents (the child's grandparents). A picture is worth a thousand words. A child who sees a living picture time after time of his own parents' revering the grandparents, has an immeasurably great headstart towards success in life in general. He can go out in to the world and not be corrupted by it. On the contrary, he can correct it.

Naftali Weinberg, Director Machon Ahavat Emet Jerusalem

# FROM KNOWING IT ALL... TO NEEDING GUIDANCE

I got married at 20, my husband 23, and I thought I knew everything, from marriage to bringing up children. Twenty years later and four (18, 16, 14, 12 years old) children *bli ayin hara*, my husband and I feel we knew nothing, but this magazine would have helped.

My idea is that every *chassan* and *kalla* should get this issue. It should be a must. I think it's just as important as to what suit to buy (for the *chassan*); maybe even more.

My children read it. I am holding on to it. *Im yirtzeh Hashem*, I will give it to them to remind them.

We thank you again. You opened a lot of people's eyes, which was very important.

It is also very important to mention that uncles and aunts should get involved. Because as you know, kids can open up to people other than their parents.

Mrs. Aaron Tabi Brooklyn

#### A CALL FOR PARENTING SESSIONS

As a young mother of small children, I read your issue of "Children on the Fringe..." with trepidation and concern. The urge to do all that I can to ensure that my children will follow the true Torah path burns in me. Yet, I feel wholly inadequate to fill this role.

It is common knowledge that in order to become a doctor, lawyer, or any legal professional, one needs years of training and experience. However, when it comes to assume the most important role — that of parent or teacher — we are not properly prepared.

Rabbi Yakov Horowitz, in his article "Report From Ground Zero," suggested that every young couple should attend classes that teach proper marital and parenting skills and techniques. I recently attended a parenting workshop in Boro Park, which proved to be quite informative. However, the cost was \$150 for five sessions, with a fee of \$30 for each follow-up session. For struggling young couples, such a price is often hard to

meet. Also, there aren't too many such classes in our area that are well known.

If there was an opportunity for young couples to attend parenting and marital workshops, run by professional *mechanchim*, for a minimal or no charge, many people would join. Of course these classes would have to be widely publicized (in fliers, newspapers, Jewish magazines...etc.) in all major Jewish communities.

I call upon Agudas Yisroel and other major organizations who wish to help *Klal Yisroel*, to organize and sponsor a massive campaign to educate parents. Please, help us help our children!

Thank you for addressing this vital issue. And please, don't let us down!

Rivky F.

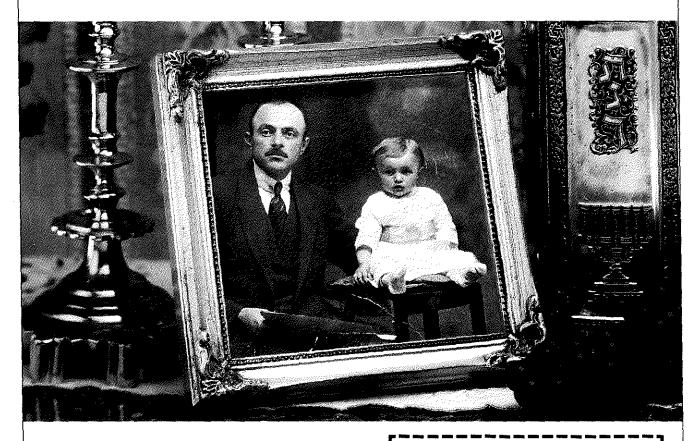
Boro Park, Brooklyn

# NOT ALL DIFFICULTIES ARE PREVENTABLE

Many children who are at risk in adolescence are biologically predisposed to developmental difficulties. As many of your articles pointed out, conditions such as learning disabilities, childhood depression, anxiety disorders, oppositional-defiant disorder and difficult temperament, can cause behaviors which are challenging to unmanageable. ADD/ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) alone can cause severe challenges in parenting, as this condition often leads to academic failure, social failure, poor impulse control, negativity, depression and anxiety - all of which often leads to difficulty in family relationships. The best of parents, using the best of parenting techniques and the soundest of Torah principles, cannot always prevent the child from experiencing severe developmental difficulties. Nonetheless, the research on adult outcomes for troubled youth, shows that consistent, supportive significant relationships do reduce the ultimate risk and do lead to brighter, happier, more successful adult functioning.

> SARAH CHANA RADCLIFFE Jerusalem

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## VI Guidance

Just as the finger of blame for kids going astray cannot — and should not — invariably be pointed at the parents, so is improved parenting not the only solution. Some children simply do not have an optimally functioning home that can pull them out of their situation. There are families under stress that do not have the resources to prevent or ameliorate a troubled situation.

In a number of communities, rabbinical leaders and lay volunteers have been matching up kids in need of attention with mentors, who — with high caliber guidance — spend several hours a week with an individual child, ranging in age from ten to the late teens and beyond. The format could be a chavrusa for homework and review, shmuessing, or just spending time together. The result is often auspicious bonding, resulting in positive hashpa'a — influence and healing — as well as a format for role-modeling. In some communities, telephone hot lines have been set up, as one of the reports from the scene details in an article that follows in a later section.

# **Teamwork**

by David Mandel

That is the relationship and responsibility that parents, students, the *rebbe*, teacher and the yeshiva have in raising a child? It is important to develop this relationship early on and strengthen it in order to yield the best results. At the same time, when a problem develops or when a crisis occurs, this "team" can work together in the best interests of the child.

#### **TEAM**

eam is a much overused word that describes the deliberate and coordinated action by two or more people to accomplish one goal. Examples of teams abound in the home, school, playground and office. It is logical then to emphasize that one of our most important teams comprise the child, parents, rebbe, teacher and yeshiva. Count the hours, days and years this team will be together and it comprises the most elaborate, consistent group of people in a child's entire life. If you knew right now that you would spend at least thirty-five hours a week, fifteen hundred hours a year or twenty thou-

David Mandel is the Chief Executive Officer of OHEL Children's Home & Family Services, in Brooklyn, NY.

sand hours over the next twelve years with a group of people, you would surely want to know and understand the other members of this group. Consider, then, whether you as a parent, as a rebbe or morah, as a teacher, have a good working relationship with the other members of your child's/talmid's team.

It is an understatement that school is one of the most critical transitions in the life span of an individual. It is also fair to state that a greater amount of time, effort and resources are needed so that the members of this team involving the student, parents, *rebbe* and teacher can collaborate to achieve the maximum potential of each child. As long as these issues remain unresolved, we will continue to experience the "blame you" syndrome when problems occur, of parents blaming the yeshiva, the yeshiva pointing to the parents and the child struggling in the middle.

#### YESHIVA SYSTEM VS. HOME SYSTEM

earning theory is based on a concept called generalization. We apply what we learn in one setting to a variety of other situations. We learn a set of values, we learn Aleph-Bet and a,b,c, basic arithmetic and so on, and we generalize from these basic concepts to

formulate our everyday activities.

A fundamental concern of *chinuch* is whether the values and concepts taught in yeshiva are reinforced at home. The yeshiva after all, is open and you can "see" what is taught and how. You can ask for a daily schedule or curriculum, you can "interview" the *rebbe/morah*, you can observe a classroom, you can go to parent-teachers meetings, and a variety of other examples permit you, to learn a great deal about the important members of your child's team.

The reverse is not true. Parenting is done mostly behind closed doors. This same *rebbe*, *morah* or teacher does not have similar opportunities to observe the parent/child interaction at home. They don't know how much time you are spending at night supervising homework, how you are teaching *mitzvos*, what Torah values you are instilling, what magazines enter your home, how many parenting workshops you attend.

Our need to emphasize the value of our team is only underscored by the very long days children are spending in school. Couple this with the numbers of mothers who are working today, not by career choice but out of financial necessity, and you have a compelling reason to ensure that the key players in a child's life are working together towards a common goal.

#### **PREVENTION**

e have too many children who have entered the risk pool. We, all of us, professionals and lay people alike, have done a disservice to our youth lately by affixing so many labels to them. "Off the derech," "youth at risk," "in the parsha," "troubled youth," are all labels that serve to stigmatize more than to heal. We tend to speak in shortcuts rather than to take a moment and describe what the problem actually is. It comes to a point where a child is walking down the street with a certain look and we too quickly assume he or she is "one of them." He might actually be the best in the class or just returning from a Tomchei Shabbos mitzva, but he has that look so he must be "one of them." Our first form of prevention is for all of us to look inward and stop categorizing and labeling peo-

Early investment in the team of people who will be spending the majority of their waking hours with our child will yield benefits whether the child becomes an illuy or, chas v'shalom, if he/she develops learning or behavior problems. Every parent has the desire for their child to behave normally and to be the brightest in school. Parents' expectations of the veshiva is to make their child a genius and turn him into a mentsch. But what if yeshivos told you that they required you to spend fifteen minutes every night with each one of your children? Only fifteen minutes with each child, every night whether he is six or sixteen years old. This investment of time early on will reap great dividends. How many parents, mothers and fathers, can honestly say they are spending fifteen minutes every evening with each and every child? How was your day? Did you do or see anything that you like, that you don't understand? What are your plans for tomorrow?

This team can jump into action early on when a problem is identified. We need not go into a discourse here on the benefits of remediating a learning disability or a behavior problem at the earliest possible age. Much has been written on the subject and it is well understood by educators and parents alike. Suffice it to say that an undiagnosed or untreated learning problem will likely translate into a future behavior problem from the frustration experienced by the child, that he/she can't keep up and is labeled as "dummy."

We're all familiar with the adage there is no "I" in team. When everything is

our most important teams comprise the child, parents, rebbe, teacher and yeshiva. Count the hours, days and years this team will be together and it comprises the most elaborate, consistent group of people in a child's entire life.

going a fine, the team members may have little interaction. But when the child begins to have problems, no amount of "I" can do it alone. The entire team will need to coordinate their efforts.

#### INTERVENTION

The real test of our team will occur when a child is deemed to be out of sync with the yeshiva. We're not discussing here that small percentage of children who have psychiatric symptoms that require professional treatment and medication manage-

ment. Nor are we including children with a diagnosed learning disorder that is addressed in a resource room, special education class or remedial tutoring. Rather, we are focusing on those children likely to develop into a twelve-tofifteen-year-old who is disinterested in school, who lacks a focus, who is behaving "nisht Yiddish," who the rebbe feels is having a bad influence on others. If you, as a parent, invested yourself in the yeshiva system and you developed a partnership and this team was working together all these years, you and your child are likely to reap the benefit now when you may need it most. Similarly, a rebbe who invested his time developing this relationship with parents of his talmidim, will also reap the benefits.

Every workshop and seminar on the youth-at-risk issue today, and there are many of them, includes a discussion on expulsion from yeshiva. Yeshivos have a right and an obligation to establish policies that will be in the best interest of the overwhelming majority of students. Parents pay substantial tuition for education and they don't want their child to be "ruined" by boys and girls who speak and dress differently, whose interests in music and recreation are anathema to their upbringing. But then again, throwing a child out of yeshiva has had deleterious effects on that child and his family. We haven't yet developed a system where a yeshiva obligates itself to hold the child until a transfer is made to another yeshiva or an alternate plan is in place. (In the Far Rockaway-Five Towns community, a program called TOVA has succeeded to

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#### RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS

The yeshiva system should continue to underscore to parents the value of joining and being active members of the team. Parents should understand that the time invested in this team partnership when the child is six, may well reap its rewards when he is sixteen. And, *chas v'shalom*, if your child develops behavioral problems that place him/her at risk in yeshiva, your years of teamwork will now pay off.

Our *chinuch* system is being challenged daily by external forces that are *mashpi'a* on our children in ways we couldn't imagine several years ago. Forget television, *Rosh Hayeshivos* today are telling parents not to have computers in their home or to keep them under lock and key when not used under adult supervision. Orthodox Jewish men are

peddling drugs to our children inside some *shuls* and *yeshivos*. Orthodox Jewish men are arrested for offending our children in our *shuls*, our parks and our *yeshivos*. These are devastating issues to deal with that our *mechanchim* who came to these shores from Europe did not have to contend with.

Our *mechanchim* need to understand these complex issues so they can identify at-risk factors at the earliest age to know how to respond and to understand when they need to call for help. This will involve additional training that many of our *mechanchim* have expressed a desire to have.

It has been suggested by many principals that parents be obligated to attend several parenting workshops every year. This is a good idea. It will not only help to clarify the role of the parents and the yeshiva, but it will strengthen the teamwork your child needs for him or her to be successful.

The approach to this could be for a school to assess parents an extra fee,

which the school would return to parents attending the workshop(s). The money retained by the school from parents not attending these workshops would be used to enhance *rebbel* teacher training. Alternatively, every yeshiva would require this training for a child to be registered so that no parent could find a way to avoid the training.

We must recognize that certain teenagers will require professional help. When we are dealing with a child who has an eating disorder, who is constantly angry or depressed, who is an habitual truant, who has lost interest in yeshiva, who is using drugs or is mechallel Shabbos, a mental health professional should become part of the team. We as a frum community and a yeshiva community have too long averted this for fear of stigmatizing the child or the yeshiva. We have also heard from our Gedolei Hador who have clearly stated the obligation parents have to involve a mental health professional when the child's problem appears to exceed the capability of the parent, rebbe or Ray. A parent's reluctance to involve a mental health professional may be understandable given the stigma our community attaches. The other members of the team should encourage the parents to seek and accept this help and assure them that the yeshiva will be an active partner.

OHEL social workers, for example, have become active members of such teams. When a child displays serious behavioral or family issues, the *rebbe* and parent find such a mental health professional to be helpful and at times it is part of a negotiated agreement to keep the child in veshiva.

When a child has a problem, the members of the team have to know the same story, the entire story. Otherwise, well-intentioned people will be responding in the wrong way and be counter-productive. This means that we have to confront and deal with the issue of confidentiality amongst team members so the entire team will work to help the child, the family and the yeshiva.

It has been commonly suggested by our *Gedolim* that every yeshiva should designate a *Mashgiach* to relate to these



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#### THE SPECIAL PARENTAL ROLE

Rabbi Yisroel Reisman, אליט"א, in his Motza'ei Shabbos Navi shiur on February 5, 2000 (Help, My Son is a Teenager) references his discussion with Rabbi Pam, שליט"א on what is the secret to raising children. The Rosh Hayeshiva answered simply, "It is role modeling by the parents." What does the child see at home, what consistent message does he or she hear, what Torah values are instilled? This is an issue that mother and father, who together make up one of those very important teams, should discuss, agree on, and be consistent in their message to their children.

It may be convenient for us to blame the bad behaviors our children learned on their friends, but if you spend enough time speaking and listening to them, their words also point to an inconsistent message heard at home and their frustrations and inability to deal with it. The concept of generalization we discussed earlier that applies to educational concepts also applies to behaviors. We learn one set of behavior at home and we apply it elsewhere in school, in *shul*, with friends and later in life in our own home and business.

One size does not fit all in the classroom. We have, ara, 150,000 boys and girls in our yeshiva and day school system throughout the country. We know that a certain percentage of these kids will not have the "zitsfleish" to sit in a classroom from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. or longer. That doesn't mean they're bad kids. We have to develop a response for them that meets their needs without necessarily telling the parent their child can't meet the demands of this yeshiva, to try another yeshiva, which the child is then interpreting that he is a dummy.

#### **TEAMWORK**

he message here is simple. Teamwork is an essential aspect of raising a child.

There are no complex or hidden messages in this concept. Your child's team will have to involve different people over the years but the consistent members are the parent(s) and child who form the nucleus. Invest time early on in kindergarten and every single year thereafter in formulating this team.

Develop that action plan with more time, energy and interest than virtually anything else conceivable to you. Every member of the team brings knowledge and strength but must also recognize at times their limitations and seek information, training and support. No one member of the team will be equipped with all the ability and resources to deal with the most complex issues. With *emuna* and *bitachon* we will all be *zocheh* to raise our children in the *derech hayashar*.



#### **GUIDANCE FOR PARENTS-AT-RISK**

I was very intrigued by Rabbi Ahron Kaufman's recent article about at-risk students in which he expanded the concept to include most of us who, by virtue of areas of complacency, are at risk as well. To me, this expanded the notion of "Al ta'amin – Do not trust yourself until your last day on earth," which cautions everyone never to take themselves for granted, and propels man onto a path of self-growth and self awareness.

I was taken back many years to the beginning of my chinuch career. I was very young and inexperienced and deeply impressed by my own inadequacies versus the magnitude of the task. A very close friend told me that I was using the wrong metaphor. You think, he said, that you are on top of the mountain and your students are on the bottom and you are not certain that you will be able to coax them up to the summit. That is inaccurate, he insisted. More appropriate an image would be to envision both you and the students as climbing mountains. Only you are a few steps ahead and beckoning them to follow. That will feel more realistic.

I internalized that metaphor, which served me quite well for many years in a broad spectrum of *chinuch* and *kiruv* experiences. Prior to moving to Israel last year, I went to say goodbye to that friend. I thanked him again for a wellworn metaphor and suggested that, perhaps, it was time for a new one. He smiled. No, he replied, it is still good.

To me, this opens the process. The extent to which we view ourselves as an integral part of the growth process and inexorably bound to the growth of the banim/talmidim, to a proportionate, or rather exponential degree we will be able to direct them away from risk. The extent, however, to which we experience our own orbits as being different or apart from theirs, we separate them from the richness and breadth of our own struggles. It is part of the modeling we must do for them, demonstrating by example how we grapple with the issues of our own vulnerability to risk that might give them the courage to do likewise.

I am reminded of Rosh Hashana years ago in the Beis Midrash of Rabbi Shlomo Freifeld אנ"ל, late Rosh Yeshiva of Sh'or Yoshuv and a great genius with at-risk and not-so-at-risk talmidim. Reb Shlomo was imploring the crowded Beis Midrash to be makpid on reviewing the weekly parsha twice, plus Targum, for the coming year. "And I know how hard it is for you," he roared, "because I know how hard it is for me."

RABBI HILLEL BELSKY
Ateres Bnos Yerushalayim Seminary
Jerusalem

# "DESIGNER KIDS" FOR "SUPERIOR" SCHOOLS?

Since 1960, articles have been appearing in this (and other) publications which decry the fate of the "failing" child.

Privileged to join the "frum" community since 1970 and the Boro Park community in 1980, I have been working with children (and their families) for 25 years.

It is gratifying to see a publication in a prominent journal dedicated to "children on the fringe"; the emergence of support groups shows what strides we've made in attacking this problem.

Please consider the following illustrative events of the past three weeks in my office practice:

- A youngster arrives asking for a prescription of albuterol inhaler (an asthma medication). A review of the chart shows that she does not have asthma. She admits that is a good recreational drug when "puffed" and shares it with her friends.
- A boy diagnosed with ADHD, on Ritalin for several years, begins "acting out" as he approaches age 12. Discontinuing this drug results in a sharp reduction of his impulses.
- An 11-year-old is denied further yeshiva admission unless the child is maintained on methylphildate (Ritalin). He presents to the office in a dazed state. When removed from medication, one notices the emergence of his personality as a restless super-genius. A change of school, with intelligent and devoted staff, brings out the finest in him and his learning. An herbal supplement is all the "medication" he needs now.
- Girl requests refills of her Ritalin admits she breaks the tablets and shares her medication with classmates.
- Follow-up exam for a boy who at age five was brought in for evaluation, after failing entrance exam for kindergarten. The examiner had stated that he was unable to properly identify and classify various common household objects, and therefore "something must be wrong." This child goes on to excel at his Yeshiva studies at a different school. Father states, "Some kids hear a different

drummer." The child, now older, states

"I didn't answer the questions because
I was thinking the test was pointless, and
I didn't trust the examiner."

We are reportedly facing a crisis among our youth, who have begun exploring and experimenting with external culture. We wonder about the etiology of this departure, and we do not know where we failed.

To me, the answer is clear.

ow many parents, mothers **and** fathers, can honestly say they are spending fifteen minutes every evening with each and every child?

In order to create "designer" children for our superior and competitive *yeshivos*, we have established a "drug culture" in our schools. Classroom instruction is directed at the "superkids," and the "deficient" kids are medicated into compliance.

A child is labeled as suffering from a "disorder" or "deficit" if he does not perform to the designs of the teacher or administrator – this child is labeled as a failure, and doomed as a reject. The parent is badgered into complying with the diagnosis; and the doctor is compelled to treat with a drug!

Imagine! A child is a DISORDER and a FAILURE – just because he is a child!

I have long refused to prescribe

Ritalin for fidgety children, unless the strict neurologic and laboratory (including EEG) criteria for ADD or ADHD have been met, and the drug manufacturer's indications and instructions have been strictly adhered to.

As a mind-focusing or mood-altering drug, it may well serve as a portal to a career of dependence on chemicals for behavior control. When children become adolescents, they learn to share their medications as well as their snacks. In addition, the stimulant effect, according to some neurologists, may potentiate behavior which is unacceptable to us, but deemed a normal developmental stage in the "outside" society (and therefore is not listed as a "side effect").

Why do schools have to label a kid "disordered" if he does not pattern his abilities exactly to their template?

Why do the schools insist that unless we drug up kids, they cannot accept them or teach them?

Why can't teachers gear lessons to the normal human variety of children who represent a vast spectrum of intellectual capabilities, realizing that a weakness in one parameter of cognitive ability is no reflection on the overall capability (or value) of a child?

Some *yeshivos* are so concerned about their reputation and "book value" that they deny a child his right to *chinuch*, claiming "he wouldn't fit in here." (rejection)

It has often been said that children need unconditional love. This is true. It is also a fact that children gravitate to the place where they sense unconditional love. It is also true that kids migrate away from punitive, belittling environments.

Today, in liberal, egalitarian America, there are plenty of other places a Jewish child can go to find unconditional love and acceptance.

Our job, whether as Jewish educators, parents, or as health care professionals, is to show our kids that we are totally and unconditionally devoted to them, to understanding their needs and accepting them. We will then earn their trust, and they won't disappoint us.

Max Bulmash, MD

Brooklyn

#### FROM SOHO TO PRODUCTIVITY

You correctly emphasized that the number of issues contributing to our youth dropping out are as varied as the number of children themselves. Correspondingly, I can concur that the unconditional love and acceptance is a tried and true path back. Having followed one such "now-productive" young man through drugs, SoHo, the Village, and numerous relationships, I can attest to this fact. He knew he could call me at any time (which he did), that I would tell him I wish he would behave otherwise (which I did) and I know that no matter what current trouble he was in, I was behind him. Now that he is the father of a beautiful baby boy, you can imagine my happiness as he introduces me to everyone as his son's "grandfather!"

RABBI YITZCHAK KASNETT, PRINCIPAL
Ocean Pkwy Developmental Center
Brooklyn

#### THE JEWISH ELEMENT IN THERAPY

There are certain issues that have not been addressed anywhere, which can not be overlooked. Many of these children that we consider at risk or troubled, may also be suffering from emotional disorders that have medical and therapeutic means of treatment, such as depression, bipolar disorder, psychotic disorders, school phobias, explosive disorders, eating disorders, etc. These teens are difficult at times to diagnose because they don't look like their adult counterparts or are very clever at hiding their symptoms from others. We may, as adults, not be aware that certain behaviors or symptoms are actually treatable disorders.

We need to alert parents, students and teachers to be on the lookout for suicidal teens and refer them right away for help before someone loses his or her life tragically by completing a suicide or causing other self-damage.

We need to have *frum* adolescent psychiatric inpatient units, residential treatment centers, rehabilitation programs for substance abuse, and therapeutic day treatment programs. When our children

go into these programs sponsored by the secular world, you can say, "Good-bye to Yiddishkeit, and Hello to shmutz of the world." I spoke to a well-known psychiatrist who felt that currently, our system of managed health care can not provide any of these desperately needed services to us. I also feel that frum adolescent girls also need veshiva programs when they are troubled. More girls than boys have emotional problems as adolescents, since this is the time depression manifests itself. Yet, all I read are new programs for difficult adolescent males. These girls hopefully will also be our future Jewish mothers to the next generation.

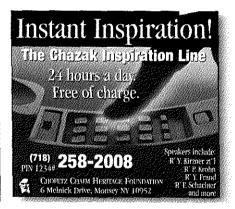
MINI VERTER Board certified child psychiatrist

# EQUIPPING THE MENTORS TO BE EFFECTIVE GUIDES

I agree that it is unrealistic to expect every rav to have the time or expertise to handle the sorts of problems which are brought to a therapist. However, some Rabbanim do make the time for this. Some are naturally gifted in interpersonal and personal issues, while others are not equipped to handle the cases that come their way, not having been trained in this area. I don't think the answer lies in consulting with frum yet secularly oriented professionals.

My suggestion; just as COPE trains people in the field of computers by teaching them only what they need to know as it concerns computers (without requiring English literature, history etc.), we should have a course for those interested in counseling, given of course, by gifted rabbanim and rebbetzins with no secular training. I imagine it would be something like Rabbi Yoel Kramer's course for men who want to be mechanchim, who are taught how to teach, about classroom management etc. without having to resort to secular education courses and college degrees. It would help if these courses were so valuable and demanding that somebody having successfully taken the course would be regarded as qualified in the field.

> Mrs. Y. Homnick Brooklyn



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# The Israeli Scene Lessons to be Learned

# Drawing Lines in a Moving Field

## Lessons To Be Gleaned From the Israeli At-Risk Scene

#### **OUT OF THE CLOSET**

The Jewish Observer blew the top off the "at risk" issue in its November edition, and though many people are still reeling from the aftershock, one very important development has taken place: the subject is now open to public debate, which means that the situation is no longer static as it had been for some years.

Both in the United States and Israel, the cold, hard facts have come out of the closet and are now out in the open – defiant, pointing their fingers at us, and waiting to see how we react. But so far we haven't made any dramatic moves. It appears that we're still in the brooding stage: considering the problem, weighing our options, wondering which way to go.

This sense of confusion is natural when one considers the huge volume of ideas being thrown at us by people who have known about the problem for years, but who never had a chance to tell the world about it. Now they have crawled out of the trenches and are letting us have it all at once, demanding sweeping reforms and a new world order. And no wonder – the number of youths on the fringe and beyond is in the thousands, and climbing by the day.

Moshe Schapiro is a journalist who lives in Jerusalem. His byline appears in a number of English-language publications around the globe. This is his first appearance in these pages.

Some of these experts claim that parents are at fault; others say it is all because of the teachers, while others blame it on learning disabilities that were not diagnosed in time. And then are those who say it is no one's fault at all, and that it is just a sign of the times. It's all very disorienting.

In order to make sense out of this cacophony of opinions, it is necessary to aim for the bird's-eye view of the issue and avoid getting bogged down in the micro perspective. From this higher vantage point one can superimpose the various opinions, discern the common denominators, and hopefully arrive at some helpful conclusions.

# THE ISRAELI-CHINUCH EXPERIENCE: SETTING BOUNDARIES

ere is an attempt to find common threads in the heated public debate that is taking place in Israel, where an estimated 1,000 youths have dropped out of school and are in immediate danger of leaving religion completely. Although the Israeli dropout scene is slightly different from the one in America, there are a surprising number of parallel themes common to both communities:

Most *chinuch* experts are in agreement that *chinuch* is essentially a matter of setting boundaries for the child. These boundaries consist of green, yellow and red areas – everything within

the green area is kosher, the yellow area is marginal, and the red is *treif*.

The big question is where to lay down the lines, because the lines have this disturbing tendency of sliding out of place with the passing of each generation. One generation's yellow line can become another one's red.

A good example is young people's attitude toward authority.

The renowned *Mashgiach*, Rabbi Nechemiah Nordheim recalls hearing Rabbi Shach say, "In the past, when a boy was expelled from yeshiva, he went to work and remained religious. Boys who are expelled from yeshiva nowadays often stop saying *Kriyas Shema*."

Rabbi Dov Brezak, principal of Jerusalem's Talmud Torah Ezrat Torah and author of a weekly parenting column in *Yated*, illustrates this point.

"When we were children," Brezak says, "we accepted as a given that our parents had the right to tell us what to do. Today, however, children see themselves as adults at a very early age, and they expect to be treated as such. They want to understand things before they do them. They don't accept authority the way they used to."

Eliav Miller, a member of Lev L'Achim's youth-at-risk project, agrees. "The most effective way to help kids on the fringe is to relate to them as you would relate to an adult – be a good listener, empathize, and suggest ways to solve his problems. This is what they are lacking."

# DEALING WITH CONFLICTS AND CRISES

onflicts occur when the child's attitude toward adult authority is at odds with the expectations of parents and teachers. A generation ago children who said, "Why should I?" crossed the red lines of defiance and were punished accordingly; but today, the experts say, such a question is merely a sign of inquisitiveness.

Crises arise when parents and mechanchim misinterpret a child's motives, thinking that the child is crossing the red line when in fact he is only approaching the yellow.

"Slapping the side of a malfunctioning computer accomplishes nothing, and it usually just knocks a few more wires out of place," says Rabbi Brezak. "You have to open up the box and try to locate the problem. The same is true of *chinuch* – these days, you have to take into account the child's feelings before you discipline him. This is not to say that his feelings should control the adult's decisions; but they must play a major factor in the decision-making process."

Investigating the reasons a child resists authority is important for another reason: when one "opens up the box" and looks inside, one is liable to discover that the child's unruly behavior is a result of hyperactivity; that his unwillingness to hand in assignments on time is a result of dyslexia; and that his lack of concentration stems not from rebelliousness, but from the fact that his parents are on the verge of divorce.

But isn't this obvious? Perhaps, but according to all the youth-at-risk experts I interviewed, the overwhelming majority of teachers are too preoccupied with keeping their classes under control and teaching to also investigate why little Yoni sitting in the corner over there hasn't raised his hand in weeks. Dealing with children on the fringe requires time and specialized training – two rare commodities that most Israeli teachers lack.

Rabbi Yitzchak Waxman, director of Nesivos Yitzchak, a youth-at-risk organization in Israel that has handled 1,500 cases in eight years, can rattle off hundreds of names of youths who dropped out of school – and eventually, religion – simply because their teachers did not have the necessary training or the time to find out what their problem was. He cites the case of one boy who was absent from yeshiva for weeks without the members of the teaching staff even noticing. Admittedly this is an extreme case, but the point is that such things could – and do – happen.

What is the reason?

The experts' consensus is that most teachers are not to blame, working as they do in next to impossible conditions – many have huge classes, minimal training and long hours.

"Most of my colleagues," one teacher admitted, "work with approximately one-third of their classes – about ten or fifteen students. As for the rest of the class, if they participate, great, and if not, then all they ask of them is to sit quietly."

This candid admission should be investigated, and if found true, should set off the alarm bells.

#### ON A PRAGMATIC LEVEL

n a more pragmatic level, it should alert school administrators and parents to the reality of the classroom, and perhaps accelerate the process of weighing some of the solutions proposed by youth-at-risk experts: creating the position of Student Counselor, whose task it will be to identify at-risk students and work with them to prevent their condition from deteriorating; creating smaller classrooms; training teachers to recognize the signs of imminent danger and to react in time; and training parents to communicate with their children more effectively.

More than likely the overwhelming majority of school administrators are painfully aware of the shortcomings in the system and would like to take steps to improve matters, yet budgetary limitations impede them from doing so. The funds needed to implement any or all of these suggestions would have to come either from parents' already

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overextended budgets, or from private donations. Sounds nice in theory, but anyone who is even faintly familiar with fundraising knows what a headache this would entail.

Which brings us to the wider issue of the Torah world's recent transition from a relatively small social group to a full-fledged society.

## SOCIAL TRANSITIONS IN THE TORAH WORLD

ome two decades ago the Torah world underwent a process of exponential growth that is continuing to gain momentum today. The small, self-contained original group of a few hundred yeshiva families metamorphosed into a diversified society consisting of all kinds of individuals coming from all types of backgrounds.

For example, a recent study of the yeshiva community in *Eretz Yisroel* found that some 50 percent of its members are *ba'alei teshuva*. While the percentages probably differ in religious communities elsewhere, one thing is certain: our society isn't as homogeneous as it once was — and neither can we expect our children to be.

This transition demands a higher level of responsibility toward all members of our community. It necessitates the establishment of a social net designed to meet a wider range of needs than ever before.

The escalating number of youths at risk should serve as an indicator that the transition from group to community is not yet complete. Evidently our communal system has not yet adjusted to the new chal-



lenges that have surfaced in conjunction with our numerical growth and eclectic composition.

Of course there have always been people who dropped out of school and left religion, but what we are facing today is an unprecedented phenomenon. We are no longer talking about a few individuals dropping out, but a trend that is one step away from becoming a movement. In the past, people who left religion abandoned it, whereas today's dropout lingers on the edge, waiting for someone to call him back, while at the same time beckoning to well-adjusted youths to join his rebellion.

#### SHOULDERING THE RESPONSIBILITY?

ur society has a responsibility to help all of its members find their place, but are we shouldering that responsibility?

Youth-at-risk experts say we still have a long way to go. What, for example, does our society do with a youth who is not the studious type, and who has no interest in becoming a rabbi, but would prefer learning a trade?

In reference to this point Rabbi Waxman cites something Rabbi Aharon Leib Shteinman disclosed to him during a recent conversation, which was consequently publicized in *Mishpacha*, a mainstream chareidi weekly magazine:

"Today we are facing a situation similar to the one that existed one hundred years ago, when not everyone learned in yeshiva. There were sandal-makers and tailors who were *yirei Shamayim*, yet who were not fit for learning in yeshiva.

"Clearly there are hundreds of young men today who are not capable of sitting and learning the entire day, and therefore, there is a need to create working and learning environments — not yeshivos—from where they will come out good Jews."

Unless viable options are created within the system, such youths are liable to start looking for solutions elsewhere. Organizations such as Rabbi Waxman's do their best to give youths-at-risk vocational training in the field of their choice in a religious environment, but bud-

getary constraints severely limit their activities. More must be done to encourage such initiatives.

#### FUN, WARMTH ... AND CHANGE

nd what ever happened to having fun within a kosher envingement? In the days of Mike Tress, people were drawn to Yiddishkeit because it was a fun experience; only at a later stage did they begin appreciating the beauty of Torah study. Have we become too institutionalized, too rigid, to let our youth have fun within the greater context of Yiddishkeit?

According to Rabbi Michel Lefkowitz, Rosh Yeshiva of Ponovezh's Yeshiva Ketana, the crucial role that human warmth plays in the development of youths cannot be overemphasized. "Today more than ever youths need to receive warmth and love from their teachers, as well as be shown the depth and beauty of learning. For this reason *yeshivos* should not expand beyond their present size."

There are plenty of positive ideas floating around out there. The problem is that at the moment there is no centralized body to process them, evaluate them, bring them for consideration to the Torah leaders of our generation, and finally, undertake the huge task of implementing them in our schools, communities and homes.

Some people I interviewed expressed frustration at how slow things are progressing. They had expected that by now, three entire months after the special JO issue galvanized our community, some basic decisions would have been reached and the first tentative steps toward improving the situation would have been taken.

In reality, however, this is not how change comes about in the Torah world – and for good reason. Were it not for our community's built-in system of checks and balances, we would probably not be here today to do the telling.

Change will come only after the spiritual leaders of our generation determine which – if any – of the ideas being generated by the public debate sweeping the land are in tune with the long-term needs of the Torah community.

# A Safety Net of Telephone Lines

An interview with **Rabbi Moshe Speiser** in Jerusalem, the director of Kav Baruch, a hotline for religious teens and their parents of English-speaking background

n the other end, it's almost always the mothers.

"In most cases, I never find out who they are," says Rabbi Moshe Speiser. "There's one – she called again this morning – who's still anonymous after three months. She identifies herself by her first name only. One time she arranged for her husband to call, and arranged a meeting between us. We met anonymously, in the school where he teaches."

An anonymous meeting?

"We arranged a certain spot that's not normally used at that hour, he told me his first name and I gave him identifying signs, that I've got a red beard and wear a tie. In Israel, that's enough." Rabbi Speiser smiles slightly. There's always a suggestion of that smile playing in his eyes— as if just around the corner, something unexpectedly good's going to happen. "So we met face to face, but I never found out who he was."

Did it help?

"Well, their son's an older bachur who's unmotivated. He hasn't gone off the derech but she has a hard time getting him up in the morning for davening, he doesn't want to start with shidduchim. Very little self-confidence. He's afraid to face life. Look, people think you can get involved and right away start changing things. Sometimes, to some extent, that can happen. But

Mrs. Shapiro of Jerusalem is a frequent contributor to these pages – most recently with "Speaking of Stunning Accidents" (Feb. '00).

most of the time, if it took years to get this way, it'll probably take a long time to get out of it, too. But you can try to give some hope, and some encouragement, especially to the mothers. It's usually the mothers who are trying to fix things, and usually they're the ones who are most broken by the problem. There's often a problem with the fathers, but there's only been one time in my experience that the mother doesn't blame herself, as well. The mother's usually aware that she's part of the problem. In any case, usually one or both of the parents is being too critical, not seeing the good in the child, not being warm enough, enthusiastic enough. But both mothers and fathers, once they arrive at the realization that it's either change themselves or G-d forbid lose their child, then in my experience, most of them are open to the idea. That's not to say they can achieve it so fast, but they're very open to the challenge of changing."

In other words, when it comes to children, that's the one area that our pride doesn't get in the way as much.

"Right. One time I was telling a father that if he was really sincere about wanting to help his son, he would have to change his own attitude entirely, his whole approach, his whole way of thinking about his child. The father sat there taking this in, then he said, 'You mean I have to change my whole personality? Isn't that what you're saying?' I nodded, and the two of us had to laugh. Then I said, 'What we won't do

for our children, right?""

You said that giving hope and encouragement is one of the main goals of the hotline. In your experience, is hope warranted?

"There are no statistics because we're in the middle of it, but it's safe to say that a very good percentage of teenagers after going through what they're going through - realize that there's more to life than the emptiness of what they've run to, and they come back. But it's very hard to get that to happen if the parents aren't trying to create a more loving relationship. The goal is to get them to work on changing their own behavior. The parents have to be part of the solution. If they don't change, there's far less likelihood of their child changing anything. And if we find that the parents aren't yet able to change their own behavior, in the meantime we try to provide a temporary parent, someone who serves as a big brother or big sister. That's why training people for this is the thing we have to do, because what a child in a crisis, or a child wobbling on the borderline, needs more than anything else – it's been said a million times but it's the truth is simply love, and if you're a loving person, if you tend to be a caring person, you can be trained to really help a child or young adult - or a parent, for that matter - who for whatever reason is on the edge. "To know how to do that is a teachable skill. I myself learned a lot of what I know in a course given by Dr. Joshua Ritchie, dean of the MiLev Professional Training Institute and Director of the Milev Crisis Counseling Hotline for English speakers in Israel. The reason I finally decided to start my own is that after two years of dealing with kids, it became clear that we needed something that the chareidim would feel comfortable with, too.

"Most psychologists here in Israel are not trained for dealing with chareidi teenagers. In America, people are very psychology-oriented, or they get in touch with a social worker, but here, even if you find a psychologist or social worker who's frum or who's adequately familiar with the frum community, and who's properly trained, what you usually hear from parents is, 'My child will not go to a psychologist.' There's more a feeling of shame about it. Kids think that if anyone finds out they're going to a psychologist, people will think they're crazy. "The courses I give train people what to say to someone in crisis, how to create an atmosphere over the phone line in which people can feel safe, feel they can be open, to talk, and if you can do that, then maybe the relationship can develop beyond that, into something face-to-face, in which a person becomes like a surrogate parent or an older, respected sibling. Sometimes that has to be somebody young enough to seem

'cool' in the eyes of the teenager - that can be one of the most powerful role models available."

Who comes to the courses?

"People who'd like to spend a little time helping with something important. It's such a big *mitzva*. Sometimes it's parents who see the signs for 'Teenage Crisis Counseling Course' and call up asking if they can take it for their own personal instruction, for their home-life, and of course, I say yes, why not. On a number of occasions, I've thought of someone I know who would be good at this and invite them to join the course, someone who by nature is a caring personality. The rest can be learned. The main thing, the crucial factor, is simply learning how to listen."

How do you learn to listen?

"By not talking! Have you ever heard of the difference between a monologue and a dialogue? In a monologue, one person talks and one person listens. In a dialogue, two people talk and no one listens."

What else do they learn in the course? "How to present basic Jewish values to the at-risk teenager in a manner he or she can accept. It teaches what's going on in the minds of teenagers today and how they're influenced by their parents, schools, community and society in

general. It teaches how to guide teenagers to deal with their situations and to take on the responsibilities of life, and how to guide parents in their role. How to develop patience. How to be nice, not threatening. To not come across as judgmental. To work at not being judgmental. To learn the art of looking for the good in people. The way people usually grow is to build on their strengths, so you have to develop a better eye for people's strengths. "One of the most important things is building the trust, and learning how not to break it. The caller has to know that if he wants his privacy to be respected, you won't cross that border. That's why the hotline can work sometimes where other approaches can't. People don't have to put themselves on line. Your identity can remain hidden." Rabbi Speiser pauses thoughtfully. "Sometimes you find yourself in an extreme situation where you must get other people involved. Knowing how to handle that can be tricky. Once, a few years before the hotline was started, I made a mistake in that area and lost my kesher."

**≺**he call came in after midnight. You were sleeping? Yes, but when you get a sense of

what's at stake, then being woken up totally loses its power to upset you. So, the phone rang at 1 a.m., and a girl says,

'I'm going to kill myself.'

"I say, look, let's meet and we can talk. She says, 'No.' I say, tell me where you are, I'll take a taxi right now. 'No. I'm killing myself.' She starts talking about her life. Her father's verbally abusive, everything in life is hard. She's in one of the Bais Yaakovs. She doesn't see any point in continuing. I say again, tell me where you are, I'll leave this minute. She says, 'No, I don't want you to see me.' We talk some more and I say, why did you call me? She says, 'This friend of mine, S. - remember her? - she told me about you. She says that one time you talked her out of something. So I thought ...maybe...why not try him.' I say, why not talk yourself out of it? 'No, it's too



hard for me.' What's so hard? 'I have no strength to go on.'

"So then I say one of the things you say in such situations. I say, you know, there's no rush. You can always kill yourself tomorrow. Why don't you get a good night's sleep and call me in the morning?"

((Tdidn't hear from her for a week. I didn't know if she was Ldead or alive. One night, the phone rang and I knew her voice instantly. I said, where have you been? I've been waiting to hear from you! She said, 'Yeah, I was getting better but now I'm very depressed again. I have a bottle of aspirin and I'm going to do it this time.' During the course of the conversation she dropped a few hints. 'No one in this world is good.' I asked her, nobody? 'Well, one principal was pretty good,' and she mentioned his name. I said, he couldn't help? 'Yeah, he helped me for a while and now I don't trust anybody. I'm going to kill myself.'

"I don't know what put this into my mind, but then I said: Instead of killing yourself, why don't I just kill your *yeitzer hara*? She seemed to like that, so I said, but how can I do that if I don't know where you are? No answer. So I say, OK, then, how about this: Why don't you ask your friend a little more about me. Ask her if I ever betrayed her trust. Then you can decide if I'm the kind of person you should talk to.

"She liked that idea so that's what she did, the next day. That night she called back. 'OK, she told me about you but I don't want to go meet you.' Then she hangs up.

"I called the principal she'd mentioned and in half a minute we'd figured out who it was. In forty-five minutes, after some other calls, I'd found out everything about her I needed to know. Before that, I had thought to myself that maybe this kid's playing a big joke on me, maybe she's just having fun, but after speaking to the people involved, no, it seemed she was capable of hurting himself. So the next time she called I

decided to take a little tougher stance. I said, look, I know who you are. I know this and I know that. She was caught totally off guard.

"'So you know who I am.' She sounded shocked. 'We'd better stop having conversations.' Then she hung up."

Then what?

"That's the last time I spoke to her. She never called again."

Can't you speak to the family?

"No. Because it turned out that the reason she'd lost trust in people, the thing that had precipitated that last crisis, was that the principal had let slip something to the parents that the girl had said in confidence. So I'm in touch with the principal, and a few of the teachers, and some other people. They're watching after her. Under the circumstances, that's as much as I can do. And every day, there are around twenty-five boys and girls I daven for—she's one of them."

an you tell some other stories?

"All right. One Friday afternoon, not long after the first ads for the hotline had appeared, the phone rings and when I pick up, there's nobody there. Hello? No answer. I say, is anybody there? Nothing. Then I hear

somebody breathing.

"We're taught not to give up. Sometimes it's hard for a person to talk. So I say, 'Look, if it's hard for you to talk, take your time. I'll be ready when you are.' Now, not many men call up, but this time it's a man. He says: 'I think my son is on drugs.' I say, can you tell me what makes you think so? So he lists the various signs. I say, 'Look, I'm not an expert on drugs, but it doesn't sound like drugs to me. If you'll hold, I'll call a drug expert on the other line and ask him what he thinks.' So I call a friend of mine who knows all about these things and he agrees it doesn't sound like drugs, but says that boy will probably end up on drugs if you don't do something fast. So from that point on, the father and I started working on it.

"Another time, a fifteen-year-old girl, clearly very nervous to be calling, started off by saying, 'I don't know if you deal with this kind of thing, I don't know if I should talk to you about it, it's not really a serious problem. It's only about friends.' I told her it took a lot of courage to call, please go ahead. It turns out her family had made *aliya* a few years earlier and she's had trouble finding friends she can confide in. Her best friend, one of the only English-speaking girls, is always on-again, off-again about their friendship, dropping her and taking her back, so she never knows



when she can count on their friendship and when she's going to be ignored. She said it was making her very depressed.

"After talking awhile, it became apparent that there were also family problems. The girl had no one to talk to, she didn't get along well with her mother, felt she couldn't confide in her. She felt she had nobody.

"While we were talking, I got an idea – a woman who I thought would be just the right big sister for this particular girl. She's a mother of a large family, she's warm, caring, smart. Good at finding the good in people. So I approached her about it and asked if she could give it a try.

"The woman had never done anything like this before. She was a little scared to take something like this on. It's a responsibility, somebody's life. But she went ahead and got in touch, and they spoke, and they've been meeting. I'll just have to watch that it doesn't get to be too demanding a situation. You have to be careful on behalf of your volunteers, to guard against their getting burned out. You have to take care not to give them more than they have time and energy for.

"One time, a mother called up very distraught about her seventeen-year-old daughter. The girl was successful in school and had never been a problem. Now she was crazy over an eighteen year-old boy in the neighborhood. The mother said the boy was a yeshiva dropout, but wasn't working, either. The situation was under parental control; in other words, the boy and the girl had agreed to meet in their respective homes only with the parents' knowledge, but she wanted help in handling it. So we talked.

"A few weeks later I get a call at 1 a.m. It's the mother. She was hysterical. The girl and boy had gone out behind their backs – someone had seen them getting on a bus – and the girl hadn't come home yet. She said she'd just been on the phone with a *rav* who had told her she absolutely must threaten her daughter that if she ever has contact with that boy again, they'll move away and she would never see him again in her life.

"I was beginning to say, 'Please don't say that to her, let's think what you can do,' when the mother said, 'Oh no! I have to get off! She's walking in right now!' I just had time to tell her, 'Cry. Tell her she broke your trust, that you don't know what to do about it and that you'll talk about this tomorrow morning. In the morning before she wakes up, call me.'

"The next morning, the mother called and said she'd done what I said. We decided that she'd tell her daughter that she was doing things that could ruin her life and if she didn't want to talk to her about it, she knew someone else she could talk to who would be non-judgmental.

"The girl agreed and she and I met in a park to talk. In the beginning she was very nervous. After a few minutes she calmed down and I listened carefully. Then I said, 'You have to know that what's happening can hurt your friend as much as it can hurt you. If you really care about him, you should be doing things that would be responsible and productive for both of you.' Then we talked some more.

"That night, she called and asked if she could bring her friend to talk, too, and the next day, the three of us met.

"I'm in touch with the mother. The boy is starting to put his life in order. The girl calls every once in a while for encouragement and advice."

ne time, a teenager said he'd seen the ad and was calling because his twelve-yearold brother was driving him crazy. 'He starts up with me all the time, especially Shabbos, and it makes me furious.' I said that probably he was doing it to get his big brother's attention, so maybe if you ignore him, he'll stop bugging you. I asked him if he wanted to come to my house for Shabbos and he said no, he didn't, but a few days later he called back and said he'd tried not reacting to his little brother over Shabbos and it had worked. He obviously felt very good about it. I told him he was a gibor, and

said, 'Look how much you gained by being able to control yourself.'

"A child can come to view self-discipline as being something for his or her own benefit.

"Parents are often not aware of how negatively they come across when it comes to their children. They convey a pessimistic attitude. Like with that unmotivated bachur afraid to go out on shidduchim, the mother used to say things such as, 'How are you ever going to get married?' I told her, wake him up in the morning with a kiss instead of a push. When he comes home, give him a hug hello. We have to give enough loving attention that it will be able to counteract the outside influences. We have to fully grasp what's going on in the minds of teenagers today. Outside influences are pulling at them. The Internet, television, magazines, billboards, the way people walk on the street, the availability of drugs. If I tell parents to be more loving in such and such a way, sometimes they say - and they're right - my parents didn't do that and I'm O.K. But this is a different generation. It's not that today's parents don't feel love - in the grand majority of cases, they do - but that they have to communicate the love so that it's felt.

"There are all kinds of calls. Sometimes problems arise when a child has been put into a school that's inappropriate for his personality or his goals. Sometimes, it's because of undiagnosed or mis-diagnosed medical conditions, or learning disabilities.

"Around a year ago, I got a call from the parents of a boy who was failing in school and had consciously decided to rebel. Failure in school is a high-risk factor, because of what it can do to self-image. and sure enough, he'd became less and less religious. They'd put him step by step into more and more modern schools, but it hadn't worked. He dropped out completely and got involved in drugs. Some of his friends tried with some success to persuade him to stop taking drugs but nonetheless he almost died of an overdose.

"I was in touch with the parents throughout this period, pleading with them not to throw him out. To be firm on some things and some things not so much, but not to give up.

"They didn't give up on him. They went through it with him and today their son is doing much, much better and going to a school he's succeeding in. Just this week I got a letter from the mother," - Rabbi Speiser takes out a paper from his pocket - "she says her son has started keeping Shabbos again, that he's taking high school courses and wants to start attending a Gemorah class. But here - she says: 'He had a hard day yesterday. His good friend from the Kikar [Zion Square in downtown Jerusalem, where disaffected youth congregatel killed himself. At age eighteen, his parents had thrown him out of the house. After six months of sleeping on rooftops and lots of drugs, he got a hold of a gun and shot himself in the head. We are so thankful for what has happened with E- . I can't express to you our gratitude. I hope we can pass on the chessed to others in return.'

"A woman once called up very upset because her teenage daughter was wearing eye-catching clothing. But in talking to her, it became evident that this was a problem not only of a parent not knowing how to give it over to her child in a good way, without trying to shame her, but also that the mother herself didn't have a good grasp of the philosophy behind *tzeniut*. We have to approach these things from the standpoint of what they stand to lose and what they stand to gain."

To appeal to the child's self-interest?

"Yes, but something that goes beyond self-interest, too. Today one of the major problems is that observance of Judaism in general has become shallow. There's more learning than ever before but the heart behind it is lacking. No kid ever ends up on the street because of philosophical issues – in my limited experience, it always has something to do with the family life – but *hashkafa* (ideology) issues are real and we have to know how to address them. The truth of Torah especially, along with *tzeniut*, these are the issues that counselors need

to be well-prepared for on a profound level. The children are picking up that there's nothing intrinsically uplifting about what we're saying. We're not making them feel good in such a way they will want to do what they're being told to do.

"For example, a father takes his son to *shul*. He sits down, expects the kid to *daven*, but doesn't lovingly tell his son that *Hashem* is listening, that *Hashem* loves him and wants to hear from him. Why should that child want to continue *davening*? If we would find a little more meaning in our *Yiddishkeit*, I think our children would follow along.

"We have to love our children unconditionally, no matter what they do. If a child feels he's loved when he does something good, and not loved when he doesn't, then that's a strong source of rebellion. He feels, 'If you knew the real me, you wouldn't love me.'

"There was a problem between a father and his son, and he'd become rebellious. I told him, you must give your son personal attention. Why don't you take him out by himself to eat? He did, and a third party reported to me later that the young man had said to a friend, 'What took him so long? It took me becoming a *chilloni* to get my father to start listening to me."

At the start of our conversation, you mentioned that a mother called you this morning, the one who had arranged an anonymous meeting between you and the father.

"Yes, she called the hotline this morning crying, saying, 'My husband thinks he knows everything.' But I was on the other line, so I asked if she could call back."

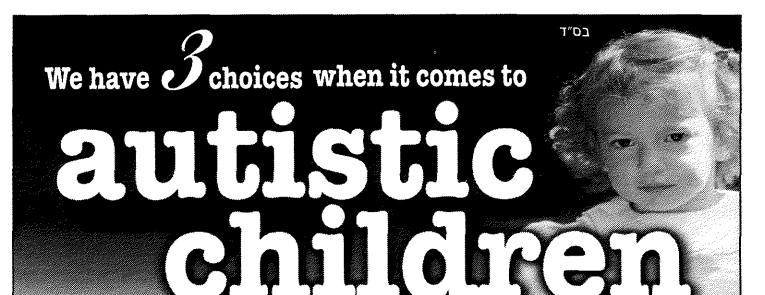
Did she call back?

"Not yet, but she will."

By the way, what happened at that anonymous meeting?

Rabbi Speiser goes silent for a few seconds before speaking. "The father told me something he said he'd never told anyone. He said, 'Of all our kids, this was the one child I never loved."





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## VIII **Bringing Them Back** to a Torah Life

# "Better Late Than Never"

by Rabbi Aaron Brody

s director of a yeshiva program helping kids on the fringe coming back, allow me to share a typical, yet not so typical, day in the lives of our talmidim. One must keep in mind that our talmidim are yeshiva boys who have left their Yiddishkeit behind, either partially or entirely, and they are now on the pathway of return.

day Morning Breakfast Club. At 9 o'clock sharp, the guys pile into the van and drive off to daven at the Kosel. By 9:30, girded in tefillin, leather jackets, and tinted hair (and one wears a cardboard yarmulka for effect), we approach our Creator. If one guy finishes Shemoneh Rabbi Brody conducts the program described above under the auspices of Yeshiva Ohr Somay-

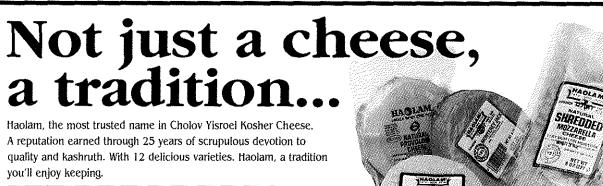
ach in Jerusalem.

Esrei early, he may choose to have a cigarette before the repetition; the chazzan, of course, will not light up in deference to the Kosel. Throughout the davening, tourists snap picture after picture of our eternity the flavor of "Jewish youth." Our breathtaking Shacharis is followed by bagels and coffee in the Old City. As full view of the Kosel to learn Torah. we sit on the ground to learn, but sityou shall toil"?

The humor of the above portrait can mask the numerous accomplishments and growth the guys experience in our little trip to the Kosel. To list just a few, the fact that everyone is awake and not horizontal by 9 a.m. is a major victory. Furthermore, they are working together both in davening and in getting each other up. Next, they are all wearing tefillin, and finally they are davening with a minyan a full Shacharis.

"Hold it!" I hear myself saying. Excuse my sharp criticism, but any normal Jewish person is up by seven for davening or earlier for a job; doesn't waking up at nine border on laziness? And how can you rate a once-a-week 9:30 Shacharis as an accomplishment? Furthermore, excuse my bluntness, but how

boys in a noble attempt to capture for We start off our week with the Sunthe coffee begins to open our minds, we seek out a nice place under the sky in Sometimes we have chairs; sometimes ting on the ground doesn't faze our rugged crew. After all, don't Chazal say, "... and on the ground you shall lie, a life of hardship you shall live, and in Torah



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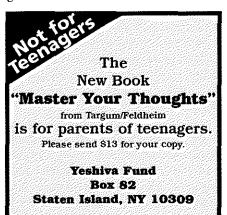
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Haolam.

can you call wearing tefillin, which is absolute basics, "real growth"? Basically, you have a group of excessively lazy boys whose commitment to even the basics is sporadic and sloppy, and you're expecting the reader to shep nachas as if they all made a siyum? You must be related to the Berdichever Rebbe.

Don't those same questions plague these boys' parents and educators? "Can't he just get up? Why can't he just put on his *tzitzis*? His excuse that he just forgot to wear them doesn't really wash. After all, he remembers his fancy boots. And why must his *tefillin* gather dust? When he finally does put on the *tefillin*, can't he at least wear a shirt, and must he say *Kriyas Shema* with loud heavy-metal music blaring in the background?"



Before I respond to this sharp criticism, how do you think the boys react to those very same criticisms of their parents and teachers, and how do they react to the criticisms that constantly play in their heads?

Very often, in order to avoid the criticisms of their parents or to gain favor in their eyes, the boys will portray themselves as doing much more than they really do, like Eisav did when he asked, "Dad, do I meisser (tithe) salt?" When they finally are ready to begin their journey of return, Dad is asking them, "Did you daven Mincha with a minyan? Was your night seder shtark? Are you davening with a hat and jacket?" He doesn't realize his son hasn't worn tefillin in over a year, he rarely davens, he has enormous struggles to control his passions and keep Shabbos. They give him a hard time about Mincha and don't realize the arena of his struggle is to be or not to be a Torah-observant Jew. The inner call to choose "life" is hard to hear over the enticing blare of the heavy-metal music.

These young adults need support and encouragement. Some of them desperately want to share their journey of return and their struggles with their parents. A real part of their healing is to feel believed in, accepted, and loved. "Can Mom and Dad let go of the vision of a

Sefer Torah they had when I was born and really hear and appreciate who I really am? Do I have the courage to risk being real and showing myself? Can they stop looking over their shoulder, worried about what everyone else thinks, long enough to see me and accept me? Can anyone appreciate the beauty of a 9:30 Shacharis at the Kosel where for a brief moment in my life a window opened for me and I felt Hashem again and I knew I wasn't alone?"

the voices of self-criticism that haunt them, voices that say, "You're not enough"? These voices are shaped by the disappointing stares and the standards and measures that are way above who they are. After a while the boy says, "I don't want to be part of a system that says I'm a loser. I will leave in search of a world that accepts me."

As times goes on, and their inner voice calls them back, they are faced with a new challenge. When they strap on their tefillin, they are binding themselves to a system that said, "You don't belong," and putting on tzitzis might mean letting go of a world that accepted them. Putting tefillin on the head means making peace with the voices in the head; it means having the courage to face the possibility that Torah and mitzvos are their friends. Having the commitment to rise at 9:00 and davening a full Shacharis might be giant steps in returning home.

When well-meaning people say, "Why aren't you wearing a hat and jacket?" and the attitudes of non-acceptance speak louder than the words of acceptance, the voices in the head start to get louder and suddenly strapping on tefillin means the courage to say, "This is who I am. I'm going to find my path at my own pace. I'm doing this for me in spite of those voices." It's at that point they have begun to cross the bridge into adulthood. "Can anyone appreciate the beauty of a 9:30 Shacharis at the Kosel wrapped in tefillin where for a brief moment a window opened and I knew I had come home?"





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# Consequential Conversations ... Without Being Confrontational

The following conversation is not fictional. Nor is it alone, or unique in any way. This excerpted conversation, and many others virtually identical to it, have taken place between the author of the article and today's teenagers. An exchange that the reader can scan in a matter of minutes may well have taken an hour or two. and then some.

→ hat are you going to tell me that I haven't heard before?" is his question. It resounds with years of bitterness and harsh exchanges, and carries with it the crushing weight of someone who has given up.

"I'm going to tell you how you can maximize your pleasure and happiness in this world," is my calm reply.

This is a surprise to him. "How are you going to do that?" he asks disbe-

"You're a rabbi, what do you know about fun? I'm already doing things that make me happy."

"Fun and happiness have nothing to do with each other."

The shock power of an idea lies in its originality. People so naturally equate fun with happiness, that a conscious assessment of that fact is never actualized. In fact, they are two separate interactions with the pleasures of life. They have absolutely nothing in common, and are even chronologically inaccessible to one another. Fun is something you have while you are doing something. Happiness is what you experience afterwards. Fun is temporary; it does not stay. As soon as the stimulus that caused it is gone, then the fun is gone. Happiness - true happiness - is a deeper emotion that abides for much longer. Happiness can last for long years after the stimulus is gone. Many rich and famous

Rabbi Kaufman, a talmid of Yeshiva Rabbeinu Chaim Berlin, is a Rebbi in Yeshiva of Far Rockaway. His article, "Of Growth and Belonging," was featured in the Nov. '99 JO.

people have all of the money and toys that bring them fun, but they are incredibly depressed, lonely, and miserable.

"Well, I like having fun, okay?" he interjects. "I like enjoying myself."

"So do I. I have pleasure every moment of my day."

"I thought that pleasure is forbidden," he says, drawing out the word. "I've yet to meet a rabbi that believes in it."

"You have now"

Pleasure is by no means negative. On the contrary, it is the aim of human life. Judaism instructs us how to squeeze the most pleasure out of life. The limitations that the Torah places on us are actually for full maximization of pleasure. There are many fun things that actually destroy the very ability to enjoy life. They suppress the very capacities of potential enjoyment, and they shape a person to settle for far less than they are actually capable of. A line of pure Colombian cocaine might give someone a rush of fleeting pleasure, but afterwards so much sense and feeling is lost, and indeed even scarred permanently, that in balance the gain is no gain, but an unparalleled loss. If people are enjoying themselves at present, but they are headed towards disaster, what is the present enjoyment really worth? It is the pleasure of a man who enjoys the breeze coming through the open window of his car as he drives it off a bridge.

Pleasure that does not extend beyond the moment is really an accelerated process of degeneration.

"So you're going to tell me how to find pleasure and happiness," he says. The disbelief is still there, but he is lis-

"Well in order to find happiness, we have to know what we're looking for," I point out with a smile. "What is happiness?"

He shrugs. "Friends," he offers.

"Are you happy hanging out with your friends?" I ask.

"I guess so," is his response.

"Are you happy?" I ask again. "When you go home after spending a night out with your friends, and when you wake up the next morning, are you happy?"

He considers that, then shakes his head. "So what would make me happy then?"

"A genuine relationship," I tell him.

"Like what?"

"You tell me."

He thinks, and then after a moment of reflection he says, "A meaningful relationship." I motion for him to go further, and he adds, "With a family, I guess. Eventually with a wife and children."

He's hit the nail on the head. Meaning. Meaning and purpose bring happiness. When a person has no reason for being, when they feel that there is no real difference in whether they exist or not, they can never be happy. The only thing that they can have is fun, and that fun is always temporary, bringing with it only a brief period of time where one covers the pain in his heart with a mask of forgetfulness.

The interesting paradox of many teenagers is that they frequently deny their own family, while their goal is to have one. They value family as precious, even if they cannot actualize those relationships. They yearn for what they cannot articulate, they desire what they cannot verbalize.

"When you have a *real* friend," I tell him, "you gain happiness from that friendship, not just fun."

"What's a 'real' friend? Aren't all my friends real?"

"Tell me, do your friends care about you, or do they just care about spending time with you? And similarly, do you really care about your friends, or do you just care about spending time with them?"

"What's the difference?"

"You tell me."

After thinking for a while, he says, "I guess if I cared about someone then I'd be willing to give him something of mine, but if I just enjoy spending time with him then I'd be taking from him."

He's right again. Real caring involves giving, not just from yourself, but of yourself. If you really care about your friend, you will not limit your time spent with them to only things that you both enjoy. Such friendships come and go, because similar to fun, they are transient in their very nature. That friendship is based on the event, not the person. If our friendship is based on each other, then it lasts as long as we last.

It's amazing how quickly friends can come and go. Many people are always looking for new friends, and have no stability in their acquaintances. When you have a deep friendship, you do not need to look for more. Only a thirsty man desires water. Only someone who is dissatisfied with what he has will go on to seek more.

"How many giving friends do you have?" I ask gently.

He fidgets, and does not face me directly. A long silence passes, one that speaks loudly. Finally he says, "Not many." A longer silence. "Not any at all, really."

"Who were your friends eight years ago?" I ask.

"People in my class," he shrugs.

"What were their names?"

"Their names?" He searches. "Um, Boruch, I think ... I don't know!"

"You know," I point out deliberately. "You'll be doing this again ten yers from now. The tragedy of life is that who you are at thirty is because of your friends at sixteen. Except at that point you can hardly remember their names. Do you still want to be the person you are now when you are thirty? Or forty? Or even seventy?"

"No." The fear in his reply is evident. At this point I shift the momentum of the conversation, and I quickly ask him, "Would you like your children to be just like you?"

This time the answer is quick and

instinctual. "No way!" Then he realizes what he has admitted to. He's not happy, and he is far from what he would really like to be. At this point he looks me in the eye and says, "So now what?"

He doesn't know it at this point, but he is already back on the *derech*. *Derech* simply means "the way," and not "the end." He is willing to listen, and he has begun to search.

"Now let's discuss your future," I tell him.

"What future?" he almost laughs.

It is at this point that I feel his pain the strongest. In that bitter laugh is his lack of hope, his lack of self-esteem, and his inarticulate cry for understanding and acceptance. He wants someone to show him the way out, but he does not really believe that someone can.

"Why are you denying your future?" I ask him. "Your future is the strongest future in the world! You and I are equal in terms of future. In terms of the past we may be different, but the future is vast and open for both of us."

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He shakes his head, not letting himself believe. "I've heard that before. I've heard that four-letter word *potential* so many times that I'm sick of it! You don't know anything about me! You don't understand! Nobody does!"

"The problem is not that nobody understands you," I say, looking into his eyes. "The problem is that you don't understand yourself. Seek to understand yourself, and only then to be understood."

"What are you telling me?" he demands. "I know who I am. This is me! For better or for worse, this is what I do!"

"Is what you do coming from you?" I ask him. "Is it coming from inside you, and as a result of your own choice? Or does it come from outside pressures – from what you see in the movies, or your 'friends'? How much of what you do is your own choice, and not the result of programming from the best advertising men on Madison Avenue? If I move your hand for you, did you choose to move that hand? Is that really you?"

Most people's lives are not self-dictated, because first we make our habits, and then our habits make us. The strongest chain around a man's neck is the one that he does not see.

"You're telling me that I'm controlled?" he asks aggressively. "I'm a free man! In Yeshiva they control me! When I'm out of Yeshiva, it's my own choice, and I picked it. I'm in control."

I answer him clearly. "The Torah demands one thing from you above all else, and that is to think. Madison Avenue demands one thing above all else as well. They want you to stop thinking. Choice – real free choice – is when I can clearly see both options, and I can clearly think about both paths. How



much about the Torah do you know that you can really say that you made this choice?"

\*\*\*

If you are not a thinking person, then you are not aware of your choices, and therefore you are not aware of the consequences of your choices. You may not realize it, but you are blindly following the dictates of a society that is only interested in what they can get out of you. Billions of dollars are spent in this country on getting people to make choices without thinking. If you truly want independence, don't opt to deal with the world by blocking out your ability to analyze,

Usually they disagree with the fact that they don't know what it means to live a Torah life. A casual questioning of Tanach, biyur tefilla, Jewish History, and philosophy shows them how deficient they are in their comprehension of the life that they want to throw away.

"You're making me think too much!" he complains.

"I'm not making you think," I tell him. "You're thinking yourself."

He rolls his eyes. "So I have no past, I have no friends, I have no understanding, and I have no life." He throws his hands up into the air. "So what am I supposed to do? What future could I possibly have?"

"Listen and you'll hear."

We must grasp the fact that happiness comes from meaning, and meaning comes from struggle. True happiness will involve some pain. Struggle involves pain. Conquest and accomplishment of that struggle brings happiness. In short, nothing worthwhile is ever easy. What every person needs to know – child, teen, and adult alike – is that avoiding pain means avoiding accomplishment. Torah is the guide to this accomplishment.

When a person does nothing meaningful with his life, his neshama senses it, and the pain that the neshama feels is depression. Depression is the shadow cast by the soul's sitting still and not growing. The easy "solution" to this depression is the quick fix of fun, be it movies and television that take away one's cognizance, or drugs that take away one's very sense of feeling. The real solution is to get moving, to have growth and accomplishment as part of one's life. And you can't get moving if you don't know where you are moving to.

Goals that will bring a person to fulfillment and happiness are true, growing relationships with people, and a true, growing relationship with Hashem. A good home, children, and a solid commitment to growth are the destination of a good life's journey.

Are there obstacles? Are there challenges? Of course there are. Overcoming the challenges is what causes growth. They define the struggle. And in fact the challenges, the things that seem to cause tears, frustration, and anguish, are the cause of the greatest joy. To overcome the obstacles is to make oneself stronger. Viewed in this manner, the dreaded stumbling blocks become welcome stepping-stones.

It is within your ability. All of those aforementioned obstacles are not reasons why you can't they are reasons why you can. The interesting paradox is that the more obstacles there are to a goal, the more possible it becomes, because its effects will last all the longer! Your past is not a stone around your neck, it is the wall you are shoving yourself away from to gain momentum. Those faults and failures are behind you, and your determination is ahead of you. To go ahead with your life is your decision. To stay behind is the decision of others.

II

The conversations that follow – excerpted from longer exchanges, as the previous ones were – took place six months after those recorded above.

"Was it worth it? I inquire.

The glow on his face has already answered my question for me. "Yeah," he says. Then he reflects for a bit. "Actually, I even enjoyed the tough parts," he adds. Further thought. "Wait a minute, I enjoyed them more than anything! I wonder why that is?"

"It's because the joy of the accomplishment is already felt when you are struggling." I explain. "The struggle gives you confidence, because if you can fight, then you can win."

"But why does it need that struggle?" The bourgeois mentality of early twenty-first century life is hanging onto his mind. "Why can't it just be instant? You know, upload it?"

"Why is it so good to get something instantly?"

His eyebrows suggest that I have just wondered aloud as to why you can't swim to the moon. "Cause I don't want to wait!" he exclaims. "Why shouldn't I get it now?"

"What on earth do you ever get 'now'?"

"What?"

"What is there in this life that's instant? There's nothing gotten instantly."

"Of course there is!"

"Name one."

"Instant coffee, instant soup, battery jumps - "

"The coffee was grown, ground, refined, cooked, freeze-dried, packaged, shipped, and marketed. The soup company did the same. Both are indexed on the S&P 500. The centuries of sweat and grind that went into the factory that produced the batteries for the cars would take a full week to detail. None of that is instant."

"But it's instant for me!"

"And is that a good thing?"

He claps his hands to his head. "And tell me," he begins in a voice that contains an edge of exasperation, "why shouldn't it be? I like a quick fix."

"Because you didn't produce it," I point out. "What you produce yourself is of far more value to you than what you are given. If you don't believe me, check into a nursing home, and sit in a bed all day hooked up to machines that eat for you, breath for you, and live for you. But you won't. Why? Because you would be miserable there. You, and me, and every other person on the planet were not

meant to receive instantly."

"Where do you get that from?"

"There are givers and there are takers. There are those that produce, and those that receive. The receivers are never fulfilled, only satiated. And even that satiation is only a temporary one. They are never happy. The producers are the happiest people in the world. If you cooked something yourself, it tastes better. If you grow it and develop it yourself, you have a wonderful successful feeling even before you sit down to eat it!"

"So I am not supposed to consume at all?"

"You have to consume to some degree, but only on a maintenance level. Your mission in life, the primal cause of your existence, is to be a producer!"

"How do you know that?"

"If not, why did your old lifestyle feel so hollow?"

\*\*\*

Isn't it odd that unlike the majority of the animal kingdom, particularly insects and reptiles, that are born fully functional, the human being, the elite of all creation, is born deficient? He is hardly a person at birth, but merely animated matter. Then slowly, very slowly, his senses begin to develop. He turns, crawls, walks, talks, and he continues to progress incrementally until his senses and concepts mature. The first twenty years of his life are spent becoming merely functional!

The explanation of this singularity is that it is precisely because man is paramount, strictly because he is born in the Almight's image, he is born incomplete. Man was granted the divine and unique opportunity to become a meaningful partner in his own creation. He gives birth to himself in a way, as he forms his own self by expanding and developing all of his life, shaping his own destiny. Every person, every event, every step we take, no matter how feeble it may seem, is of cosmic importance. Man's reach exceeds his grasp.

Since I have the mission to create myself, and to produce my life, I cannot be happy in a role that is not mine. Man was meant to produce, not merely be produced. That is the underlying truth of Tzellem Elokim. G-d produces, and man produces. A man that cannot produce, is not a man. There is no such creature. A man can produce. There is no man that cannot act in the image of G-d and produce. There is such a thing as a man who can produce, but does not. Those people have their own designation. Unhappy.

"That's a great thing, but not everybody can live like that."

"Of course they can."

"Look, you've already got it, you're a Rabbi! You can control your mind. I have no attention span, I think I'm –"

"Please don't say those three letters to me," I beg. "You'd think that ADD was the bubonic plague the way it spreads."

He laughs. "Okay, but I don't have the self-control I need."

"Yes you do."

He looks at me with suspicion. "I do?"

"Yes."

"No I don't!"

"You have the self-control that you need, not the self control that someone else needs. Understand something clearly. A person is not built overnight, but a person who is building overnight will get built. You were brought into the world for this purpose, and that purpose is waiting for you, stretching out to take your hand."

"I don't know..."

"I'll prove it to you. You have selfcontrol and concentration, and you have the willingness and ability to listen to the intricacies of rules and regulations, and limit yourself by them."

"Really?" His tone is extremely dry. "And where do you see that?"

"Do you play sports?" "Yes, but – oh."

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"Exactly. Do you play pool?"

"Yeah, sometimes."

"Are you good at it?"

"Absolutely!"

"When have you ever won a pool game without concentrating?"

You wouldn't play sports without rules and regulations, because that's the whole game. When you examine it, it's the rules and regulations that make the game. That is the game itself. A game without them is not a game. You find the game enjoyable because you know that the rules are there for you. Since you clearly see what the rules are for, and how they help you, you do not even begin to think about them as limitations. Rather, it's the opposite. You see them as things that set you free.

Mitzvos are the rules and regulations of life. Torah is the guidebook. You, my dear, are the active participant. Seek out a Rebbi or an older bachur to mentor and coach you along.

Throughout life we all make investments of various kinds. However, the most important investment you can ever make is in yourself. And the greatest end result that you can make of yourself is that which happens to be the definition of a ben Torah; a purposeful person, a creator, someone doing something magnificent with their life, dealing with eternity. Failure to do so, no matter what the reason, will result in a little less of you, which is an irreplaceable loss. It's your failure if you allow it, but it is also your success if you succeed. Yes, you can give me a thousand reasons why you can't develop into that ben Torah, but there is one reason why you must. Because that is you and your mission in life.



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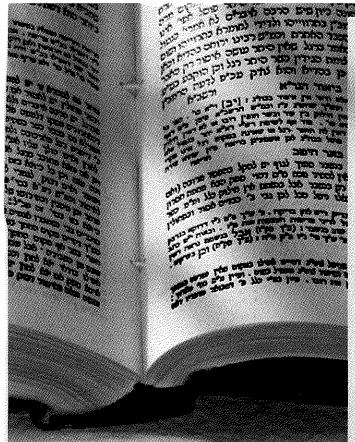
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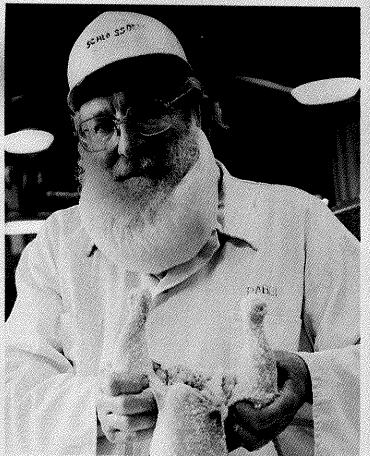
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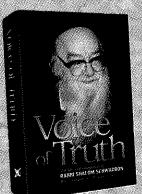
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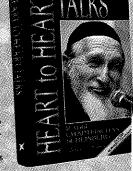
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