

THE Jewish OBSERVER

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RABBI SHMUEL
KAMENENTSKY מו"ק

THE MECHANECH'S PERSPECTIVE

RABBI SHLOIME MANDEL
MRS. ROCHEL LEAF FRANKEL
RABBI ABRAHAM KAUFMAN
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PREVENTION

DR. DAVID PELCOVITZ AND
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GUIDANCE

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BRINGING THEM BACK TO TORAH

RABBI MICHAEL LEVY
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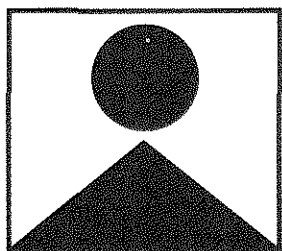
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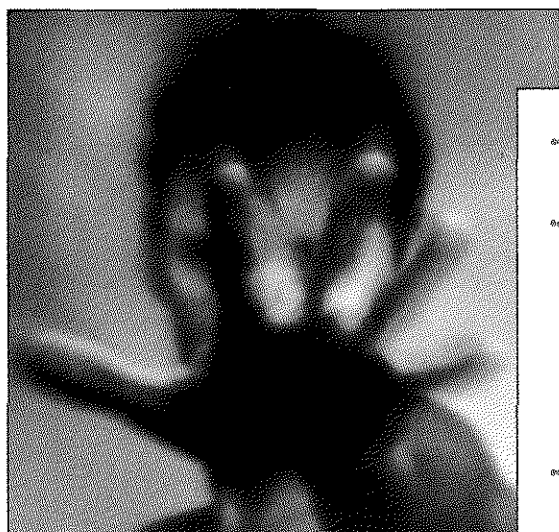
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ON THE
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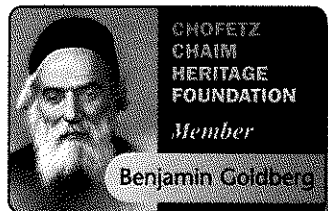
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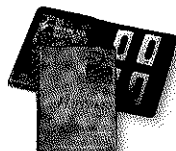
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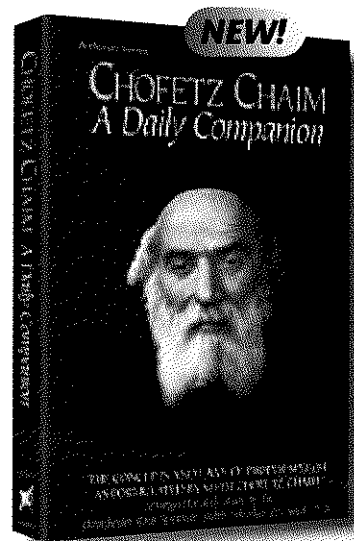


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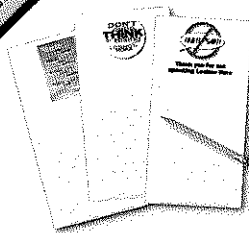
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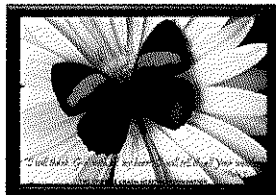


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Rarely in its 35 years of publication has *The Jewish Observer* devoted an entire issue to one subject. While the current phenomenon of "Children in the Torah community on the fringe... and beyond" in America does not remotely compare in numbers or intensity to Torah Jewry's hemorrhaging in Western Europe in the nineteenth century, and in Eastern Europe and Israel in the twentieth, it can no longer be ignored. In contrast to other times and places, when poverty was rampant, the threat of pogroms and persecution hung heavy in the air, or exciting, "new" ideologies pulled at Jewish youth, American Jewry today lives in serenity and contentment, enjoys great prosperity and is not confronted by ideological challenge. In much of Europe and Israel, defections from Torah were accompanied by an attempt at philosophical rationalization. Today's slide downward generally does not include even the flimsiest ideological veneer.

This should not be shrugged off as the problem of isolated individuals. Rabbi Chaim Soloveichik of Brisk once interrupted a gathering of rabbinic leaders to raise funds for the army exemption of a yeshiva boy. When asked how he could interrupt an important *Klal* meeting for the needs of one boy, he pounded on the table and said: "Every *yachid* (individual) is an entire *Klal*."

It is precisely because every individual is an entire world that, even were we to contend that in relative terms the phenomenon is unusual, we must have the forthrightness to look this problem squarely in the face, rethink our premises, reconsider our attitudes, and ensure the fulfillment of our responsibilities.

We cannot afford to write off a single child.

Rabbi Klugman lives in Jerusalem where he is a *maggid shiur* in a *yeshiva gedola*. Author of a detailed biographical study of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (ArtScroll Mesorah), he is a frequent contributor to these pages.

From the moment that *Hashem* chose Avraham because He knew that he would "charge his sons and family after him to observe the way of G-d," every Jewish parent has known that the *ehrllichkeit* of one's children is the ultimate measure of success or failure in life. It is for that reason that the worry that ones children may go "off the *derech*" strikes such terror in the hearts of parents and grandparents, who don't sleep at night for fear of what may become of their children. It is a horror that is rarely glimpsed by others and cannot really be shared.

The dread of "losing a child" often shatters domestic harmony as well. In the words of Rabbi S. R. Hirsch, "Family problems and domestic grief gnaw at the hearts of men; they are like fine needle tips whose miniscule wounds the world tends to overlook, but which in the end may

required to do whatever we can to minimize those risks.

One more point. It is human nature to blame "the system" for society's ills and for personal failures. That is understandable for two reasons. On the one hand, the individual takes comfort in the assumption that whatever happens is not his fault. On the other, it gives people a reasonable framework with which to comprehend what may seem inexplicable or too painful to confront.

There are those who claim – inaccurately and unfairly – that fault lies with our heroic *mechanchim*. We reject that claim. Most *rabbe'im* and *morahs* are overworked, underpaid, underappreciated – and yet, notably effective. Are they all perfect? No. But they are far more devoted and caring than most of their detractors.

And if all the critics of "the system" would focus their energies on ensuring the financial viability and societal prestige of the *chinuch* profession in America, the face of Orthodox Jewry across the country would be unrecognizable.

In preparing this issue, we have drawn on the insights and guidance of *Gedolei Torah*, benefitted

from the experience of *mechanchim* (Torah educators), invited the comments of mental health professionals, and shared the anguish of parents. Not all of them are in agreement with each other, but every one opens a window to a painful – even tragic – scene, and instructs the rest of us in how to avoid pitfalls and traps, how to identify with the pain of the errant youths and their suffering families, and how to help them out of their grievous situations.

We have no illusions that any magazine issue or series of articles can effect a quick fix. The healing of societal maladies is measured in millimeters. But that fact does not absolve us from doing everything we can. It is precisely in regard to problems such as these that *Chazal* instruct us (*Avos* 2:21): "The task is not yours to complete; neither are you free to desist from it." ■

CHILDREN ON THE FRINGE... AND BEYOND

Introduction

by

Rabbi Eliyahu Meir Klugman

cause many a heart to bleed to death. For they strike a man in the one peaceful place to which he flees trying to escape from life's struggles."

The mutual responsibility of all Jews does not allow one who has been successful with his own children to cluck smugly in sympathy and do nothing. The mark of the great Torah leaders, from *Moshe Rabbeinu* until our day, is the care and concern that they evince for every individual, the conviction that every Jewish child is their own.

It is not our task to assign blame, point fingers, or self-assuredly maintain that there are conclusive answers. Every child is different and no two situations are alike. But there are risk factors, and there are areas that bear improvement. Clearly, many children in high risk environments will grow into fine, noble and righteous Jews. But we are still

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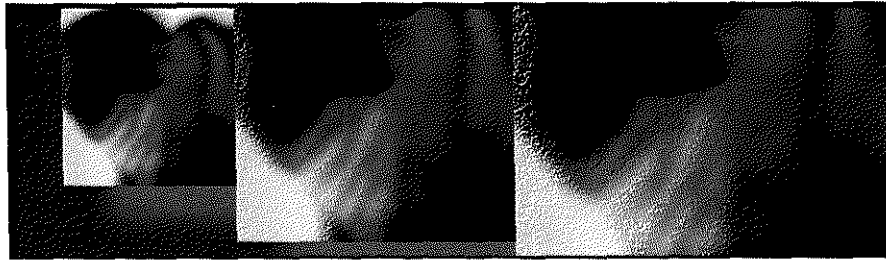
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Photo Credit: The picture of Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg זצ"ל that graced page 8 of his biography (Sept. '99) was not credited properly. The photograph was taken by Chananya Rosenblum.

In Appreciation

Children on the Fringe... and Beyond

To do justice to this topic —
its complexities, subtleties and myriad ramifications
...its resolution and prevention — called for reaching out to
a wide range of writers, to share their insights and experiences with
our readers; thus requiring *The Jewish Observer* to put aside its usual
constraints of space and expense.

We are grateful to the following individuals whose vision,
compassion, and generosity have made this special issue possible:

Rabbi & Mrs. Mendel Goldberg

Mr. & Mrs. Naftali Hirsch

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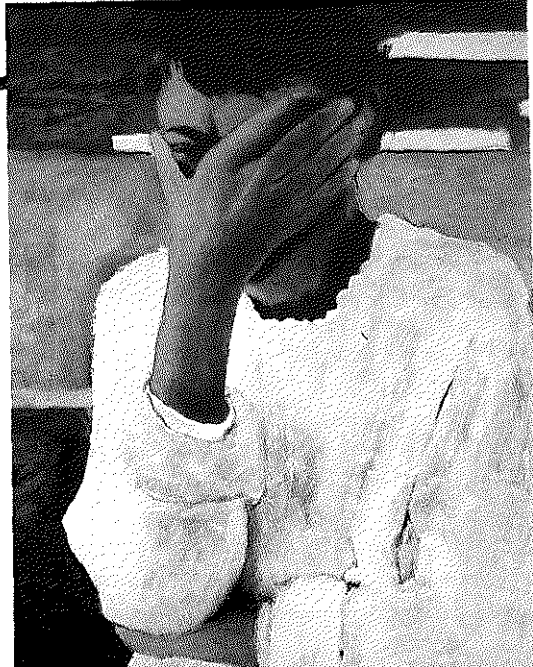
Mr. & Mrs. Yaty Weinreb

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and several other, anonymous benefactors.

Thoughts of a Mother



I used to say to my husband: It's like he grew up in El Barrio. You don't believe me. You don't understand. I don't think he absorbed anything of the "culture" in our house. Not *Modeh ani*. Not *negel vasser*. Not anything. And my husband would say: You're exaggerating.

But I wasn't. Like he grew up in El Barrio.

At the beginning it was spitting in the street. Throwing a soda can out of the car window as we were driving home from the country. Then the swagger started. The Southern hillbilly drawl. A new vocabulary. Hey, Rabbi. (Rabbi? – what happened to *Rebbe*?) My friend in Israel (not *Eretz Yisroel*?). Upstate (i.e. the Mountains). And this was the vocabulary when he was on the way up, way, way up.

Last year his vocabulary didn't include "rabbis" – it was more of unprintable vulgarities. And his clothing didn't include a yarmulke. No – this was definitely on the way up.

And if he's up all night now "on the weekends," I am grateful that it's no longer every night. And if he sleeps on *Shabbos* and Sunday until four in the afternoon, I bite my tongue, because after all, as he says: A: It's easier not to be *mechallel Shabbos* if you sleep through most of it. B: He's been getting up the past few weeks on Monday through Friday to go to work. So how can I complain?

Nowadays I'm sleeping through

the night – mostly. Last year, and two years ago, (and three and four also) I didn't sleep as well. Often I would wake up in the middle of the night – find my face wet from tears – my lips moving even as I slept. "Please, *Hashem* – help us. Help him. Protect him from himself."

I remember the dreams. One that recurred fairly frequently (Dare I write it? Dare I say it?) was his *levaya*. And I was crying so hard – because I could not get anyone to be *maspid* him. No one. No one had anything nice to say about him. And the tragedy of what was happening, the terror of what might yet happen, gave me no peace.

We spoke to *gedolim*. We spoke to professionals. The *gedolim* said, no matter what – don't lock the door. Only with love. And some professionals said: You have leverage; you have to learn how to use it. Make limits. Don't let him step all over you. If he violates curfew, lock him out.

One therapist who had worked with him while he was in yeshiva said: The key is the morning. You have to get him out of bed in the morning even if you have to get physical. And another said: He's a gem. He'll outgrow it. And my friend said: You just have to keep his head above water. Just don't let him sink.

Don't let? Tell me how! Leverage? It's just not working. He gets angrier and angrier. And we grow even more distant.

But what difference does it make what anyone said? We tried it all and nothing worked.

Nothing at all.

He went from an immature kid (no contradiction to his brilliance) to a yeshiva throw-out to another yeshiva throw-out. To the street. All day – and most nights – when he wasn't sleeping the sleep of the drugged.

The pool hall. The pool hall was his home. And after a while I became grateful for that too – because if he wouldn't be in the pool hall – where would he be?

At night – waiting for the call – the call from the police – or the hospital – or....

It defies description, the horror of those nights. I would sit up in the living room – saying the whole *Tehillim* – and sobbing out loud. And when he would open the door at 4:00 A.M. – and come in, bloodshot eyes – staggering from alcohol – or drugs (yes, drugs!) as though nothing was wrong – ("Why are you up, Mom? Is anything wrong?") I would die a little more inside.

We tried to talk to him – it didn't help. No one was home. We tried group therapy – he stormed out. We tried private therapy. He refused to go. "Oppositional, defiant" – those were the words the professionals used. And I just wanted to know – how does that differ from *middos ra'os*? *Baal yeitzer hara*? *Rasha*? *Baal taava*?

Help me! Won't someone help me? Doesn't anyone care to help me?

Having a son like this is a humbling experience. Truly humbling. I never thought of myself as an arrogant person – but I must admit, I used to think that I knew the “reason” for kids like mine. Either it's a dysfunctional home. No *shalom bayis*. No warmth. Too rigid or too loose. No money, or too much money. No real *simchas hachayim*. Too liberal – modern. Too *frum* – fanatic. Or maybe, sometimes, it's not the home – I thought, and the kid must be learning disabled and couldn't make it in yeshiva.

And then all of a sudden the kid was mine, not LD. Somehow, in my family, my beautiful blessed family, it had happened. He slipped through our fingers – and joined the other side – the world that we thought we had locked out when we locked out TV and movies, and yes, even the daily newspapers.

My husband still tells him gently that he wants him to be a *tzaddik* and a true *talmid chacham*. So now we argue, my husband and I, late at night when no one else is around. I want him to change what he hopes for our son, what he tells him. Just tell him that you hope he will be an *ehrlicher Yid*. Please – that would be the right thing to say. And my husband won't budge. No, he says. But I counter – fighting back tears – an *ehrlicher Yid* is not a little thing. It is so much. It is so great. Can you imagine if he would wear *tzitzis*? Put on *tefillin* every day? *Daven* three times a day? To be an *ehrlicher Yid* is so much. And my husband just looks at me sadly – doesn't answer – and continues to tell him how much he hopes he will be a *talmid chacham* and a *tzaddik*.

Deep inside, I'm not sure he's wrong. What would it do to my son to see that we've changed our hopes for him? Would it make him think – *You see? They've given up on me.* On the other hand, maybe it would relieve the pressure, and he would realize that we will respect him even if he does choose a different path than the others. Who is right?

I wish I knew.

But you see – that is so much part of the pain. All the decisions. And never being sure that you've made the right one. What to say, how to say it, when to be firm, when to bend the rules. Sometimes I don't even know what to want, much less how to achieve it.

I used to think that if only I would do the right thing – arrange things smoothly – he'd get better. At one point, it seemed that everyone else knew how to do “it” better than I did. (“It” being making the right moves so that your child stops his fall and starts to climb back up.) Now I think that there are many different ways that could help – but it really depends on him – on his *bechira* and not so much of what I do.

Here are some of my confused thoughts:

1. Recovery, one drug therapist told me, is a process, not an event. Your son is *in the process*. You have to expect that there will be slipping – and sliding. But as long as he's headed in the right direction, there is hope.

A process – not an event. On one level, I know that that is true. But on another level – a deep, gut emotional level, I keep waiting for the “event.” A revelation. Like by *Har Sinai*. A lightning flash of self-awareness. *Eliyahu Hanavi* to tap him on the shoulder and lead him back home.

Can it be I am waiting for – *teshuva*? That is a beautiful dream. But then sometimes I shudder to think what true *teshuva* might do to him. If he were ever to realize what he did to us – to all of us – his parents, siblings, grandparents – what pain, what excruciating pain he caused us – what sleepless nights and depression-filled, non-functioning days. I'm afraid of what the awareness of that might do to him. Would it break him? G-d forbid. I don't want that.

And as much as I once thought that I could never, ever, ever forgive him for what he did to us, I have come to learn that the one with the most pain must be him. He may not show it. He may not even realize it. But that is part of

his problem. And it is his pain that I cry for now.

And so I have learned that – yes – I will forgive him. I already have. And now, whether through “revelation-event” or process, all I want is his complete recovery.

2. Rabbi _____ told me something that made so much sense. He said: If he does something bad, don't take it personally. Make believe he's someone else's kid. You can be really good and patient and smart with someone else's kid. But if someone attacks him – then he's your kid – and your only kid. (Someone said to me: You know, your son is a pothead. My response should be, yes, but he's *my* pothead, so watch what you say. And I'm here to help him no matter what.) And if he does something good, then for sure I should let him know how proud I am of him.

No matter what – he's my kid. My love for him is unconditional. And I have to learn to communicate that to him.

3. There is the issue of embarrassment. How he dresses? *Baruch Hashem*, I must say that I'm not embarrassed. I never was. At least almost never. The only thing a person should be embarrassed of is his own *aveiros*. I heard Rabbi Matisyahu Salomon call this plague a *gezeira*. If this is a *gezeira* (Divine decree), why should I be embarrassed? Anyway, I really believe that his being an embarrassment would be counterproductive for him. Because then he would think that this is about our needs – not his; our position in society, our egos, our pride.

And it's not. It's about his growing up. Becoming a *mentch*. Learning how to function and be a productive member of society. And yes, it is about *Yiddishkeit*, because we truly believe that he can only be happy (and productive and a *mentch*, *et al*) if he is connected to *Hashem* and (dare I say it) a true *ben Torah*. To me it seems that he's thrown away gold and chosen garbage. I was going to write “straw,” but that wouldn't really be accurate, just a neater simile. We *daven* that one day, soon, he will realize – and choose the gold again.

One more thing, the word *daven*. At first, I thought: how can I ask *Hashem* to help him? Doesn't it say *hakol biydei Shamayim chutz miyiras Shamayim*? *Hashem* gave him everything – so many gifts; the one thing in his power to choose is *yiras Shamayim*. And he chose not to. So what do I want from *Hashem*?

But then the words from the *Siddur* leap out at me, again and again. And I cannot help but be comforted. Because I see that we do ask. And if we do, then that means that we may.

Where are the words? To quote just a few:

וְהָיָה אֲנִיחָנוּ, וְצָאצָאנוּ, וְצָאצָאנוּ עִמָּךְ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל,
כֹּלֵנוּ יִידְעִי שְׂמֵךְ וְלִמְדֵי תוֹרָתְךָ לְשִׁמְחָה

And these words teach me that I should not *daven* only for my son, but for all the sons and daughters of *amcha beis Yisroel*. Each one is precious. Each loss, *chas veshalom*, is an irrecoverable loss. And each parent's pain hurts so.

וְהָיָה רְצוֹן מִלִּפְנֵיךְ שֶׁתְּרַגְּלֵנוּ בְּתוֹרָתְךָ וּדְבָקֵנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתֶיךָ
וְאֵל תְּבִיאֵנוּ לֹא לְיָדֵי חָטָא וְלֹא לְיָדֵי עֲבָרָה וְעוֹן

So you see, we are asking for help from Above in our daily war against the *yeitzer hara*. And again:

אֲבִינוּ אֵל הַחֲסִידִים הַמְרַחֵם רַחֵם עָלֵינוּ וְתֵן בְּלִבּוֹ לְהִבָּן
וְלִהְיוֹת לְשִׁמּוֹעַ לְלִמּוֹד וְלִלְמֹד לְשִׁמּוֹר וְלַעֲשׂוֹת וּלְקַיֵּם
אֶת כָּל דְּבָרֵי תִלְמוּד תוֹרָתְךָ בְּאַהֲבָה, וְהָאֵד עֵינֵינוּ בְּתוֹרָתְךָ
חִבָּק לִבּוֹ בְּמִצְוֹתֶיךָ וְיַחַד לִבְנוֹ לְאַהֲבָה וְלִדְאָה אֶת שְׂמִיךְ
(And I whisper – *Hashem*, put it into his heart. Only You can help him.) And again, please. Please, please.
הוּא יִפְתָּח לִבּוֹ בְּתוֹרָתוֹ וְיִשֶּׁם בְּלִבּוֹ אֶהְבֵּתוֹ וְיִדְאָתוֹ לְמַעַן
לֹא יִגַּע לְדִיק וְלֹא יִלָּד לְכַהֲלָה.

So the *Siddur* and the *Tehillim* have become my friends. I used to find *davening* a burden, I'm ashamed to admit. (Do you think that that is where he got it from?)

Now I am grateful for the opportunity.

Our story – our son's story – is far from over. We're not out of danger yet. But there are glimmers of hope. Yes, I've learned a little to detach myself but not so much that he isn't in my *tefillos* constantly.

Where he is now is better, far better than where he was. And for that I am

grateful beyond words.

Where he will be in the future I cannot predict.

We've learned a lot, all of us. But I can't say that I know too much of anything other than: he's my kid – and I love him – and I'm going to try my best to make sure that he knows that. And meanwhile, I keep dreaming: *Eliyahu Hanavi* – is that you? Finally, you've come.

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THE CHAZON ISH זצ"ל ON THE EDUCATOR'S RESPONSIBILITY TO THE WEAK AND WAYWARD STUDENT

Principles and Vignettes

The Chazon Ish, Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz (1878-1953), one of the greatest Torah luminaries of recent times, lived in Eretz Yisroel from 1933 until his passing. His views, actions, halachic rulings and writings continue to have a major influence on the fabric of Torah life everywhere.¹

THE REQUIREMENTS OF AN EDUCATOR

The necessary prerequisite to influence one's students, the Chazon Ish told Rabbi Michel Yehuda Lefkowitz, is a genuine love of people. He based his view on the directive of Chazal (Avos 1:12) that one must be "ohev es habriyos u'mekarvan laTorah, love people and draw them closer to Torah." These are not two unrelated commands. They are rather cause and effect. Only one who loves others can draw them close to Torah.

He once requested that a certain individual be appointed as *Mashgiach* in a particular yeshiva, despite the fact that the candidate was not a great *talmid chacham*, nor renowned as an exceptionally great *tzaddik*. (Today the man works for the *Chevra Kadisha*.) "He has a good heart," the Chazon Ish explained, "and he will make every effort to help the boys through their pain." That character trait sufficed. He rejected the other candidate as "too tough."

Rabbi Yabrov is the author of *Maaseh Ish*, a three-volume biography of the Chazon Ish. The contents of this article were approved for publication by the nephew of the Chazon Ish, Hagaon Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky of Bnei Brak, who lived with his uncle for a period of seven years.

The ideal educator, in his view, must be of elevated character. A *mechanech* of deficient character causes a double tragedy. Since his actions do not match his words, his students will not learn Torah from him, and even worse, they learn from his behavior (*Emuna U'Bitchon* 4:16). A student emulates his teacher. And if a teacher is of imperfect character, his *talmid* will learn bad *mid-dos* from him.

THE "WEAKER" STUDENT

"*Chanoch lenaar al pi darko* — educate the lad according to his way," the Chazon Ish insisted, does not mean to withhold the possibility of becoming a *gadol baTorah* from one who seemingly lacks that capability. We have to ensure that every child has the opportunity to be that "one out of a thousand," however improbable that seems. Hence, a yeshiva must never devalue any student, for it is impossible to know which young *bachur* will one day be the *gadol hador*.

Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz once asked the Chazon Ish if it would not be beneficial to create a different kind of yeshiva, emphasizing *pshat* and *halacha* (literal meaning and practical application), rather than *lomdus* (abstract probing), for less

gifted boys. Since such boys have no hope of becoming *roshei yeshiva*, and will eventually become *baalebattim*, Rabbi Lorincz wondered, would it not be better to emphasize the skills necessary to understand a *daf Gemora* and learn *halacha*?

The Chazon Ish was vehemently opposed to the suggestion. "Our *chinuch*," he said, "must be based on the assumption that every boy can be a *gadol*. One who does not seem blessed with great intellectual gifts can turn the corner one day and be blessed with formidable intelligence. Suddenly all the wellsprings of Torah open up to him and he is recognized as a considerable *baal kishron* (intellectually gifted)."

The Chazon Ish buttressed his view with the story of a contemporary *gadol* who was considered slow as a youth. Even at the age of 18, he asked the Chazon Ish to explain a *Rashi* that any third grader could understand easily. "Yet," he told Rabbi Lorincz, "that person is now one of the great Torah luminaries of our times."

A *talmid* who felt he was not cut out

¹ Every situation is unique, and one cannot assume that the Chazon Ish's directives in the above examples can be freely applied to specific cases that may appear to be similar (*halacha lema'aseh*). They do, however, serve to illustrate the extent of a *mechanech's* responsibility and *achrayus* for each and every *talmid*.

for learning once informed the Chazon Ish of his plans to master a trade. The *gadol hador* invited the young man to learn with him, and they spent a long time learning *Gemora* together. When they were finished, the Chazon Ish asked the young man, "Don't you see that you are capable of learning?"

GOOD CHILDREN

"Make sure that you learn with them every day," was the Chazon Ish's advice to a father who wanted to know how to help his sons become *talmidei chachamim*. He often shared with fathers who asked for a blessing for their children's success in learning, the reply of the Chofetz Chaim to a similar request: "You do not educate your son by collecting *berachos* for him, but only by being willing to sell the pillow under your head to pay for his tuition."

Becoming a *gadol baTorah*, the Chazon Ish often said, is as dependent on the tears and *tefillos* of the boy's grandmother as on his intellectual gifts.

THE DIFFICULT STUDENT

When asked how a yeshiva should treat a troublemaker, the Chazon Ish responded, "It is better to put up with him and draw him as near as possible. The function of the yeshiva is to provide wisdom to the weaker ones and understanding to those who go astray. One cannot blame the unruly student. That is the nature of children. We must make every possible effort. Sometimes the right hand must push away while the left hand draws closer. And sometimes we must draw them near with both hands" (*Kovetz Igros* 1,81).

A boy was once expelled from a yeshiva for joining an inappropriate youth group. The Chazon Ish arranged for him to be accepted in an out-of-town yeshiva. Once again he joined a proscribed youth organization. The boy was sent to talk to the Chazon Ish. The latter spoke to him at length without ever mentioning the youth club. After the

meeting, the one who arranged the conversation with the Chazon Ish expressed his surprise: "I brought him here with the hope that the *Rav* would convince him to sever his ties with that group. But the *Rav* did not even mention it!"

"He obviously derives satisfaction from his membership in this group," the Chazon Ish replied. "Before you take something away from someone, you must first give him something else in return. This *bachur* isn't yet ready to taste the sweetness of Torah and it won't affect him. So I was nice to him and invited him back next week. I'll speak with him in learning again, and he will begin to enjoy it. And when his eyes light up in Torah, the darkness will disappear on its own."

EXPULSION - A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

Sending *bachurim* away from yeshiva, he often said, is tantamount to *dinei nefashos* (capital punishment). Accordingly, he often refused to decide the issue. "Yeshiva _____ says that I'm ruining their yeshiva by not allowing them to expel their students," he once admitted. "But what can I do? I can't be the one to decide that they should send them away. Hopefully, Heaven will have mercy and these boys

will leave on their own."

Rabbi Yehoshua Yogel once came to the Chazon Ish with the following dilemma: In his yeshiva were several problematic students who would deteriorate if sent away. On the other hand, if allowed to stay, they might have a bad influence on others. The Chazon Ish's initial response was that this was a difficult life-and-death issue. He then asked Rabbi Yogel how he had handled similar situations in the past. Rabbi Yogel replied that he had indeed expelled several students. As a rule, though, the hard cases left on their own and as a result the others succeeded in straightening out. Thus, in his view, experience had shown that when the hard-core troublemakers left the yeshiva, the others improved greatly.

The Chazon Ish interrupted him: "Experience does not overrule the *Shulchan Aruch*. One may not expel a student. You don't have to court him, but if he wants to stay you have no right to send him away. You must rather dedicate all your strength to educate him and to supervise his behavior."

"I don't know if I have the strength," Rabbi Yogel responded.

"*Hashem* will give you the strength," was the reply.

A yeshiva student was once caught stealing, and the yeshiva's dean asked the

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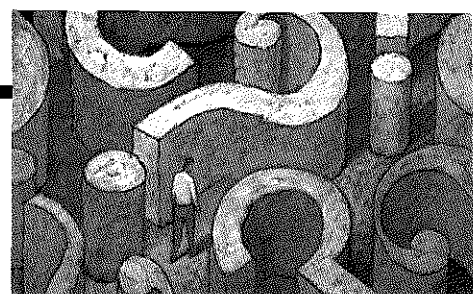
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Chazon Ish whether the boy should be expelled. "Did you ever speak *lashon hara*?" he asked the questioner. "Did they throw you out of the yeshiva as a result? What difference does it make what *aveira* he did? Surely he is not *chayav mesa* (liable for capital punishment) for these actions."

When asked how a school should deal with a child in the class whose parents are *mechallelei Shabbos*, he replied that one must never disgrace parents in the eyes of their children.

On one occasion, the Chazon Ish decided that a student should be expelled from his yeshiva. Nevertheless he made the expulsion contingent on several conditions. The *Rosh Yeshiva* was required to first establish a regular learning *seder* with him.

"First begin learning with him," the Chazon Ish insisted, "and only afterwards can you notify him of his expulsion. And you must continue learning with him thereafter, as well. In this way, he will be able to deal with the trauma of expulsion and will be in a learning framework until he finds a new yeshiva."

The *Rosh Yeshiva* involved related that that student became a great Torah sage and *Rosh Yeshiva*. And the once wayward youth admitted that if his *rebbe* had not drawn him near, he does not know if he would even be Jewish today.

The Chazon Ish followed the same approach with girl's schools. Asked about the possibility of expelling a girl from school, he replied. "Capital cases require a *beis din* of 23 judges."

In those instances where he permitted the school to expel the girl, he stipulated that the school find some other arrangement for her to ensure that she not land in the street. "Nowadays," he told Rabbi Avrohom Wolf (founder of the Bais Yaakov high school of Bnei Brak), "as a result of the influence of the street, all girls, even those who have parents, are like orphans. And one doesn't throw orphans into the street."

THE MECHALLEL SHABBOS CHILD

When asked how parents should treat their children who have gone "off the

derech," he responded that they should try to draw them closer with bonds of love and not to push them away. A youth who became a *mechallel Shabbos* later asked his father to buy him a car. The father agreed on condition that he promise not to drive on *Shabbos*. The son refused to promise and the tension between father and son rose sharply. The Chazon Ish, however, advised the father to give his son the car without any conditions, for in that way he would have much more influence over him.

OUR OBLIGATION TO EVERY JEWISH CHILD

Any child who does not receive a proper Jewish education was in the Chazon Ish's eyes an orphan, and accordingly, there is a *mitzva min HaTorah* to take pity on him and provide him with a Torah education.

The Chazon Ish was once asked if students who frequented inappropriate places were in the halachic category of a *talmid she'eino hagen*, to whom it is not permitted to teach Torah (*Yoreh De'ah* 246:7). The Chazon Ish replied, "That *halacha* does not apply today. In previous generations, Torah study was for the entire community. The *Rav* gave *shiurim* in the *shul* and everyone understood that they had to attend. Of course there were always a few degenerate individuals who had no desire to learn and came only because of societal pressure. It was those whom *Chazal* classified as ones to whom one should not teach Torah. But the youth of today, who come on their own free will and seriously want to learn, even though they do not yet keep all the *mitzvos*, are not considered to be *talmidim she'einam hagenim*. One should teach them Torah."

LIKE PUTTING ON TEFILLIN

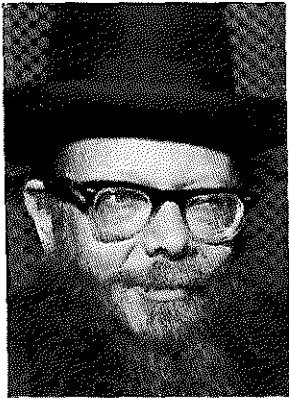
The obligation to help weaker *talmidim*, the Chazon Ish held, is not only the province of the educator. It extends to every *ben Torah* as well. On the basis of "talking in learning" with students of Ponovezher Yeshiva, the Chazon Ish came to the con-

clusion that many younger *bachurim* were getting lost there, and felt despondently alone and helpless. He requested Rabbi Yaakov Eidelstein, then studying in Ponovezh, to organize the older *bachurim* to learn with younger ones. "If they refuse with the excuse that they have no time for anything but learning," he told Rabbi Eidelstein, "ask them how they have time to put on *tefillin* every day. Tell them," the Chazon Ish continued, "You put on *tefillin* because it is a *mitzva*. Well, helping younger *bachurim* is no less a *mitzva* than putting on *tefillin*."

THE ULTIMATE ZECHUS

A *ben Torah* whose father died came to the Chazon Ish for advice. He wanted to establish a free loan fund to perpetuate his father's memory. The Chazon Ish responded that while it would be a great merit for the deceased to establish a free loan fund in his memory, it would be an even bigger *zechus* to learn with a weaker student, build him up and put him on his feet, and help make him into a *ben Torah*. When that young man marries, his children will also be *bnei Torah*, and their children as well. Establish a free-loan-fund, and you will benefit a limited number of people. But if you build a weak boy into a *ben Torah* the potential merit is limitless and will sustain your father's *neschama* for eternity.

The Chazon Ish had a powerful love for every Jewish child and his actions and activities were an outgrowth of that love. He once told his nephew Rabbi Shlomka Berman, that *Roshei Yeshiva* are generally concerned primarily with the good of the public, with what's good for their yeshiva or for the Yeshiva World as a whole. But what is right for the yeshiva, is not necessarily beneficial for the individual student. "I look at it differently. To me every individual is an entire *Klal*." ■



Basic Principles of Parenting

Rabbi Wolbe שליט"א, author of *Alei Shur* and other works, is one of the foremost living educators and mussar personalities. He delivers shmuesen in many yeshivos including Mirrer Yeshiva, Yeshiva Kol Torah, and the Lehmann Bais Hamussar in Jerusalem. This article is an abridged selection from the forthcoming *Planting And Building In Education* (Feldheim Publishers) by Rabbi Wolbe, which was prepared for publication by **Rabbi Leib Kelemen**.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a task that parents naturally long to perform; from deep within themselves, parents yearn to educate their children properly. But education is also a science. It cannot be mastered after a bit of casual consideration or by depending on one's hunches. Parents and teachers cannot rely on their intuition alone and assume that is enough and everything will turn out all right.

Nowadays, few people understand that education is a field that requires study and preparation. Unfortunately, often even teachers lack this awareness. In order to educate children properly, we must understand what education really means.

Sometimes we use methods that are counterproductive because we assume that they contribute to the educational process, but further investigation – especially keeping the long-term in mind – actually reveals that these techniques hinder education.

Finally, we must acknowledge that, ultimately, everything depends on *Hashem*. Even after careful study of all the components of education, we must still pray that *Hashem* will be satisfied with our efforts and grant us success.

AGE APPROPRIATENESS

Our educational efforts during each stage must match the child's true level of development. It is counterproductive to make demands of a child that, because of his age and level of development, he cannot possibly comprehend or fulfill. A child loathes and often shirks inappro-

priately sophisticated requests, and forcing him to attempt tasks that are beyond his ability could seriously damage his long-term spiritual development.

This concept presents a clear challenge to parents. Parents must recognize the child's exact level of development and constantly adjust their expectations to the child's changing abilities. 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. Rather, the child must progress at his own pace, passing one by one through the various stages of childhood.

Three examples will illustrate our point:

1. Parents often don't take play seriously enough. Rabbi Yisrael Salanter explains that when a child taking a bath pretends that a block of wood is a boat, and we take that block away from him, the child experiences the same trauma as an adult would feel if he owned a ship and it sunk. A child cares about his toy boat in exactly the same way as an adult would care about his ship. When we interfere with their playing for no good reason, we are hurting our children.

2. Certain expectations are so widespread and accepted that we don't bother evaluating whether they are age-appropriate. For example, we expect our children to remain at the table throughout the *Shabbos* meals, even though these meals sometimes last for hours. A young child cannot sit quietly for so long. This is far beyond his ability. He must frolic. If we force him to sit, we are demanding behavior he is not capable of, and we do not need to explain how destructive this

is. Our intentions are good: we want to build the child. However, a child cannot be built from demands he cannot satisfy. Instead, the child will be damaged. And that form of damage is especially devastating at a younger age, since interference with the planting process profoundly affects growth later on.

3. Parents sometimes push their children into aspects of prayer for which they are unprepared. There are schools today that, based on the advice of Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky, only teach young children morning blessings and *Shema*, and delay introducing them to more of the *Siddur* until age seven. Before seven years old, prayer is burdensome and children will do anything they can to escape it. By seven years old, most children can understand what prayer is and they are able to approach it with sufficient seriousness and respect. Children introduced to prayer at this stage don't need to unlearn bad habits they might have picked up earlier, and consequently, they have an easier time relating properly to prayer for the rest of their lives.

SELF-IMPROVEMENT

Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin says that those who get angry easily are exempt from the obligation to rebuke inappropriate behavior. Since the Torah includes the instruction to educate our children in the more general commandment to give rebuke, it would seem to follow that those who anger easily would be exempt from the commandment to teach their children. However, they cannot be exempt from the commandment to teach their children, since ultimately a parent remains



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a parent, and a parent is by definition, an educator. There is no option here but to exercise self-control.

A person who does not work on improving his character cannot be a proper parent or teacher. This is not always easy. Parents and teachers must set aside time to develop themselves, especially their patience. One who lacks this trait certainly will not succeed at educating others.

The greatest parental obligation is to set a good example. Every child naturally wants to identify with his parents and imitate them. If parents set a sterling exam-

ple and have a close, warm relationship with their children, then sons will want to be like their father and daughters will want to be like their mother. However, if parents demand of their children behavior or traits that the parents themselves don't exhibit, the parents risk completely corrupting their children.

FALSE GOALS

Parents often act towards their children in a way they think is educational, but which, in reality, hasn't the slightest connection to their children's education. At the root of such behavior are selfish, egotistic motivations. Sometimes the parents are driven by completely evil emotions, traits that the parents would consider abhorrent if other adults displayed them. However, we might exhibit these very traits in our relationships with our children and consider them acceptable. They include: jealousy, dislike, pursuit of honor, anger, conceit, and especially a desire to control. Parents often want complete control over their children: "The child is mine, and I have the right to exercise unconditional authority over him."

Here are a few examples of some evil emotions and what they can prompt us as parents to do:

Jealousy: If I see that the neighbor's child helps his parents more than my child helps me, I feel jealous. I wonder: why doesn't my child help more? Then, if I force my child to help more, I probably am not doing it for educational reasons (i.e., with a deep understanding of my child and what is appropriate for him), but simply because I am jealous of my neighbor and his child.

Honor seeking: If guests visit, I want my child to greet them nicely and behave pleasantly - not necessarily for the sake of my child's growth, but so that my guests will compliment me on my superb job of childraising. Then I feel good.

Anger: I feel anger whenever someone goes against my will. When it comes to children, there is plenty of opportunity for anger since children often don't behave exactly as we would like.

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There are many other negative traits that we display in our relationships with our children. However, we try to conceal our real motivations behind the rationalization that what we are demanding is really "necessary for educational purposes." If out of anger I strike my child, I might excuse myself by saying that it was "educationally necessary." If out of jealousy of my neighbor I force my child to do something, I can fool myself into believing that this too was "educationally necessary." If I want others to think highly of me through my dear child and, therefore, compel him to act in a particular fashion, this too I can justify as "educationally necessary." In short, exercising total control over my child for entirely selfish reasons can be wrongly justified as necessary for his education.

When we deceive ourselves in this manner, the net result is that we don't see the child for who he is. We see the child strictly as our property. We think that his purpose on earth is to benefit us, the parents. This is not to say that we parents don't feel a responsibility to care for our children. We do. However, too often we care for them as we care for our property and do with them as we please.

We must recognize that pursuit of these selfishly motivated educational goals is not education at all. In fact, it often accomplishes the opposite.

THEIR NEEDS; NOT OURS

Often parents place too much value on things that they lacked as children. Certainly their intention is good, but their unwavering determination can produce disastrous results. Just because a parent lacked something as a child does not mean that his child needs that same thing. Needs should be evaluated according to each child.

For example, parents who grew up in impoverished circumstances sometimes are determined that their children will never lack. They pour gifts upon them, often accompanied by a lot of concern and love. The children enthusiastically

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accept all the indulgent pampering, but it can ruin their character. G-d forbid, overindulgence often produces egoism and selfishness, as the Torah hints: "Yeshurun became fat and rebelled."

THEIR DREAMS; NOT OURS

In a similar vein, sometimes a parent who failed to earn the status he dreamed of in his youth - being a

Torah scholar, communal authority, or honored professional - tries to vicariously fulfill himself through his child. He decides, "My child will achieve what I did not!" However, the child, poor thing, might have different natural talents that would better be used in a different field. The child even might have started down his own path and might be experiencing real growth and success, and still the parent tries to crush

his inborn inclinations. The parent spiritually strangles the child by repeating, "You will be a person of stature, you will learn what I never learned and will reach heights that I never reached!" The child is torn between his own nature and his desire to make his parents happy. What he is fit to do, his parents won't allow him to pursue. That which his parents force upon him, he has no interest in. The result is failure.

Certainly, we think, his way should be our way! And we set out to make it so.

PRAYER

Our primary obligation as parents is to pray for our children, and this obligation begins even before they are born.

We can never pray enough for our children. The obligation is infinite. Our Sages did not prescribe any particular petition. Instead, we are given the opportunity to pour out our hearts in prayer, and so we must do, each of us composing our own personal entreaty. Our words should address the moment's needs and concerns.¹

Prayer is perhaps the most important ingredient for a successful education. We are deceiving ourselves if we think that our children's future rests in our hands alone. Everything depends on the Holy One. However, our children have been deposited with us, and we must do everything we can for our precious trusts, including praying for them frequently.

CUSTOMIZED EDUCATION

Parents need to recognize their child's unique character. No two children are alike. If parents assume one child is the same as another, and as a result they mistakenly believe that one child has abilities that he really does not, all their educational efforts may prove to be counterproductive.

King Solomon teaches us (*Mishlei* 22,6): "Educate a child according to his own way, and then when he grows old, he won't depart from it." To educate a child, one must first uncover and eval-

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uate the child's "own way."

We all know that a banana plant and an apple tree require different treatment. If we take care of a banana plant and an apple tree in the same way, at best, one of them won't flourish, and it is possible that neither will bear fruit. So, too, with children. We must try to understand the child's individual personality and take it into account when making all our educational decisions.

On the verse in *Mishlei* mentioned above, the Vilna Gaon comments:

Educate a child according to his "own way" when he is still young, and

those lessons he won't abandon even when he grows older. The idea here is that a person cannot change his way; that is, he cannot alter the qualities bequeathed by his *mazal*.

The Gaon's comments offer great insight into raising children: A physically active child cannot be transformed into someone who sits and reads twenty hours a day. If we force such a child to sit, we could actually damage him. Moreover, even if we succeed at physically controlling the child in the short term, that control is entirely external. The child will remain internally

unchanged. Then, when he is old enough to flee our influence, his real inclination will resurface and he will indulge in it, behaving however he likes, abandoning the ill-suited education we tried to foist upon him.

The Gaon concludes:

This is what the verse means, 'Educate a child according to his own way' - according to his *mazal* and his nature. If we take into account the child's nature when we educate him to perform *mitzvos*, then he won't abandon that education even when he grows older. But if we try to force a

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child against his nature, he will listen now out of fear, but later, when he passes out of our jurisdiction, he will abandon our lessons, since a person cannot change his *mazal*.

If we force a child down a path inappropriate for his personality, he will listen now and we won't detect the damage we have done. But much later, when he matures and no longer fears us, then he will stop listening. This is a fundamental educational principle.

Some parents transgress by forcing their child against his nature, and their mistake has horrible consequences. I remember once when an outstanding Torah scholar brought his son to see me. The scholar explained that his boy suffered from shyness. Indeed, the boy didn't speak. When questioned, he refused to answer. Later, however, I discovered that the silence was not a product of shyness. The father, in his great "righteousness," didn't permit his children to leave the house. He didn't even let them play. After all, "the children must learn Torah," and play is "a waste of time." The child was consumed with hatred for his father.

I never succeeded in removing the hatred from that child's heart. When he grew up, he left Judaism entirely and married a secular woman. And all this flowed from a well-intentioned education, directed toward producing another great Torah scholar. The father's tragic error was his failure to take into account children's nature in general and this specific child's personality. Such an approach often produces horrible results.

LONG-TERM EDUCATION

• Creating the Bond

Ideally, our educational strategy should be a long-term plan. Parents must build a powerfully warm bond with their children while they are still young, so that even the stress of adolescence cannot break it. When the child is only two or three years old, we should already be laying the groundwork for handling the child's contrariness at age fourteen or fifteen - and this is only done

by building intimacy and trust.

• Consistency

Generally, we should not make too many demands on our children. However, we must be careful to stand by whatever demands we make. Once parents decide that a request is appropriate and necessary, and they articulate that request, then they must stand firm. They must fully expect the child to accept the request. Of course, the request must be made in a wise manner - to obviate the need to hit or scream, while inspiring the child to honor the request.

HARSHNESS: EDUCATIONAL MYOPIA

When parents relate harshly to their two, three or four year-old child - when they hit the child or make demands beyond the child's abilities - they destroy the likelihood of ever building the crucial, warm relationship their child will desperately need to have with them in a decade.

Harshness is insidious, for the distance it produces is not always immediately apparent. The toddler still needs his parents. But later, when the child reaches his teenage years, parents begin to complain, "I don't understand what's with my child. He never talks with me. He never shares anything with me. I have no idea what's going on with him." When parents experiencing this rejection approach me for advice, I often ask, "Tell me, did you strike the child when he was two or three?" The parent usually responds, "Of course, but only for the sake of the child's education." Then I must offer the painful explanation, "Now you are paying for the blows you gave him back then." The blows and harsh treatment seethe in the child's subconscious, often without even the child's awareness. The events remained concealed within the child's soul until adolescence reveals the deep wounds. Usually too late, parents realize that they have damaged their relationship with the child. For the parents, this is terribly painful. For the child this is terribly destructive.

Sometimes it seems that we get bet-

ter short-term results using a harsh approach, but "the wise man looks ahead." Parents who know the secret of providing a lasting education - a long-term perspective - will be careful not to be seduced by the promise of immediate results.

Often when a child won't listen, parents deliver a few blows to elicit instant obedience, and then congratulate themselves, "Ah, we know how to get results!" This is a very premature celebration. Parents might pay for their rashness when their child turns fourteen or fifteen years old, and then it will be extremely difficult to repair the damage.

PUNISHMENT

This is a topic that interests many people. To my distress, there is a widespread belief that punishment is the most important educational tool available to both parents and teachers.

Fascination with punishment stems from parents' desire to control their children. A person feels that as long as he has the ability to punish, he also has control. Schoolteachers often feel this way too.

Such an approach is totally perverse and unworthy of professional educators; the same is true for parents. The "When should I punish?" perspective is corrupt and undermines all prospects for a healthy education.

One might argue that Jewish sources approve of punishment. An explicit verse even warns us, "He that spares his rod hates his child." Many people feel this verse requires us to beat our children.

Elsewhere, however, we find another verse: "And I took for myself two rods; the one I called pleasantness and the other I called beating, and I herded the flock" (*Zacharia* 11:7). The verse mentions two rods: one that we use to beat, and another that we can also use to educate, but through pleasantness - the rod of pleasantness. We must recognize that the rod of pleasantness is also a rod, but it causes no pain. When I offer encouragement, this too is a rod. If a child performs well and I give him a piece of

chocolate, this is also a rod, but it is a rod of pleasantness.

When we read the verse, "He that spares his rod hates his child," we must remember that there are two sorts of rods - violent ones, and pleasant ones. Why read the verse as a requirement to beat a child, when there are other ways - better ways - to encourage and guide the child's growth?

We cannot imagine how much we damage a child when we strike him. Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian once instructed me, "We only deal with children in a pleasant way." He told me that late in life he came to regret the few spankings he had given his children when they were young. Rabbi Lopian raised eleven children, many of whom headed leading *yeshivos* later on - and he rejected spanking.

In this regard, I want to add a personal observation. The *Gemora* (*Kid-dushin* 30) records a discussion about the age when it is no longer suitable to spank a child: is it age sixteen or twenty-four? The *Gemora* gives the reason why striking older children is prohibited: The parent is putting a stumbling block in front of his child since the child might rebel and attempt to strike back at the parent. Today, we find that a parent who even strikes a three year old is

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putting a stumbling block before him. The child's rebellion is visible; he clearly wants to hit back. Often the child will raise his fist in response, but he can't reach up to his parent's cheek. There is only frantic motion, but the meaning of that motion is clear. The child has been driven to rebel, and the ramifications of this rebellion must be taken into account.

In previous generations the situation was different. Children were more tolerant and could more easily accept a spanking. Children also had a more positive self-image and were not so badly damaged by a few blows. Today, however, our children's whole environment is suffused with rebellion.

If a parent tries to subdue his child with a beating, he can damage the child and his relationship with the child. Then, when the child matures, he will close himself off from his parents and it will already be too late to rebuild a trusting, open relationship.

HARSH LANGUAGE

Another technique as destructive as spanking, or perhaps even worse, is yelling. When a parent screams at his child, bystanders can easily detect the child's terror. Screaming so powerfully affects the child's nerves that he begins to shake. It is

much worse than a light spanking.

Of course, it is sometimes difficult for a parent to restrain himself. We can imagine such a scenario: A father comes home late, tired and hungry. The children, seeing their father for the first time since morning, begin clamoring for his attention. The mother is also exhausted. Her temper is short. It is bedtime, but despite the mother's aggravated insistence, the children refuse to go to bed. The father, influenced by the rising tide of anger in the household, raises his voice too. Under such circumstances, staying in control of oneself is very difficult. Still, one must remember that screaming does serious damage.

In the early nineteenth century, Rabbi Chaim Volozhin declared, "These days, people will not listen to harsh language." If we speak to people harshly, they cannot hear what we are saying. People only hear soft, pleasant language. We have no choice but to speak softly. Rabbi Chaim Volozhin concluded, "And someone whose nature makes it difficult for him to speak softly, or who angers easily when others misbehave or refuse to listen, is exempt from the commandment to offer rebuke." This was Rabbi Chaim Volozhin's ruling over 140 years ago: One who angers easily cannot rebuke another. How much more applicable

is Rabbi Chaim's ruling today, especially when it comes to disciplining children.

THREATS

Threats impair growth and should, therefore, be avoided. This is not to say that we should never place demands on our child, or that we should give in to our child whenever he throws a tantrum. We must do what is right regardless of pressure from the child. Still, we don't want to give our children the impression that they are living in a threatening environment. We should find a positive way to transmit our requests. This is infinitely better than the negative approach, the threatening approach.

What should we do when a child doesn't listen? We should express our request repeatedly and in different ways until the child hears and appreciates what we are asking. This is part of the wisdom of education: knowing how to speak and when to speak.

Parents must watch how they speak. A child can be adversely affected by hearing an inappropriate word or dishonorable expression even once. Also, a child is quite sensitive to his parents' relationship with each other. He hears screaming. He notices anger. It is impossible to calculate precisely how spiritually destructive an improper example can be.

THE SHABBOS TABLE

Shabbos should be pleasant, and not oppressive.... There are those parents who insist on their children's presence at the table the whole time and like to show off how well-trained their children are. This is inadvisable.

When children reach an appropriate age to stay at the table, we can attract them with beautiful stories about the weekly *parasha*, or stories about *tzaddikim*, or anything else that creates a fascinating experience and draws them into the event. Children

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should yearn for *Shabbos*.

It is also possible to include the children in the *Shabbos* preparations, not in a fashion which makes the child feel burdened, and not just to lighten the parents' responsibilities, but to interest them and give them a feeling that they are "big children," responsible, and partners with their parents.

HELP AND KINDNESS

The child's training in kindness also begins in the home. It is very important to accustom the child to helping out around the house. Of course, when dealing with small children, their contributions must be modest, and as they mature, so, too, the kindnesses they perform at home should grow.

It is not productive to force children to do acts of kindness that they dislike. Unpleasant assignments won't inspire the child to independently want to help in the future. Rather, we must make helping people out into a cheerful experience.

Earlier, we mentioned one effective technique for accomplishing this: Make the child feel like your partner while he is assisting you, so he will feel good about himself and the kindness he is doing. If you include your child in your chores, this gives him a boost in his self-image. Since assisting his parents raises the child's stature in his eyes, he happily volunteers and gets accustomed to helping others. In large families this process usually happens naturally, with the older children taking care of the younger ones. The older children spontaneously begin to take responsibility for their younger siblings and help them when they need it. This is exemplary education.

QUESTIONS

Every child eventually begins to ask questions. A child's questions must be treated seriously and addressed directly. If we constantly respond to questions saying things like,

"You can't understand this," "You'll understand when you're older," or "Don't ask such silly questions," then we stunt the child's natural inquisitiveness. The child wants to know, but instead of developing this curiosity, we crush it.

We should celebrate the fact that our child asks questions, and we should answer in a manner that matches the child's level of comprehension. When the parents find themselves unable to answer the child's questions, they should do their best to find out and then provide serious, satisfying answers.

LEARNING

What should we do when our child doesn't want to learn? The Gemara answers: "In Usha they established that a man should roll with his child until twelve years old, and then get tough with him." What does it mean to "roll with" one's child? Rashi explains: "If he doesn't want to learn, roll pleasantly with him, with soft words." Persuade him. Entice him. The Talmud recommends that we take this soft approach until age twelve. Of course, today the age has changed, and what was once only appropriate until age twelve is now appropriate until age twenty. Until age twenty we must "roll with" our child.

REBUKE

Earlier we referred to the Talmudic discussion about the age when a child is no longer fit for rebuke: either sixteen or twenty-four. *Me'iri* strikes an interesting compromise, explaining that the ideal age for rebuke is between sixteen and twenty-four years old.

Rebuke consists of clarification. We must clarify to a child, and especially to a young adult, what constitutes good behavior. We should stress the child's great, perhaps unrealized potential, helping them recognize their personal strengths. *Me'iri* writes

that ages sixteen to twenty-four are ideal for this sort of clarification. Of course, rebuke is necessary even before age sixteen. But the ideal window of opportunity - the period when one can best speak openly and deeply about personal issues - is this eight-year slot.

Education is a huge responsibility. A parent's whole mission in this world is to guard the precious trust the Holy One gave him - to raise his children well, with all his strength, and to understand the responsibility parents have to set a good example.

We parents must learn how to transmit to our child the soul of the Torah, not just rote behavior or technical instruction about how to act. By "soul," we mean the joy, beauty, and splendor of fulfilling a *mitzva*; we mean the taste of a *mitzva*. We must show our children their purpose and mission in this world. We must open their eyes to the wonders of creation as well. When we plant *emuna* like this in a child, there is hope that the child will become someone who independently yearns to grow through the study of Torah and performance of *mitzvos*. When he himself wants to grow, then we have hit the center of the educational target.

Education is compared to lighting the *menora* in the Temple. "When you lift up the flames," the verse says; and *Rashi* comments: The pilot torch must be held in place until the flames rise independently from the *menora's* lamp. A parent must ignite the soul of his child so that the flames of love for Torah burn on their own. ■

¹ A general formula exists, passed down to us from the *Chazon Ish*. Many people include this formula in their *Shemoneh Esrei*, and/or recite it after *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov* candle lighting: May it be Your Will *Hashem*, my G-d and G-d of my forefathers, that You have mercy on my child [name of son/daughter], and that You move his/her heart to love and fear Your Name, and to learn diligently Your holy Torah. May You push away anything that could interfere with his/her diligent study of Your holy Torah and provide those circumstances that will lead him/her to study Your holy Torah. For you hear the prayer of Your People, Israel, with compassion.

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Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetsky שליט"א



In the complex, confusing field of dealing with children at risk, the heart often says *no* while the mind says *yes*... or the reverse. One yearns for objective yet compassionate guidance, cognizant of the various pressures and trends in contemporary society, capable of a response that encompasses Torah values, and sees beyond immediate demands, to long-term implications.

We have selected several questions that deal with the entire phenomenon of children at risk in the Torah community, and submitted them to Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetsky שליט"א for comment. Rabbi Kamenetsky is the *Rosh HaYeshiva* of the Talmudical Yeshiva of Philadelphia, chairman of the *Nesius* (Presidium) of Agudas Yisroel of America, Rabbinic Advisor of Agudas Yisroel's Project YES, and a member of the Rabbinical Administrative Board of Torah Umesorah, the American Society for Hebrew Day Schools.

I. *JO*: As parents struggle to balance their concern for their troublesome children who are at risk, and their more conventional children, a question can arise: Is there a point when a child is "sent out of the house," a point where tolerance and *savlanus* must be sacrificed for the sake of protecting siblings?

Rabbi Kamenetsky: As a general rule, a child who does not conform to family standards in religious conduct and general decency must still be included as a member of the family, liv-

ing under the same roof. This should apply as long as the child exhibits respect for his or her parents.

Once the line is crossed, however, and the child is consistently defiant of parental authority, the child's presence in the house can have a destructive effect on siblings. Under such circumstances, rabbinical guidance must be sought as to whether an alternative place of residence should be considered for the "difficult" child – not as an act of banishment; to the contrary, he (or she) is still a member of the family, but as a measure of protection of the other children. If at all possible, the substitute home should be with a relative or close friend.

II. *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?

One must add yet another factor. Because of the extraordinary growth of the Torah community, schools are overcrowded, and not every child receives the attention he or she requires to develop properly. Many children do not realize their potential, and some simply slip between the cracks. Growth in numbers calls for equal growth in personnel and individual attention.

III. *JO*: Are there legitimate grounds – academic, financial, or religious – for a school to expel students? How far is the responsibility of a school to an individual errant student *lehachziro lemutav* (to lead him back to Torah)? When can a student be considered a *rodeif* (a spiritual "life-threat to others"), and how can that classification be applied?

Should parents heed their children's requests to transfer to a "less frum" school as a means of stemming the downward descent of the teen?

Rabbi Kamenetsky: A student's failure to maintain minimum academic requirements of his school does not constitute grounds for expulsion. Should it appear that he could gain more in another school, the parents should be encouraged to transfer him, but he cannot be forced out.

Inability to make tuition payments is not a basis for expulsion of a student.

After all, every school does turn to the community for financial support, and the schools, in turn, have their obligations to the community's children. Other means for making up the deficit must be sought.

When a child does not conform to the school's code of conduct, a careful, painstaking evaluation must be made in regard to the degree he/she disturbs the class or is a detrimental influence on other students. Of course, the child's *rebbe* and teachers must be included in making this evaluation. This extreme-

ly sensitive matter has been described as *dinei nefashos* – a life-and-death decision – and deserves to be weighed accordingly.


Parents may be reluctant to yield to their child's request to transfer to a school with less-restrictive standards, but should the child conform to the more liberal school's policies, he/she will be a member of good standing of an Orthodox society. This can be preferable to being a non-conforming student in a school of higher standards.

IV. JO: Can the various schools in a community be held accountable for difficult children; or can each school, individually, simply shrug off kids-at-risk by claiming: "We're just not equipped to deal with your child. Try elsewhere."?

Rabbi Kamenetsky: Once a child is enrolled in a yeshiva or Bais Yaakov, the school carries responsibility for his/her development, and cannot shrug off this assignment or arbitrarily pass it on to others. Before enrollment, however, the individual school has no obligation to accept a child it is not equipped to teach. When a child with difficulties is not yet registered in a school, the community at large – or the schools of the region – do have an obligation to insure that all boys and girls being graduated from the 8th grade have a place to learn, and either create a facility or program to accommodate them or set up a system of assigning them to the participating schools.

V. JO: Does the *Rosh Yeshiva* have any additional comments to make on the topic?

Rabbi Kamenetsky: In *Eretz Yisroel*, the *yeshivos* and Bais Yaakov schools are ahead of our schools in many ways, in the way they deal with kids-at-risk. For example, Lev L'Achim sponsors a free telephone help-line for high-school-age boys and girls: *Lev Shome'a* (the Listening Heart). This has proven to be an extremely effective source of guidance and support system for young teens attempting to work out their problems. This specific program, among others, should have a counterpart – a free-access 800 number, if you will – in America. ■



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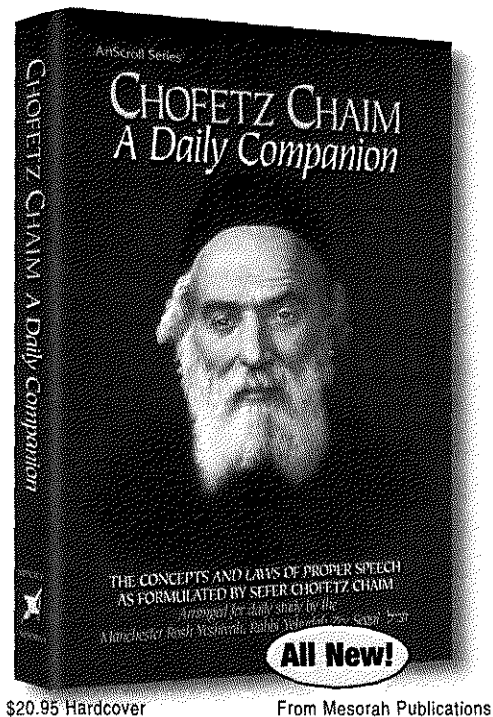
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A Rosh Yeshiva's View of "Kids at Risk"

Children are the greatest *beracha* granted to a human being. Children are our link to eternity, a touch of immortality granted to us by the supreme immortal Being, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. When *Rachel Imeinu* was faced with barrenness, she begged *Yaakov Avinu*, "*Hava li banim v'im ayin meis a nochi* – Grant me children or I am dead" (*Bereishis* 30,1). Life is not worth living for *Rachel Imeinu* if there were no one through whom she could perpetuate those values that she held dear and that she lived for.

And yet, sometimes this great *beracha* does not turn out the way we expect it to. Then the plea emerging from our lips cries out, "*Im kein lama zeh anochi* – If this [child] be so, why should I go through this?" (*ibid* 25, 23) When *Rivka Imeinu* suspected that her child would be traveling down a path of alien worship, those were the words that she uttered. Today this cry has become a chorus, a chorus of parents wondering what went wrong. How did this great *beracha* – this gift worth more than life itself – *im ayin meis a nochi* turn into *lama zeh anochi*.

There is no foolproof guarantee that a child will develop properly by virtue of growing up in a beautiful home.¹ Children cannot be raised on autopilot, on the assumption that they will "inherit" the proper values from their parents and grandparents. "*Chinuch* left to chance has no chance." How then do we create a generation where *all* our children are inculcated with Torah values, knowing right from wrong and acting

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accordingly?

Though our schools have a great impact upon our children, the influence of the home is still the greatest determinant of children's future. All elements in our homes have to be in harmony with each other, like one orchestra. You cannot preach one approach, and practice another.

Children will not grow up with a commitment to *kedusha* when videos, Internet, magazines, television – and today, even newspapers – bring the most unacceptable experiences and concepts into our homes.

Two summers ago, I had occasion to call the home of a bachur learning in a local Mesivta. His parents were still in the mountains. When he answered the phone, I could barely hear him as the noise level was so high. "Excuse me a moment," he said, "I have to turn down the volume on the video."

Irony of ironies, his parents were shepherding nachas from a hundred miles away because their son had gone home early to begin Mesivta!

THE ART OF TOCHACHA

Perhaps the most difficult and important art to be mastered by both parent and *mechanech* is that of *tochacha* (reprimand). While we must rebuke our children when they do wrong, we must do it with obvious love in our voices, our faces and our gestures.

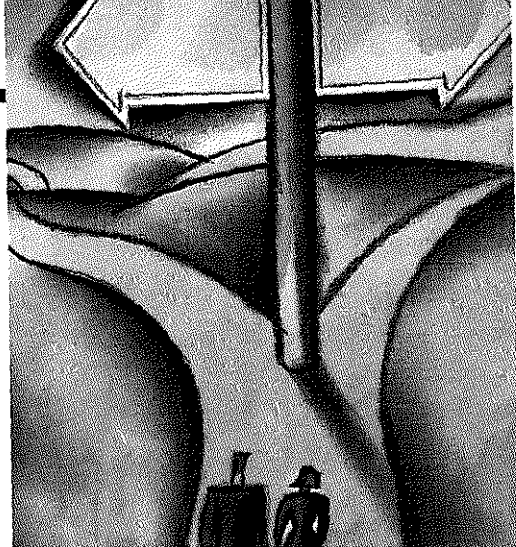
Shlomo Hamelech advises us that "*Hashem* chastises the one He loves" (*Mishlei* 3,12). One must emulate the *Ribbono Shel Olam* when exercising the responsibility of *tochacha*. Not only must the words be laced with love, they

must be based on love, and resonate with love.

The elderly Rabbi Tarfon posed a question in halacha, which was brilliantly resolved by the much younger Yehuda Ben Nechemia. A smile crept onto Yehuda Ben Nechemia's face, and Rabbi Akiva turned to him and said, "Yehuda, you smile with satisfaction for having shown the elder that he's wrong. It would greatly surprise me if you were to live long" (*Menachos* 68).

The *Shita Mekubetzes* states that there is a word missing in the *Gemora's* text. Rabbi Akiva actually prefaced his comment with "Yehuda, Yehuda." It would appear that just as *Hashem's* repetition of a name – "Avraham, Avraham" at the *Akeida*, and "Moshe, Moshe" at the Burning Bush – was meant to convey love², so too did Rabbi Akiva want to express love and caring for his disciple by repeating his name before delivering his strong rebuke (see *Rambam Hilchos De'os* 6:7). This implication is especially compelling, coming as it does from Rabbi Akiva, who lost thousands of disciples for their not having conducted themselves with mutual respect. Thus Rabbi Akiva said in effect, "Yehuda, I love you. How could you do something like this?"

I and a number of baaleibattim had a meeting before last summer with several teenagers in the neighborhood – basically kids from "heimishe" backgrounds who have been involved in almost everything, including drugs, immoral conduct, etc. They asked the boys several questions, among them the very legitimate query, "What are you doing for the summer?" As one of the boys was



about to answer, the questioner interjected – “Pot?”

The boy later said to me, “I know I’m a piece of garbage, but did they have to advertise it in public? Maybe if he would have told me that I am a ‘tyere Yiddish kindt’ but fell and hurt myself, and he wants to help pick me up and think about the summer, I would think differently about myself. My problem is that I think of myself exactly as he said it.”

We must recognize that our children feel bad enough about failing. We must preface our rebuke with an outpouring of love, and deliver our *mussar* with an arm draped lovingly around the child’s shoulder. Caring, love, and recognition of a child are of utmost importance, and many times are crucial to what may transpire years later. This lesson must be absorbed by parents and *mechanchim* alike.

A number of years ago, a Yungerman who had been a *talmid* in our yeshiva for a short period of time, approached me with a special request. Could I see to it that the Rebbe he had had in our yeshiva receive \$100 extra every month, without his knowing from whom the money is coming? I agreed, and he has continued to do so until today. I didn’t ask him any questions. Recently, he revealed his reason: “All my life, my parents and the yeshivos I attended treated me like a nobody – always finding fault with me. No warmth, no love. This Rebbe made me feel like a *mentsch*, caring and feeling for me. In my mind, he stands out with glowing warmth, and I will never forget him.”

A major pitfall to avoid when giving *tochacha* is inserting our own personal

agenda. “Yaakov/Rivka, do you know how you embarrass me? I’m ashamed of what the neighbors think!” “How will we be able to do *shidduchim*?”

A parent called me saying that her husband doesn’t want to bring their son to the bungalow colony because he wears one of those flashy shirts that are not so acceptable. He actually wanted to leave their child in the city rather than be “shamed” by his mode of dress. The child must feel that you are looking out for his/her benefit when giving *tochacha*, not for your own. Tell the child, “Yankele, I love you. You are a *ben Olam Habba*. Stop and think: is this how a *ben Olam Habba* would act in this situation?”

EVERYONE’S OBLIGATION

One cannot give up hope and must pursue every available avenue to turn a child around. He/she is a Yiddishe *neshama* lost or gone astray, waiting to be retrieved. A former Rebbe, counselor, friend or neighbor who has a good rapport with the child can be engaged to strike up or rekindle some kind of relationship with him/her. We all have a responsibility to do our utmost to redirect the struggling, straying *neshama*.

A Yungerman approached me not long ago with a perplexed look on his face, followed by a question on behalf of his friends: “We found out that you have been very involved with a group of boys who dared break in and desecrate the yeshiva. If anyone should be upset with them, it is you. How and why do you sacrifice so much time and effort on their behalf for over a half year?”

I took off my watch and asked him if this \$25 watch were lying on the ground, lost by one of these terrible boys – on drugs, *mechal-lal* Shabbos – what would he do? He looked at me with puzzlement, and said, “I would track him down and return it to him.” When I asked why, his wonder and dismay were even more evident, “What do you mean? I have an obligation of *hashavas aveida*!”

“A lost \$25 watch is *hashavas aveida* and a lost *neshama* is not *hashavas aveida*?”

WHO I REALLY AM, WHO I NEED TO BE

The parents of one boy who had seemed hopelessly lost received a letter from his *Rosh Yeshiva*, informing them that their son is a true *nachas*. This *bachur* wrote the following note: “I really don’t know how to say it, but I feel like I just learned who I am. I need time to develop myself into who I really need to be. I’ve set certain goals for myself: I put on *tefillin* every day, I try to have *kavana* as to what the words mean. I learn two times a week; I wish I could learn more, but it’s hard. I’ll get there someday. I plan to get somewhere in life.”

A member of the family told me that his mother never stopped *davening* and never gave up on him. She told him that she believes in him, and that she still loves him.

To a great extent, the fault lies in ourselves. We can blame friends, outside influences, the yeshiva system, but basically, it is we who must mend our ways if we want to stem the tide that threatens to overtake so many among us. How can we prevent the blessing we plead for “*Hava li banim, im ayin meisa anochi*” from becoming “*Lama zeh anochi*?” By removing the “*anochi*” – the self-centeredness – from being the primary focus of our relationships with our spouses, we can create *shalom bayis*, so essential to nurturing Yiddishe *neshamos*. By taking the “*anochi*” out of our *chinuch* and the reprimands to our children, we can build a relationship based on mutual love and trust. By taking the “*anochi*” out of our attitudes towards *yeshivos*, we can place responsibility where it really belongs. By abrogating the “*anochi*” and prostrating ourselves in *tefilla* before the *Ribbono Shel Olam*, we can all be *zocheh* to the true Yiddish *nachas* that we long for. ■

¹ See commentary of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein זצ"ל in *Darash Moshe*, in regard to Yitzchak Avimi’s fathering Eisav even though he himself had been brought up in the home of his extraordinary parents, Avraham and Sarah.

² See Rashi, *Bereishis* 11, 22

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CLEAR CONCERN

Talmidos are influenced by those they believe care about them and are concerned for their welfare. If we are to make a difference in a student's life, we must make it clear that her well-being and success is our goal.¹ All those in the field of *chinuch habanos* are here because they care. We know that, but it is not enough for us to know; our students must know it, too.

Sara Laya left the office in a huff. The very fact that the principal could say this to me, she thought, shows that she doesn't even know me or care about me. She doesn't begin to comprehend who I am. All she cares about is the "school's name."

It may come as a surprise that the advice offered was rejected. Not because it wasn't sound advice. Not because it didn't hit home. But simply because the student felt that her well-being was not the issue. Even when there is obviously no personal motive, the student must be made aware that all you seek is her benefit. When a student threw me the line, "You only care about the 'school's name,'" I turned to her and said, "What is a school? A school is not a separate entity, a monolithic monster. A school is made up of individuals, *yechidos*. If every girl has a good name, a *shem tov*, then the school has a good name. So all I am concerned with is you." With that, we sat down to address the issues at hand.

Mrs. Rochel L. Frankel has been involved in *chinuch habanos* on the high school level for over a decade, most recently as *limudei kodesh* principal of a Bais Yaakov in Monsey, NY.

Even when a *talmida* knows that you care about her and that her success is your number one goal, there may be times when she feels you could not possibly understand her. Perhaps she thinks you cannot relate to her situation since you appear to be too *frum*, mature, smart, or different from her. Putting yourself in her shoes, conveying an understanding of her struggles or difficulties can prevent such a situation.

UNDERSTANDING THEIR STRUGGLES

A very glum and dejected Tali sat before me. "It's no use. I give up. I will never be a real Bais Yaakov girl. I just am not like the rest of you." I inquired how she felt she differed from "us." "Oh, just that you are all so good, being *tzniusdig* seems to come naturally to you. Do you know what an effort it is for me? What a constant battle it is?"

"Welcome to reality, Tali," I said, "No one has it easy. Each person faces difficulties on her level. Each of us has our own struggles..."

A little glimpse into the daily tug-of-war all students face was all she needed to realize she was as "normal" as the rest. Even more so, she needed to realize that teachers also have their own struggles.

Taking the time to understand a student's personal struggles can also diffuse a potential situation.

Fraidy sat before me, defiance oozing from her every fiber. Her remark was out of line, but how was I going to explain that to her effectively? "You must be very upset

about something to have answered the teacher like that," I finally said.

She looked up at me in surprise. "How did you know that I was so upset?!" I explained that both she and I knew that *chutzpa* was unacceptable, and as such, she must have lost herself. We discussed the source of the problem and some potential solutions. I pointed out that her remarks had not helped solve her problem. On the contrary, they had given her another problem to deal with. We both agreed that *chutzpa* was uncalled for even when one is upset, and left with a line of communication and understanding open for the future.

EXPLAIN IT IN THEIR TERMS

There are times when a student is convinced of the truth of her case. She sincerely feels that a teacher is wrong, she knows a *Rav* who disagrees with school policy. It serves no purpose to lock horns with her. No one wins in such a situation. It is as though she wears a sign proclaiming: "My mind is made up, so don't confuse me with the facts!" Listen to her. Let her have her say. I didn't say I agree with her. Then very gently use her own argument or logic to point out flaws in her conclusion.

Rina politely informed me that she would no longer be able to sit in *Morah L's* shiurim. Even her parents agreed with her, that this teacher was just not equipped to discuss the subject involved. She was so narrow-minded and not in sync with the school's policies. I heard her out. I commented on how difficult

it must be for her to sit in class and take notes in a class given by a teacher she clearly disagrees with. I commended her on her high grades in the subjects taught by that particular Morah, and then calmly turned to her and said: "So you don't like the fact that Morah L is so narrow-minded and intolerant in the lessons she conveys?"

Rina bobbed her head in agreement and said she felt the teacher lacked tolerance.

"And what about your lack of tolerance for Morah L?" I asked. Of course she had

never thought of it from that perspective. Needless to say, she continued to attend the shiurim and became an active participant in the lessons.

KNOW YOUR STUDENTS

If there were a golden rule for teachers, it would be, know your student. Of course I know her, you might say; she's the one who is always disrupting in class, the ringleader, the non-performer. These all may be true, but who is she?

Students do not function in a void. They are members of a class, but they are also daughters, sisters and friends. They bring all sorts of "baggage" to school in their designer backpacks. We must diagnose the issues involved: the social predicament of the student, her home situation, her personal shortcomings, her areas of strength. All these factors directly influence her growth and accomplishments.

Liba was not the best of students. Though the teacher put in much effort, she still did not produce laudable results. One semester, her grades took off. Immediately, the teacher had doubts as to Liba's integrity. Not long after, it was back to the old test scores. This only served to bolster the teacher's suspicions.

The truth of the matter was quite different. Liba had a very difficult home situation. For that short time, things had changed dramatically and with the change her ability to concentrate and study improved. Unfortunately for Liba, the change did not last.

TEACH BY EXAMPLE

All students crave guidance and direction. When it is properly given, they are receptive and responsive. If we do not provide the direction, they will take their cue from other sources. When giving guidance to our *talmidos*, it is important to remember that *hashpa'a* (influence) is caught, not taught. Each time we stand up in front of a class, we are living examples as to what is expected of them. We refer to this as role modeling. The problem is we are likely to think of it as just that; a modeling job. You show up at the job site, properly attired, pose for the necessary time and take off the costume/attitude upon leaving. There is nothing further from the truth. When teaching impressionable young minds and souls, we never know what will make the greatest impression. It may surprise you to know that it is not always the difficult *meforash* that you deliver with great skill that has the strongest impact on a girl and changes her focus, but rather the reaction you

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had to a challenging class situation.

We were on a school Shabbaton in the mountains. Many staff members and their families had come along to add ruach to the experience. There were inspiring speakers and thought-provoking lectures. Surprisingly, upon our return to school, one girl said that the thing that had the most impact on her was the exchange she overheard between her teacher and her son. It had taken place Shabbos morning as they prepared to go to shul. The boy had been up for some time and had been helping out in the kitchen with preparations for the Kiddush. As a reward, he had received some cake which he promptly fed to himself and his shirt. His mother said to him, "You can't go to shul like that. It is not kavod." This she could not get over. It changed her whole approach to kedushas beis haknesses and tefilla.

PRAISE: THE MAGIC TOOL

Praise is so valuable a tool, I often wonder why it is underutilized. It is not expensive, does not require much effort, and produces the most amazing results. We must be truthful when we praise. Praising a girl for doing so well when she is failing will more likely produce a snort rather than the desired effect.

Every student has some good qualities. Focus on it and build the rest to match. A very good example of this type of praise-induced change is one I use in parenting. The scenario: a (very) messy bedroom. The advice: find one spot in that mess that is neat. Focus on it by saying, "Let's get the rest of the room to match that shelf/drawer/corner."

Tzila was having a hard year. Although she had done well in the past, her current marks were not reflecting her capability. A teacher was detailed to speak with and motivate her. Upon perceiving that there was interest in her accomplishments, Tzila began to put in more effort. As soon as it was noticeable, I went over and complimented her on her improvement and informed her that the teacher had told me how well she was doing and how impressed she was with her

determination. You should have seen Tzila float out of the office as though on a cloud. Slowly, her effort expanded to include other subjects as well.

STRESSING THE POSITIVE

People thrive on praise. It creates a desire to repeat the action that brought about the praise, initiating a cycle of success. As teachers, we must incorporate praise into our very being. It must reflect a positive attitude towards people and life.

Positivity is a key ingredient in chinuch. The receptivity of a student hinges on positive presentation. Most students do not reject the ideals taught in principle. Their rejection is due to the manner in which they are conveyed. This is with regard to classroom discipline, school rules and procedures, and most importantly Torah hashkafa. Stress the beauty of Torah. דרכיה דרכי נועם – show how Torah enhances our lives.

This is especially important when

conveying sensitive issues such as tzeniut. It is vital that bnos Yisroel realize that they are bnos hamelech². Just as a princess never feels her crown is a burden (though it is quite heavy), but rather wears it with great pride, so too, do we view tzeniut as our badge of honor.

Chedva asked me one day to show her where in the Torah it says not to wear a certain style of dress that we had prohibited. I knew that she was aware that this is not a "d'Orysa," and was looking for a loophole. I asked her if she knew why this type of dress was created. She answered immediately, "To attract attention." I asked her why she would want to wear something that was created for that specific purpose, since she was such a refined girl. "No, no! I would never wear that, I just wanted to know."

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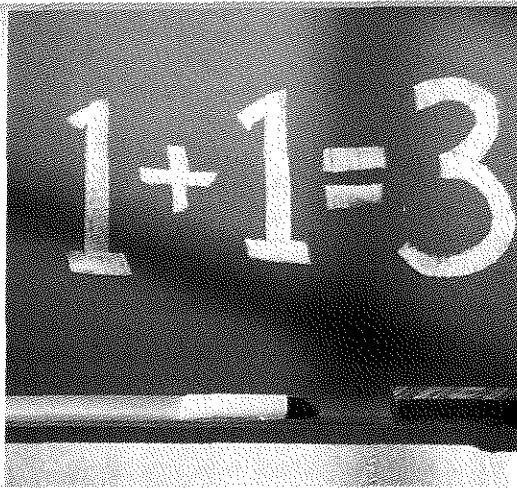
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munication, and understanding, we can solve many a problem before it gets out of hand. Were we to succeed, many a tragic situation would be prevented. Yet, the problems do crop up... in part, because we are not the only caregivers of this child. There may be a home situation that may not complement all the positivity you radiate, or some other situation beyond your control. You will be sensitive to changes (even subtle ones) in a *talmida's* behavior if you have this type of relationship.

What to look for³:

Changes in scholastic achievement: One of the more obvious signs of a student's disenchantment is a marked drop in grades. It is often interesting to note that she may maintain her average in the *limudei chol* department. Perhaps this is due to the fact that secular subjects do not demand certain behavior, are basically theoretical, and do not tend to contradict her desired lifestyle.

Dress styles: Another symptom is change in mode of dress. When a girl begins to adopt a new dress style – i.e., more casual, less careful of *hilchos tzenius*, trendy – you must keep an eye out. Also common is the lack of *Shabbos*-type of dress on *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*.

Negative relationships: Note any change in her circle of friends and acquaintances, or improper relationships. These point to a new type of behavior and interests or lack of attention and affection.

Cool speech: Watch for trendy talk. Every generation has its own catch phrases and lingo. A student who suddenly begins talking differently is obviously trying to fit in with a new crowd. Perhaps she is remaking her image so as to fit in with more “cool” students.

Lack of eye-contact: A student who is not feeling good about her actions will suddenly begin avoiding eye-contact. You will only note this if you had a relationship beforehand. This is due to her feelings of embarrassment. She knows you would not approve of her behavior.

Challenging questions: A student begins stridently challenging and confronting you in class on issues of *hashkafa*. These issues had never bothered her before, but now she is hotly debating every topic you raise.

You know you have a problem on your hands, or perhaps the makings of a problem. The student displays one or more of the above signs. What to do now?

WHAT TO DO NOW

When as a principal or teacher you are confronted with a problematic situation, take the time to fully investigate the issues. Be sure to ascertain the precise nature of the problem. Do not get confused and treat symptoms in place of the root causes.

Keep in mind that there are no “one size fits all” *chinuch* tips. What worked for one may not be the solution for another.

Beware of “fishing” for information. It is not wise to confront a girl before you have the facts. It is more worthwhile to wait a little longer until you have all the information than to confront her and have it wrong. Students tend to focus on the part that you got wrong and conveniently forget about the true issues you raised.

Always give her a chance to explain. Appearances are deceiving and second-hand information can be garbled. It is also an opportune time to express disbelief: “I just could not believe the information presented to me so I am coming to verify it with you.”

Show disappointment that a girl with her ability could behave in such a manner. She will work to regain her standing in your eyes.

Focus on the bad behavior, not the bad person. When a student is labeled “bad” (or *chas veshalom* worse), she no

longer feels a need to strive for improvement, because she is bad! Like a self-fulfilling prophecy she lives up to her reputation.

If the behavior warrants punishment, care must be taken to present it as a consequence of her actions. This is not a personal struggle. It just follows the rules of cause and effect. *If you misbehave or break rules, there are consequences.* Keep it free of emotions.

Celebrate minor accomplishments so that she can continue on to major ones. Any small improvement is cause for rejoicing. Remember, this is all about direction. Is the student in a growth mode or *chas veshalom* intent on self-destruction? She may not look or dress the way you like, but note the minute improvements.

We had agonized for a long time over the dress code for the Shabbaton. Baruch Hashem most of the girls looked wonderfully fine and aidel. It was obvious that each of the girls had tried, on her level, to bring along her finest ensemble, although some still fell short of our expectations. Monday morning, back at school, I addressed the student body. I told them how proud I was of each and every girl. I commended them on their sensitivity, and said, “For everything you brought along, I know there was something you left behind.” One mother called to say, “My daughter appreciated your understanding of how she agonized over her choice of clothes.”

The most important thing a *mechaneches* can do is *daven*. *Daven* that your *talmidos* accept what you teach them. *Daven* that they see the beauty in Torah. *Daven* that they not fall prey to temptation. *Daven* that they improve if *challila* they have stumbled.

The day will come when we will no longer need address these issues. **כי מלאה הארץ דעה את ה' כמים לים מכסים** – the beauty of Torah will be apparent to all. ■

¹ Rambam Hilchos De'os 6:7

² Tehillim 45, 14

³ The following are only a partial listing of the more common symptoms to watch for.



Of Growth and Belonging

A UNIQUE PHENOMENON

The purpose of this article is to identify the root of our dropout problem from the perspective of a Yeshiva *Rebbi*, and offer a practical approach to solving it.

In truth, the dropout problem is not confined to our youth. Everyone is at risk. The difference is that adults tend to be more set in their habits, and their lack of devotion is masked by habit. They will continue to go to *shul* and observe many *mitzvos*, but without putting their hearts into it. This is not what the Torah wants. A continuous and ongoing dedication is required of everyone, and these "observant" Jews actually serve as a microcosm of the dropout phenomenon. Judaism demands growth from people of all ages. It demands it, and it also nurtures it, because its very essence is growth. Therefore, anyone who departs from this – regardless of whether he is 7, 17, 27, or 70 – is at risk of dropping out.

What are the causes of the dropout phenomenon? Exposure to immorality, to alien cultures and values, and the overwhelming power of the mass media are some culprits. Certainly the overwhelming power of television, movies, and the Internet as corrupting forces cannot be ignored. But these are not the direct cause. In fact, after discussions with many teenagers, I have found that they are not rebelling against the Torah

Rabbi Kaufman, a *talmid* of Yeshiva Rabbeinu Chaim Berlin, is a *Rebbi* in Yeshiva of Far Rockaway. He has successfully implemented the concepts expressed in this article, in dealing with teens, both in and out of *yeshivos*.

The amazing *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 is it about our society that could both attract and repel at the same time?

in favor of some other culture, as did the Hellenists. Rather these diversions have the power to fascinate and occupy them, intensifying their fall.

What, then, triggers this catastrophe? Some attribute this problem to dysfunctional, broken homes, feelings of oppression and depression. These can be causes of many problems, but do not on their own bring about rebellion against Torah. Historically and logically, these forces usually inspire people toward spiritual search. Thus the question is strengthened.

The question is further highlighted by a unique phenomenon: Never before as a people have we had so many individuals coming close to Torah, while at the same time, others are abandoning a Torah life. 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?

"FOB" VS. GENUINE JUDAISM

Throughout the *Siddur* – indeed, distinguishing every *tefilla* – is the phrase "*Elokeinu V'Elokei Avoseinu*." But nowhere do we find this phrase in its chronological order. Why is "Our G-d" placed before "The G-d of our fathers"? Where does my understanding of G-d come from, if not from the vast and resonant heritage that came before my arrival to this world?

"*Elokeinu*" is stated first because we cannot rely on those who came before us. If I stand smug and complacent – relying on the achievements of others – then I am not a participating Jew. The Torah wants it to be "*Elokeinu*" – my own G-d. My relationship to *Hashem* must be through my own journeys, my own struggles, my own discoveries, and my own accomplishments. My relationship to my Creator must be discovered, rediscovered, and reintensified on a daily basis. It must be my own *avoda*. Only after I extend myself can my inheritance come to me. If I add my own work to the work of my fathers, then the achievements of my fathers will have relevance to me.

The common description of one who grew up in a religious household is "*Frum From Birth*," FFB. To be satisfied with one's Judaism simply as a lifestyle inherited from one's parents is not being "FFB." Rather it is "FOB," a Fact Of Birth. But this is not Judaism. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* does not want genetically-produced robots. To be

raised by *Yirei Shamayim* is indeed a great gift, but it is only meant to provide a boost to one's own achievements, not to replace them. To the contrary, living in the valley of habit is a great drawback to growth as a Jew. We are all familiar with too many people in our own circles who are mechanical Jews, performing *mitzvas anashim melumada*. "Elokeinu" must precede "Elokei Avoseinu."

The reason why the *baal teshuva* movement is expanding so prolifically is because the bankrupt, empty life in secular society is driving the *baal teshuva* to fill an inner void, to find a purpose and a need for his existence. This vacancy is anathema to him, and it becomes a spark that lights a fire, and that fire drives him ever onward.

FILLING THE VOID

Unfortunately, when some people feel a void, they seek to fill it with things. With money, with possessions such as magnificent homes,

luxury cars, designer clothing, state-of-the-art electronics, and ... (*Hashem yeracheim aleinu*.) with girls, drinking and drugs. People turn to these diversions because they do not know how to fill the void within. When a person is complacent in his Judaism, when the *davening* is by rote, and his *mitzvos* – and yes, even his Torah learning – are formulae punched in with the same level of involvement as a bank card's PIN code, he perceives himself as Jewish, but he has the urge to look elsewhere to find meaning, to find a reason to live.

How many of us or our children understand the meaning of our *tefillos*? *Prayer without understanding cannot be prayer with heart. It will not bring any real connection with Hakadosh Baruch Hu.* How many of us or our children truly follow and understand *Krias HaTorah* and *Haftorah*? Is *Tanach* merely a handbook for *vertlach* and *drashos*, or is it the very basis of our existence?

Why is *Lashon Hakodesh* a foreign language? Our children sing *Zemiros*,

whose words they don't comprehend. Is it a wonder why English music attracts them? Are we more excited about our vacations and do we derive more pleasure from our *divrei reshus* (religiously neutral activities) than from performing *mitzvos*? What confusing message are we sending to our children? Do we really comprehend the meaning of *Shabbos* and *Yomim Tovim* on a higher level than a grade school child? Do we genuinely experience *oneg Shabbos*? Is our *Motza'ei Shabbos* an honorable escort to the departing *Shabbos* or the antithesis of *kedushas Shabbos*? Can we logically convince an irreligious person to observe *Shabbos* or perform *mitzvos*? If we can't, is it a wonder why our children don't? So many American Jews are surviving Judaism, not living it.

This, then, is one of the causes of the crisis gripping our young people. They live in the shallowness – or, better said, the shallows – of American Jewry. They can not understand their Judaism. If they do not understand, they cannot appreciate. If they do not appreciate, they cannot be

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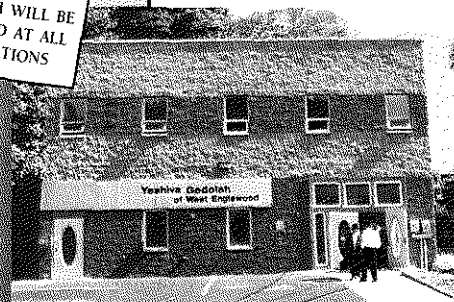
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enthusiastically involved, and it is not meaningful to them. If it is not meaningful, they are on their way to dropping out. *Dropping out is not our main enemy; superficiality and ignorance are.*

THE NEED TO BELONG

There is another side to the coin. Every human being has an extreme need to belong. It is a need that reaches deep into the human soul, and it grasps even at the most introverted of personalities. Yet, it does not even register in one's mind in an intellectual way any more than being hungry or tired, and therefore it frequently escapes conscious analysis. It is there, and it pulls at man, and it does not let go.

In the past, even non-religious people identified themselves as being Jewish. They felt part of something greater than themselves. When a person does not find identity in his Judaism, he will look elsewhere. The *baalei teshuva* realize that they have no identity in their original society, and therefore they seek their identity in the Torah. The painful reality today is that there are people in our own society, the society that *baalei teshuva* are joining, who do not have this crucial need addressed in their lives and they look elsewhere.

Jewish identity can only come from feeling secure and comfortable in one's Judaism. If a person is not comfortable with being a Jew, or where he is as a Jew – in whatever community he lives, or yeshiva he attends – he loses a sense of identity and he will always seek to replace that loss. The popularity of national sports teams across the country can be attributed to this phenomenon.

These two forces – the lack of meaning and the lack of identity – feed off each other. If my life in my society has no meaning to it, I feel detached from that society, and I am no longer bound to it. On the reverse side, if I lack an identity in the society in which I live, then it will eventually become meaningless to me, as I seek to find a place where I feel I belong.

Many accurate points have been made regarding children who do not feel accepted by their parents, their peers, or their *rebbe'im*. A strong correlation exists between children from broken homes and dysfunctional families, children who are not part of the "in" crowd, children who were ejected from the classroom, and children who grow into adults and leave us. This lack of acceptance is real, and it is deadlier than can ever be imagined, but it is not the direct cause of the dropout problem. If a person is secure in his identity as a Jew, then he will not stop being a Jew because one segment of the Jewish populace does not accept him. While it is true that a lack of acceptance can cause a lack of identity, it is the lack of identity that causes the dropping out, not the lack of acceptance.

THE REMEDY

What it is not...

Before outlining a remedy, we must recognize what the remedy is *not*. "Fun," in and of itself, in or out of yeshiva, will not solve the problem. In general, fun activities help us relax and temporarily forget our problems; they can even provide the basis for bonding, which offers a format for further *hashpa'a*. But fun activities do not bring happiness. Happiness is an outgrowth of accomplishment, which comes as a result of effort... sometimes painful effort. Watering down Torah learning, making success easier and painless, is the dumbing down of our Judaism. Good PR cannot replace substance, and a person's *neshama* will sense the difference. Merely telling someone that he is a good boy, and that you like him, without giving him basis to believe that you mean it, is a false injection of temporary self-esteem, and a cosmetic cover for a deeper problem. The voids of meaning and identity continue to plague him.

Among the numerous, unmotivated, and even motivated teens with a broad range of problems whom I've met, one common denominator is this lack of understanding of basic Judaism, its depth and warmth. They frequently ask,

"What do I gain in this world from Judaism?" "How do I benefit from being *frum*?" They fail to feel secure in their Jewish identity and to realize that their existence matters. They yearn to be understood and long to understand as their souls' craving for meaning cries out deep inside them. When these issues are addressed, these teens' directional signal changes from downwards to upwards, and subsequently, their other obstacles can now be successfully dealt with.

... And what it is

How can one find meaning, freshness, and vitality in actions that are repeated every day?... The answer is through growth. In order for my Judaism to be new every day, it has to be greater every day. It has to be something to which I can apply myself and can constantly feel attainment.

Growth is achieved through setting goals. When a person aspires towards something greater, his life has meaning. When he is part of something greater, his life has identity. *Those goals must be in Torah, for that is the essence of being Jewish.*

A teenager with goals in Torah, who identifies with a yeshiva or community, is protected from the obstacles of the

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world. He spiritually nourishes himself from the wellspring of Torah. A teenager without these goals will become a teenager without growth, and eventually without identity. Such a life is spiritually empty, and is the breeding ground for the rebellion and misery of our troubled youth. A sense of true purpose and value is what will give meaning to our children and will keep them from the emptiness that fills their world. (Of course, we can insert the word "adult" in place of "teenager," and "ourselves" in place of "children," and the above paragraph will be equally true.)

We have to imbue our children with the recognition that we are the "*Am Segula*." We are special, and therefore different. We must convey to them a deep feeling of Jewish pride. There is no greater loss to the son of the king than robbing him of his identity – that is, not explaining to him who he is, his responsibilities and privileges. *Mitzvos* take on a different dimension when we view them in this context. They are opportunities to be utilized and cherished. Torah becomes life's handbook. For years, the *Sefer HaChinuch* and *Taamei HaMitzvos* were taught to children at the *Shabbos* table, teaching them the reasons for *mitzvos*. Understanding leads to appreciation.

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. Many successful *b'nei Torah* in *Beis Midrash* allocate time in their daily schedules to learn these topics. We should encourage our children to discover these topics earlier, to spend their

free time exploring them. It is fertile ground for building up Jewish pride and understanding, and it fills free time with stimulating and engrossing challenges.

CROWDING THE SCHEDULE, TOUCHING THE SOURCE

Our teens are faced with much unstructured time. If their time is not filled with something positive, it will be filled with negative influences. Friday afternoon, *Shabbos*, *Motza'ei Shabbos* and Sunday afternoon allow too much freedom. The momentum of the previous week's growth is lost and they begin a new week at a deficit. It is worthwhile to implement a system whereby older *bachurim* spend time with younger boys. It benefits both groups. The younger boys have an opportunity to learn and gain from older role models. They will relate and open up to them, providing positive peer pressure. At the same time, older *bachurim* learn and grow as they guide others. Nothing creates a sense of self-satisfaction like being needed and giving to others: The greatest gift that one can give and *chessed* that one can perform is teaching Torah and helping another develop into a *ben Torah*. Everyone gains from this situation. Done properly, this has been proven to have an overwhelming success rate.

One of the most effective tools of motivation and, therefore, prevention is *iyun tefilla*. Spending one half hour daily, learning the purpose of *tefilla*, its explanations and its depth, guiding students in concentration in *tefilla* allows our students to be acutely aware of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and our purpose and mission in life. Classes in *tefilla* become a basis for many *hashkafa* and *machshava* discussions, both in and out of class. *Tefilla* is engaged in three times daily, so they are aware of the constant results of these sessions. It opens lonely, vulnerable hearts to reach out intimately to The Infinite Creator. *Tefilla* is designed to put us into a frame of mind to be touched by *Hashem*. It opens our hearts to introspection, to understanding, to warmth; and stimulates growth and motivates us to learn further.

A SACRED PARTNERSHIP

When a *Rebbi* makes investments in his *talmidim*, stimulating their growth, he is clearly communicating his love and respect for them, conveying his confidence in them. He thereby cultivates an influential and even intimate relationship with his *talmidim*, which stimulates further growth. Nevertheless, only when parents work together with the *Rebbi* can the child's full potential be achieved. After all, *Chazal* describe parents and *Rabbe'im* as partners.

While the parental role emphasizes making the child successful in *Olam Haze*, and the *Rebbi's* primary focus is *Olam Habba*, these areas of focus are not mutually exclusive. Mandatory parenting groups under the auspices of our *yeshivos* are vital for nurturing this partnership.

AVOIDING A DOUBLE MISCONCEPTION

When a parent questions the integrity of a *Rebbe* or *Menahel*, and accuses the *hanhala* of making its primary concern the reputation of their institution or their egos, and of not working with *mesiras nefesh* and concern for the welfare of the child, they are damaging the relationship between the child and *Rebbe*, between *talmid* and *yeshiva*. A child whose attitude becomes negative towards his *yeshiva* will not absorb the goals of the *yeshiva*. Moreover, the above parent will not inform the *Rebbe* of situations and problems within the home that may influence the child's behavior and performance in the classroom. A child also senses this, and feels uncomfortable communicating his feelings to people in authority, or asking questions about topics that trouble him. This will cause the *talmid* to seek identity and support amongst peers outside the *yeshiva*, whom he mistakenly perceives to be friends who care.

Only when parents and *talmidim* realize that we are all on the same team, can all of these issues be successfully resolved. ■



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The *Gemora* (Succa 46 a-b) teaches us one of the myriad of ways in which G-d is not bound by laws of nature

"Come and see how the ways of the Holy One Blessed be He are not like those of man. In man's world, an empty vessel can be filled while a full one cannot. But in the ways of G-d, a full vessel can be filled and an empty one cannot as it says 'If you surely listen' - if you listen, you will hear more; if not, you will hear nothing." (A similar idea is expressed regarding charity. "Asser te'asser - give money [for charity] in order to become wealthy.")¹

The usual laws of nature dictate that when you give away something, you have less. Similarly, when you are listening, your ability to otherwise attend is reduced. Apparently, the opposite is true when one is expending for Torah and *mitzvos*. Rather than diminished, the giver is enriched.

If we apply these ideas to the sphere of Torah education, a sharp distinction emerges between the business world and that of the yeshiva. In business, companies compete and vie for the same resources. In order to preserve their share of the market, they scrupulously avoid sharing information or customers

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with one another while gladly steering less profitable business in the direction of their competitors. Do the same practices apply to yeshiva education?

Many *yeshivos* inadvertently assume that very competitive posture as they vie for the best students and reputation. For very understandable reasons, they actively recruit the "best" students and the most impressive families. While some competition is both healthy and conducive to growth, there are community-wide issues and challenges in which cooperation and unity between Torah institutions enrich and benefit everyone involved. The schools that work together are indeed the full vessels that expand as they contain more.

Choosing Cooperation over Competition

One proof of the "profitability" of cooperation-versus-competition is the highly successful partnership between the various *yeshivos* of the Rockaways, Five Towns and Nassau County. In 1992, nine (now ten) local schools joined to sponsor special education classes for learning disabled children and formed an umbrella organization called CAHAL².

Today, ב"ה, CAHAL and its participating schools are sponsoring ten classes servicing over 80 learning disabled children in mainstream academic settings. No single school had the space or resources to service these children, and this was only accomplished because of the willingness of these institutions to work together.

When the crisis of rebellious teens came to the fore, these communities capitalized on their success at an elementary school level and forged a part-

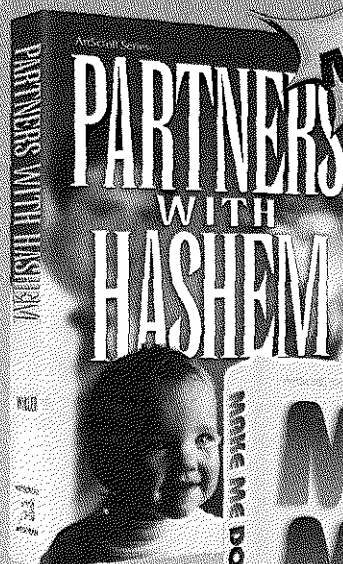
nership of all of the local high schools. What emerged is TOVA³ which is a "mentoring" program for "at risk" teens governed and directed by the principals of all of the participating schools and the various *Vaadei Ha'Rabbanim*.

Briefly, the program works as follows: Students within the respective schools are identified by teachers or administration as "at risk" for academic failure, emotional distress, substance abuse or comparably marginal behaviors. At this early stage of the student's downfall, more subtle signs such as stylish clothing or grooming, placement of *yarmulke*, immodesty of dress, use of vulgar language or modern teen lingo can be harbingers of potential problems. These teens are referred to the TOVA social worker for a screening and needs assessment. Appropriate referrals are made for tutoring, remediation and/or counseling which is monitored and followed by the social worker.

In addition, each child is assigned a mentor hired, as well, by the collective schools and *rabbanim*. These mentors are often dynamic and engaging personalities steeped in Torah observance, but sufficiently familiar with contemporary teen culture to relate and allow for an open exchange. The mentors visit each child in school, providing supplemental educational assistance, or alternative learning for those teens returning to "turn off" to the standard *Limudei Kodesh* curriculum. All of this is done under the tutelage and direction of the individual school's administration. In the evenings and on weekends, the mentors meet with their teens for meals and/or recreational activities. They gradually emerge as both a role model and friend positioned somewhere

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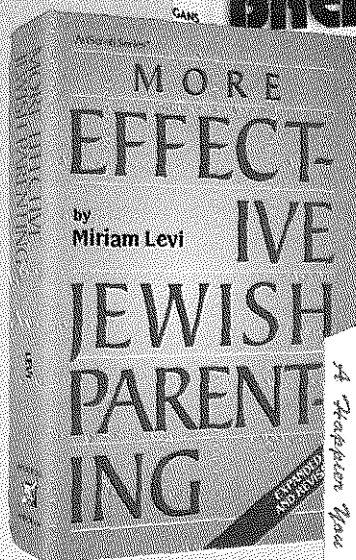
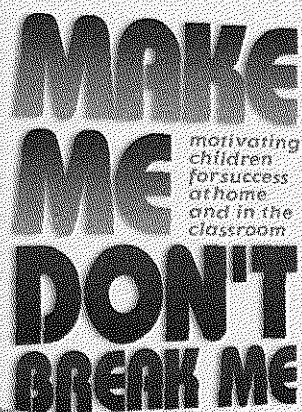
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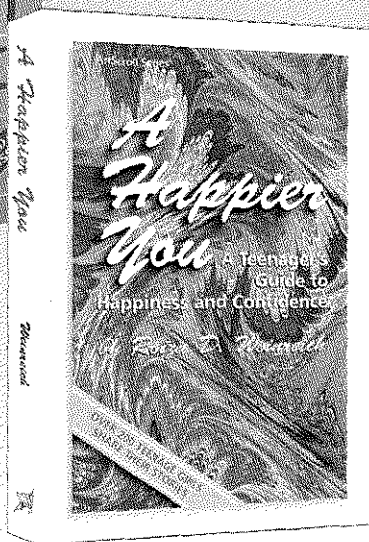
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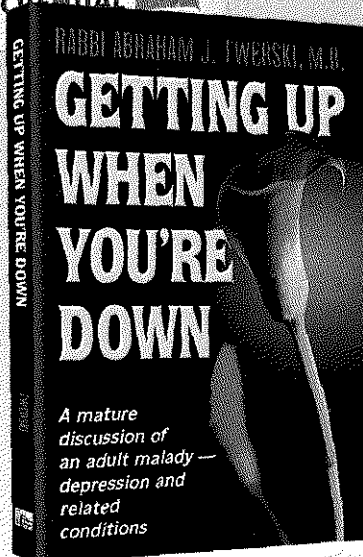
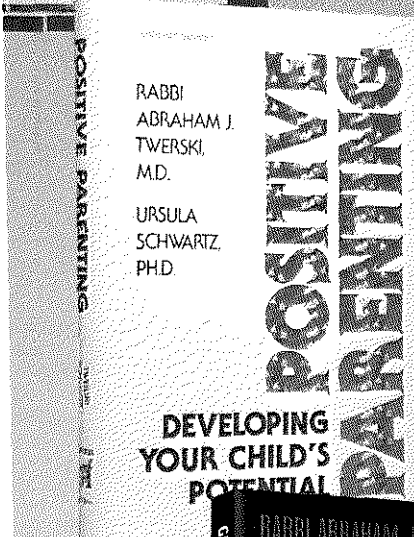
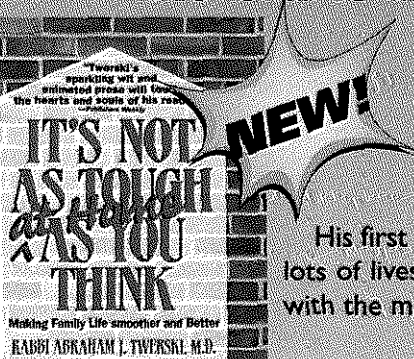
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between the adult world and that of the teen's contemporaries.

Several times a year, the principals of TOVA's participating schools meet to review the program and discuss the needs of these vulnerable students. Halachic direction is regularly provided by representative rabbis from within the community.

The TOVA Advantage

There are two essential ingredients to TOVA's success. As a school-based program, TOVA is able to effectively address learning problems so often at the root of the teen's ultimate disillusionment and alienation. TOVA is also in a position to partially relieve the

burden on the schools to address the needs of these teenagers. It is not uncommon for both the child and *Rebbi* to welcome the break afforded by the mentor's visit. No less important, the school represents the *kehilla* to our children. By channeling our efforts in that context, we are promoting the teen's sense of belonging and affiliation within the Torah observant community.

Since all local schools and rabbinic organizations are working together, no single institution is saddled with challenging students who can so readily drain the school's resources and blemish its reputation. The burden (or blessing) of educating these teens is equally shared. The universality of the program both minimizes costs and facilitates fund raising for a relatively manageable budget. (In fact, there was a recent meeting, under the auspices of *gedolei Torah*, of the principals of local girls' high schools in a major *chareidi* community with the goal of replicating the TOVA model.) The schools' and community's willingness to work together is also a message to the nearly marginal teen that, for the sake of *Klal Yisroel*, we are willing to put differences aside and include in our midst those that do not necessarily fully embrace our particular practices and ideology.

It was on a Thursday night over a meal that one youngster handed over two Friday night rock concert tickets to his TOVA mentor, stating, "You better hold these – 'cause if I have them, I'll go." It is a safe assumption that the sense of acceptance he feels from his mentor, and renewed affiliation with the Torah community and way of life, prompted the forfeiture of those tickets. That acceptance and sense of success was originally bred and nourished by the willingness of his community schools and rabbanim to work together for the overriding needs of our children.

With every child saved, the collective vessel that is our *yeshivos* gets more filled – and has abundantly more room. ■

¹ Shabbos 119 and elsewhere

² Communities Acting to Heighten Awareness and Learning.

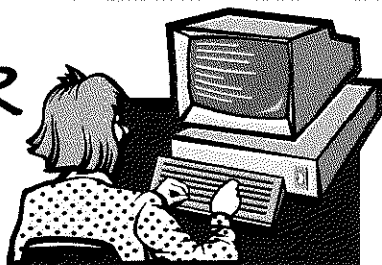
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The "At Risk Child:"

Early Identification and Intervention

I. BACKGROUND

In recent years there has been an unfortunate increase in the number of adolescents from *frum* families who have been seriously disruptive, rebellious and defiant. Their parents desperately try to understand the source of their adolescent's problems, which may involve a serious reduction in religious observance, use of drugs or alcohol, refusal to abide by parental rules and/or school truancy. Unfortunately, by the time the situation has grown to such major proportions, it is far more difficult to deal with than had the problem been caught while the child was younger. The purpose of this article is to address some of the ways that parents can identify if their child is at risk for developing such serious diffi-

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Rabbi Shimon Russel, a psychotherapist in private practice with offices in Lakewood and Brooklyn, studied in *yeshivos* in Eretz Yisroel and *Beis Medrash Govoha* in Lakewood, where he received *semicha* from the late *Rosh Hayeshiva* Rabbi Shneur Kotler זצ"ל. A board member of *Nefesh*, The International Network of Orthodox Mental Health Professionals, he recently co-chaired a conference sponsored by *Nefesh* and Ohel Children's Home on children in crisis in the Orthodox community.

culties. We will also present some strategies for intervention.

It is critical to recognize that the cause of serious conduct problems in children can rarely be attributed to a single source. Experts in child psychology usually ascribe such difficulties to the interaction of numerous factors such as temperament, poor peer influences, problematic parent-child interactions, and poor self-concept engendered by repeated academic and/or social failures. An understanding of how these factors can place a child at risk for conduct problems can be an important first step in prevention.

II. RISK FACTORS

Temperament

Even as very young children, differences in basic temperament are evident. While one child can be even tempered, sleep well, and, in general, pose very little in the way of challenge to his or her parents, another child can from infancy on show signs of a difficult temperament. Numerous studies have documented the kind of temperament that places a child "at risk" for later conduct problems. The intense child with a high activity level, distractibility, negative, irritable mood, and difficulty with changes in routine is at greater risk for developing behavioral difficul-

ties than a more placid child. Such children often lack flexibility and have a low frustration tolerance.

Of course, as the *Rambam* makes clear in *Hilchos Dei'os*, biology is not destiny. A child with a difficult temperament can be helped to learn to channel his intensity for good purposes. Parents of such a child, however, should be aware that if they find that the negative in their interactions outweighs the positive, they should seek help in learning how to deal with the special challenges presented by such a child. Relatively short-term efforts when a difficult child is young can prevent a problem from developing that is far harder to deal with when they reach adolescence.

Oppositional Defiant Disorder

It is not at all unusual for children to go through stages where their behavior is mildly defiant or disruptive. In one of the largest studies ever conducted of behavioral difficulties in children, researchers found very high rates of disruptive behaviors in typical children between ages 5 and 9. For example, 46% of the thousand boys in this sample were described by their teachers as at times disruptive, 26% were found to be disobedient and 30% as occasionally "hyperactive." What differentiates the child who is at risk for

more serious and sustained rebelliousness is a pattern of frequent negativistic, hostile, and defiant difficulties that last for at least six months and causes significant impairment in their ability to function well at home, in school or with peers.

This pattern of behaviors, which is called "oppositional-defiant disorder" by mental health professionals, is characterized by some or all of the following: frequent loss of temper, argumentativeness with adults, an active defiance or refusal to comply with adults'

requests or rules, repeated attempts to deliberately annoy people, a tendency to blame others for his or her mistakes or misbehavior, and indifference or resistance towards the performance of *mitzvos*. Such children are also often described as touchy, resentful and easily annoyed by others. They may respond to anger at others by becoming spiteful or vindictive.

This pattern of disruptive behavior is most likely to be found in children born with difficult temperaments. These children are also more likely to have parents who are inconsistent, punitive, or neglectful. A child with symptoms of oppositional-defiant disorder is at risk for developing into an adolescent and/or adult with more serious conduct problems.

Repeated Academic Failure

Another factor that places children at risk for serious conduct problems is that of the child who feels himself or herself to be a failure, relative to his peers because of school failure. Children with learning disabilities, particularly those with significant reading problems or language disorders, often experience repeated academic failure. These children are at risk, at least in part, because the poor self-concept which these difficulties typically engender can make them more vulnerable to negative peer influences

Childhood Depression

Depression in childhood often takes a different form than it does in adults. In addition to depressed mood, difficulties with concentration, and altered sleep and appetite, depression in childhood may also present in the form of irritable and aggressive behavior. The seriously depressed child can be at risk for later behavioral difficulties. Research shows that many adolescents who develop conduct or drug problems had prior bouts of depression as children. As depressed adolescents, they may turn to drugs as a form of self-medication.

The Role of the Parent - Factors in Alienation

What family characteristics are associated with children who are defiant? Researchers have consistently found that a parental discipline style characterized by high levels of yelling, lecturing, criticism and punitiveness or infrequent expression of unconditional love are associated with a drastically increased chance that a child will be non-compliant and rebellious. Of course, this doesn't mean that child misbehavior should be ignored. On the contrary, children with difficult temperaments need even more limits and structure than more easygoing children. The key in dealing with such children is to find the balance between "*s'mol docheh veyemin mekareves*" - setting limits with one hand while providing an atmosphere of love and warmth with the other.

There is an intriguing series of studies on the effects of stress on parenting. Parents who succumb to the myriad of time and financial pressures, which are all too common in our community, are more likely to exhibit parenting practices that are associated with fanning the flames of rebelliousness. Research has documented that parents who feel powerless in their lives are more likely to harshly chastise their children, engage in coercive disciplinary practices and focus on the negative while failing to recognize positive behaviors in their child. Such parenting practices are an almost certain recipe for the exacerbation of behavioral difficulties in at-risk children.

Perhaps the most important stressful situation, which can impact significantly on parenting, is marital difficulties. Children exposed to frequent fights between parents are at risk for a variety of behavioral problems. These children learn from their parents that the way of dealing with frustration and anger is to lash out at others. The parents in families with high levels of mar-



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ital distress are also more likely to engage in inconsistent discipline, a major risk factor for childhood behavior problems.

Finally, since approximately half of mothers who are in a distressed marriage have been found to be suffering from significant levels of depression, it is important to understand the interaction between parental depression and the development of conduct problems in children. Since irritability is often a component of depression, depressed parents are more likely to respond to misbehavior in an unproductive, emotional manner. Furthermore, the pessimism inherent in depression makes it more likely that there will be a focus on the negative in the child's behavior. Such children may come to think that they can't win since any efforts at improvement are squelched when their depressed parent fails to recognize these attempts.

Reactions and Judgments

While reacting over-emotionally to defiant behaviors in children can exacerbate their behavioral difficulties, the other side of the coin – not dealing with behavioral problems – is equally dangerous. Furthermore, when parents are unable to give their child a sense of consistent love and attention they may place their child in danger of turning to acting out peer groups as substitute sources for unconditional love and acceptance. Lack of family cohesiveness, insufficient parental involvement, and failure to adequately supervise a child are among the most commonly cited contributors to childhood hostility and defiance. For example, one study that followed children from early childhood to adulthood found that parents who connected to their children by spending time with them, having discussions, and caring enough to supervise their activities with friends were far more likely than other parents to raise children who were well-behaved and respectful.

Notwithstanding the above, we urge parents, friends and *mechanchim*, to recognize that often times, poor parental treatment of the situation was the result of the problems and not its cause. Remember, "Al todin es chavercho ad shetagi'a limekomo." It is impossible to imagine the fear and pain felt by parents, as the crisis develops within their home, and how that fear can cause even the best parents to err in their judgment of and reaction to their children's behavior. The more supportive and non-judgmental friends, family and *mechanchim* are of parents going through a crisis with a child, the less the parents will feel ashamed and embarrassed, and their ability to deal with the situation will be enhanced.

III. INTERVENTIONS:

Identifying the Problem

One of the most effective interventions for the problem of at-risk children is to identify and treat the problem that places the child at risk as early as possible. If, relative to peers, your child is more aggressive or non-compliant, assessment by a qualified mental health professional should be considered.

This does not necessarily mean that regular counseling will be recommended. Recommendations can range from a single meeting, where the counselor will provide guidelines on how to deal with your difficult child, to ongoing sessions, which will combine parenting guidance, individual sessions and consultation with the school. As noted earlier, since marital conflict or parental depression can increase the chances of minor behavioral difficulties in your child becoming major, it is important to deal with these problems, as well. This is clearly a situation where the best way to help your child is to get help for yourself.

Family-based Interventions

Dealing with children calmly but firmly is at the heart of effective prevention of serious behavior problems. Consequently, understanding

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the source of parental emotionalism is crucial. Perhaps the greatest contributor to excessive anger at children is the tendency to assign blame for the child's misbehavior either to one's self or to the child. A belief on the part of the parent that their problematic child is acting that way because something must be wrong with their competence as a mother or father can increase the chance that a parent will respond emotionally and unproductively. It is human nature to respond to feelings of incompetence and powerlessness by lashing out at others – in this case, the child. Unfortunately, such an emotional response typically yields the opposite of what is called for. The solution feeds the problem and the situation is exacerbated in a manner that makes it more likely that the child will misbehave in the future.

Special sensitivity is therefore demanded of *mechanchim*, who often are in the unenviable position of regularly pointing out to parents their children's problems. It is critical that in doing so they not make parents feel even more incompetent than they already do.

Similarly, if the parents view their child's behavior as willful and a reflection that there is something seriously wrong with their child's *middos*, this too will fuel a counterproductive emotional reaction. In contrast, if the parent views the problematic behavior as stemming from a biological predisposition

rather than from a deliberate, or lazy behavior, then their response is far more likely to be calm and productive in helping their child's behavior change.

The following interventions can help minimize defiance in at-risk children:

- Try to anticipate which situations are most likely to trigger rebellious behavior by learning the patterns behind your child's explosiveness. Parents might find it useful to keep a diary of a typical week in your family's life. The diary would note each episode of misbehavior in your child, with a particular emphasis on what the trigger was for each incident. Eventually, a pattern should emerge which should allow you to anticipate which situations are most likely to elicit explosive or non-compliant behavior. Parents often find that use of distraction, empathy or logic, which typically are ineffective once the child has lost his temper, is far more likely to be effectual if the situation is caught before their child loses control.

- Recognize that while you may have no immediate control over your child's misbehavior you do have significant control over the consequences. At-risk children do best when expectations at home and in school are clearly spelled out and consequences are immediate, consistent and calmly implemented. It is equally important that positive behavior be consistently recognized and reinforced. A number of helpful parent training books are available (e.g. Greene, R., *The Explosive Child*; Clark, L., *SOS Help for Parents* (2nd edition) Parents Press), as are parenting classes. It is crucial to keep in mind, that should behavioral difficulties increase in frequency or severity, consultation with a child mental health professional should be obtained.

- Consider carefully which battles are worth fighting. If the parent-child relationship is dominated by frequent fighting, it is often very helpful to make a list of which behaviors must be dealt with immediately and which can be safely ignored. For example, ignoring verbal bickering between siblings and letting them work out minor differences by themselves fre-

quently reduces the frequency and intensity of sibling fighting. Of course, any issue involving your child's safety or the safety of others must be dealt with immediately.

Anger Control Strategies For the Child

Children who are at risk often need help in being taught the necessary skills needed to control their anger. Seriously consider seeking professional help to learn how to teach these skills to your child without antagonizing him/her further. Teaching the "right" skills, with the "wrong" attitude always fails.

School-Based Interventions

1. Close cooperation with the school is necessary to diagnose and remediate any learning difficulties. Early identification of language problems, learning disabilities or attention-deficit disorder is crucial. If difficulties are suspected, evaluation by specialists in these areas should be conducted as early as possible. With early intervention there is a greater chance for success.

2. Consider having a tutor/mentor for a child experiencing academic failure. This person can provide the dual role of helping the child cope and improve academically, while at the same time serving as a mature sounding board to help guide the child through difficult relationship issues

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Early identification and intervention in dealing with children who present with significant oppositional and defiant behavior in childhood can prevent them from developing into more serious difficulties in adolescence. Most children and families are resilient. Thus, taking a proactive approach in dealing with behavioral problems when they are more easily manageable should *B'ezras Hashem* spare us from having to deal with rebellious and alienated adolescents. ■

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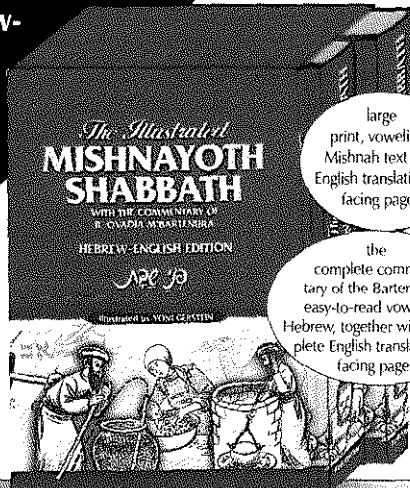
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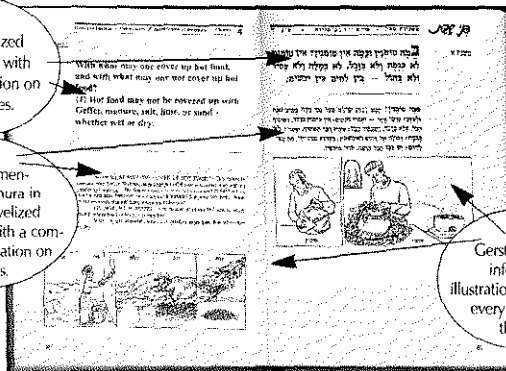
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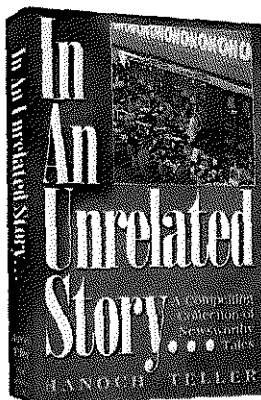
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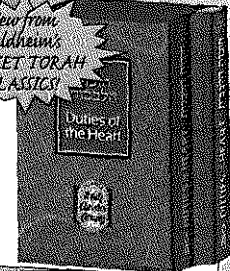
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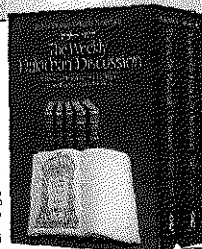
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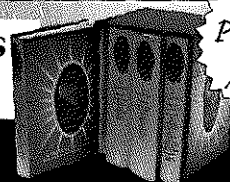
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Can "Doing Their Year" in Israel Do Them In?

"Doing their year" in Israel has become a given in many families. Through their years of Bais Yaakov and Yeshiva Ketana, many children know that just beyond high school lies their post-graduation year in Eretz Yisrael. Many of us remember our own year abroad, steeped in *kedusha* and *devekus*, remaining in our hearts as a constant source of inspiration. It is only natural that veterans of a year in Israel look with excited anticipation toward their child's opportunity. But times have changed.

Whether we are *frum* from birth or *ba'alei teshuva*, we recognize that the very fabric of our children's lives has been altered from ours. Why then should we assume that all of today's children will find their year in Israel the positive experience

Yeshara Gold, author and journalist, is involved in *kiruv* along with her husband, Rabbi Shalom Gold, in Jerusalem's Old City, where they make their home.

that was ours?

Undeniably, much of Israel has embraced the lowest common denominator of the West and made it their own, and this is reflected in the daily papers, monthly periodicals, and media reports on "special events."

But what does this have to do with our precious *neshamos*, our children who are made from much finer and protected stuff?

According to Rabbi Yaakov Orimland (*Menahel Ruchani* of Yeshiva Shalom Rav and Sha'arei Bina Women's Seminary in Tsefas), who deals with teen-agers of religious background who are at risk – or who have slipped over the brink – we must rethink, or at the very least, *re-plan* our child's year in Israel.

In the past, the Israeli exposure served to consolidate and add a deep spiritual dimension to a child's education.

"Even for those whose *emuna* and observance were less than optimal," says Rabbi Orimland, "the experience of learning and living in *Artzeinu Hakedosha* had a positive effect." Rabbi Orimland points out that for the majority of the children who spend a year or two in Israel, the experience is indeed successful, and can even be transforming yet he warns that cautionary measures must be taken for all.

The enrollment of most seminaries and yeshivos is often so full that there is not always ample supervision for all students. And because the parents are not in constant contact with them, the children know they can get away with conduct and activities that would never go at home.

To insure an uncompromisingly positive experience, Rabbi Orimland not only encourages the parents who opt for sending their children abroad to maintain their close *kesher* (bond) with their teen; he also stresses the importance of having someone else, in addition to school personnel, keep an eye and ear out for their comings and goings, and be in touch with their swings of mood and circumstance. "Many of these impressionable kids are experiencing emotional pain and turmoil that can be readily relieved by communicating or by just engaging in some plain talking."

Not every child is ready at age eighteen to go away to study and live abroad. After deliberating on the child's unique situation, there should be no stigma or peer pressure on those who decide to remain stateside. After all, there are outstanding yeshivos *gedolos* and seminaries on American shores, as well.

True, hundreds of youths blossom and make great strides by experiencing the *kedusha* of Eretz Yisrael. But alongside the *kedusha* that is so very great in the land, the *tuma* is also rampant. It can exact a tragic influence on our girls and boys. We cannot afford to dispatch our sons and daughters across the seas without adequately investigating what awaits each, as individuals. ■

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Making Our "Bayis" a Mobile Home



WHEN THE SHTETL WALLS CRUMBLE

The world in which we are raising our children is utterly different from the one that we grew up in. When I close my eyes and try to peek at that world through the eyes of my children, there is not much that I recognize.

One of the most radical differences is in the way in which we define our own homes. There was a time, not so long ago, when each member of the family could clearly recognize what was "home," which dimension was sacrosanct, where the space was private. When one physically crossed the threshold of one's home, it was understood that they were stepping into another domain, a *reshus hayachid*, the domain of the family. What was outside had to remain there, unless invited to cross the threshold with you. And like the age-old concept of *bayis*, a *bayis* contains, encompasses, surrounds, at the same time that it stands as a physical symbol excluding that which must remain outside its walls.

It was not so long ago that many of our grandparents lived in a *shtetl*, protected by a double lock, that of the home and that of the community. Just as when the *shtetl* wall crumbled, and we faced new challenges that required new responses, so too, as the protective wall of *bayis* is penetrated, a new response is required.

Rabbi Hutner זצ"ל once remarked,

Mrs. Devorah Greenblatt is the director of Youth Services for Project YES.

"Don't think you will protect your children from the *gasse* (street). Your children will be exposed to more *tuma* (defilement) going to the corner to buy a soda than your grandfather did his whole life in the *shtetl*." There are children from every community, every type of Orthodox upbringing, whose *frum* homes and yeshiva education have not been a sufficient barrier against the ills of society. What is the solution?

Recently, several yeshiva students went one night to daven at the kever of a great tzaddik. As the group reached the cemetery, one of the boys held back. Realizing he was a kohein, his friend came up with an ingenious solution. Finding a discarded refrigerator box on the street, he pried open the top, and fashioned a handle on either side. Voila – the bachur was in his portable bayis within the cemetery.

While I certainly cannot comment on the halachic viability of this scheme, the image is valuable. We are all like that *kohein* whose mission requires him to separate himself from *tuma*, and yet finds himself in the cemetery.

This must be part of a two-pronged response. First, we must fortify the walls of the *bayis* that our children carry with them by strengthening all of the relationships within the home. Second, we have to teach our children how to deal with failure. All the protection in the world cannot prevent a problem, but if children know how to put their own mistakes into perspective, then the problem does not have

to evolve into a catastrophe.

OVERCOMING THE PULL OF THE STREET

In seeking to foster the relationships within one's home, we must realize that today it is not sufficient for things to be just OK. To fight the glamour, glitz and pull of the street, we must have an alternative that is real and more enticing. That alternative is passion, and our children must see our passion. Take commitment, sprinkle it with devotion, warm it on the flame of emotion, and you have passion. Rabbi Wolbe says in his *sefer*, *Planting and Building in Education*, that one half of the formula for success with children is *Shalom Bayis*. Though the love between husband and wife is private, it spills over and warms and envelops the other family members. Rabbi Wolbe refers to this feeling as the warmth of the home, a necessary atmosphere in which the children can flourish.

Do our children know we are passionate about them? Not just about what they should not do, but also what they mean to us, how much we enjoy being with them, how much we believe in them. Do our children ever see our passion for *Yiddishkeit*? Do they see us cry? Do we shed tears when we are move by a *shiur* or by a righteous person we have met? Do we ever shed a tear of sadness for the plight of another Jew? Or a tear of joy for their *simcha*?

Parents have a natural influence over their children. During adolescence, that is challenged. One way to maintain that influence, necessary if we are to guide them, is to convince them that we are on the same team as them. As long as the relationship is adversarial – if you win, I lose – there are no winners. Once our children come to believe that their success is our success, and their setbacks are ours as well, having nothing at all to do with what the neighbors will say, we can exercise influence over our children and give guidance to them.

There are other factors that can lessen our ability to influence our teenage children. We live in a world in which the concept of “*kavod*” (honor) has been lost. There is no position or person whose honor is not challenged. *Kavod* is the ability to feel the weightiness of someone because we maintain a vision of the whole person. Our ability to diminish another person sets in when we fragmentize them: the way they look, dress, etc. rather than who they are as a whole person. We learn this from Chazal when we are taught “Judge *kol ha’adam* (lit. every man) favorably” – as long as we view him as *kol ha’adam*, all of the person, we can maintain a focus on what is positive. An adolescent (particularly a girl) starts to see herself as fragmented. Her body image, her peer relations, are now seen as who she is rather than as aspects of her self. We need to help our children maintain their own vision of themselves as whole, thereby reducing the influence of any of the singular “parts.” This is done through interacting with *kavod* with our children.

When we must criticize, the *Rambam’s* laws of *tochacha*¹ must be applied. The three conditions are: (1) We may never criticize in public. (2) The words and the tone must be soft. And (3) we must convey to them that we want what is best for them, not what is best for us – and believe me, they know the difference. A young person who sees *kavod* modeled in the home in all the rela-

“Please, Hashem, watch over my children. Please help me to raise them as *yirei Shamayim*, devoted to Your Torah.”

tionships there, learns *kavod atzmi* – self-respect – which is a protective shield that a person takes with him/her into all situations.

Since all our best efforts cannot put our children in a protective cocoon, and difficulties will inevitably come their way, it is essential to teach our children how to deal with failure. *David Hamelech* ע”ה says, “*Vechatasi l’negdi samid* – My sin is always before me.” I once heard an insightful explanation in the name of the Satmar *Rebbe* זצ”ל. “*Tamid*” is usually translated as continuously. The Satmar *Rebbe*, however, said that *tamid* means “always at the appropriate time.” We must always remember our wrong actions at the appropriate times, whether it is on *Yom Kippur Kattan*, during the month of *Ellul* or *Asseres Yemei Teshuva*. The rest of the time, we need not remember; we must forget, to allow us to move forward.

THERE IS A ROAD BACK

One of the saddest things that I encounter at Project YES are girls whose perception of themselves is that they are not *frum*. One of my first Project YES cases was a fourteen-year-old Bais Yaakov girl who had been asked to leave her school in the fall of ninth grade. She had a difficult personal situation, and when I spoke to her, she related her story stoically and in a monotone. In over two hours talking, she cried only once, as she told me the following: One Friday night, desperate

to get out of her house, where she had been locked in for a week, she climbed out of a ground floor window, thereby turning on the light on the alarm panel. “Now I am a *mechalleles Shabbos*,” she sobbed. She certainly made a serious mistake. The question is, *What is our message to her? Is there no road back?*

How do our children see us deal with our own failures? Do they see us struggle trying to grow in our *Yiddishkeit*, and in that process sometimes having setbacks for which we have remorse? We want our children to “become” committed Torah Jews. Are we also in the process of “becoming,” or are we finished products? To be alive is to struggle. It is good to let our children in on that ongoing struggle. They may be motivated to struggle also.

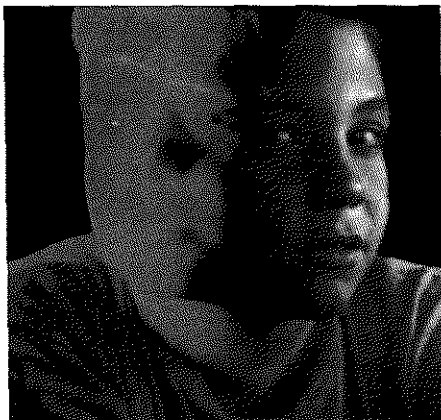
Finally, we must teach our children not only to be *frum*, but to actively cultivate a relationship with *הקב"ה*. Too many teens say to me, “Why should I be *frum*?” They see only an external set of rules and miss the essence entirely. We must teach our children through our own behavior, not through lecture, that our Creator is *tov u’mativ*, that He loves us no matter what. To teach them that “we cannot get through one day without His direct guidance” is indispensable. Knowledge of Hashem’s presence and love is life-sustaining nourishment.

At the recent *levaya* of a *tzaddeikes*, her son-in-law spoke of the impact of entering her kitchen late one night, after the house had long gone to sleep. He saw his mother-in-law at her kitchen table deep in conversation. Not wanting to disturb her, he paused in the doorway. He realized that there was no one else in the kitchen, and the telephone was resting in its cradle. “Please, Hashem,” she was saying, “watch over my children. Please help me to raise them as *yirei Shamayim*, devoted to Your Torah.”

All of this while she was still well, before the two-year illness which claimed her life. If her son-in-law was forever changed by this encounter, need we speak of the effect on a son or daughter?

¹ *Hilchos De’os* 6:7

Report From



Ground Zero

AL REGEL ACHAS... ON ONE FOOT

If we are going to have an impact on the frightening trend of young men and women abandoning the teachings of our yeshiva and Bais Yaakov system, we will need to improve the overall quality of our home life. There is a common inclination to lay the blame for these problems on families in crisis. This type of thinking, however, does not do justice to such a difficult and complex issue. We must avoid the tendency to attribute all of the blame on the "broken homes," and work to minimize the tension levels in *all* of our homes.

Several years ago, at an Agudath Israel National Convention, *Mori Verabi* Rabbi Avrohom Pam שליט"א quoted The Steipler זצ"ל as having said, "*Hatzlocha mit kinder* (success with one's children) is 50% *shalom bayis*, and 50% *tefilla*."

One thing is painfully clear. Our home life is under assault. It is not merely the unraveling of the moral fabric of secular society and its effect on (even) our insular community. Our homes are under assault. Longer work hours for both spouses, the exponential increase of our *simcha* schedule and social obligations, and the increased burden of providing *parnassa* for our growing families are taking their toll on the tranquility and *simchas hachayim* (*joie de vivre*) of our home life. Many of us are able to maintain this juggling act and keep all of these balls in the air

at once. Many, however, are finding it very, very difficult.

Those who deal with at-risk teens almost unanimously agree that the greatest factor that puts children at risk is lack of *simcha* and *shalom bayis*² at home.

Yes, some children just seem to be born "difficult." Some have an ornery disposition. Others have an innate propensity to challenge authority. Some are extremely restless and simply not cut out for a ten-hour school day. Many have significant learning disabilities.

Experience has shown, however, that children from warm, loving homes have the best chance of overpowering these difficulties and becoming well-adjusted adults despite having risk factors³.

But children can never get used to bickering. Stress. Unhappiness. Negative comments. Emotional abuse. These create unhappy, distracted children who are unable to concentrate in school. They develop an intense distrust of authority figures, and harbor a simmering rage at an adult world that cannot seem to get its act together and provide them with a peaceful environment in which to grow up and thrive. This holds true for all households – including two-parent ones.

So, a short response to the frightened parents who ask – *al regel achas* – what they can do to 'protect' their family from the ravages of the counterculture that threatens their boys and girls is the poignant comment of Rabbi Chaim Pinchas Sheinberg שליט"א, *Rosh Yeshiva* of Torah Ohr⁴, that the most important thing that parents need to maintain in

their home is a sense of happiness, *simchas hachayim*.

As vigilant as we must be to shield our children from the influences of secular society, ultimately, our greatest defense against this onslaught is to create a happy and stable home life for our children. We must keep our eye on that goal and do everything possible in our power to see to it that the quality of our home life is as good as possible.

A TIME FOR ACTION

It is not the intent of these lines to discuss the broad-based issues related to the topic of at-risk teens. We do, however, need to implement some initiatives and solutions that relate to the topic of this article – the improvement of our home life.

1. *Shalom Bayis* Classes:

During *shana rishona* (the first year of married life) when a young couple is at the critical stage of developing their relationship, it should become the accepted societal norm⁵ for *both* spouses to attend a series of four, six, or perhaps eight classes on *shalom bayis*. Although the newlywed couple may not think so, this is the ideal time to do this. Young couples have a reasonable amount of discretionary time, and can begin to prepare their home to be a resting place for the *Shechina* and a nurturing environment for their children to thrive in.

Many young men and women lack proper role models for establishing a relationship based on mutual respect and trust, or simply were not exposed to the positive influence of the parents' home

Rabbi Horowitz, *Menahel* of Yeshiva Darchei Noam (Monsey), and director of Project Y.E.S., was last represented in these pages by his tribute to Rabbi Moshe Sherer זצ"ל, "Basic Training" (June '98).

during crucial years. Training helps. Education helps. More so, a good mentor will provide an opportunity for young couples to seek guidance when the inevitable bumps⁶ will occur. Many couples are uncomfortable going to their parents for direction at this critical stage in their lives.

2. Parenting Classes

Here, too, education is the key. It would be naïve to think that any one person has all the answers to the difficult questions that parenting requires. Many, many parents, however, have told me how their home life was immeasurably improved as a result of attending parenting workshops.

At a recent symposium, Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetsky שליט"א related the story of a young woman who was experiencing significant difficulty at home and in school. Professional counseling was recommended. After several sessions, a remarkable improvement was noted by all. Reb Shmuel related that the therapist told him that he had instructed the mother to take her daughter out of school for lunch in a

restaurant and spend at least one hour together, conversing, prior to each session. This, the therapist felt, was far more effective than his time with the young woman.

Similarly, it is great training for a young couple to spend time together growing as parents and sharing in the raising of their children⁷. The practical tips and skills that are imparted at these sessions greatly improve the quality of the home life as parents are trained to deal with the many issues and challenges that they face on a daily basis.

Yes, our parents seem to have done a decent job raising us without attending lectures or reading books, but times have changed and our children are faced with temptations that we never had.

Good parenting skills do not always result in wonderful children. Effective parenting, however, can significantly improve the likelihood that a difficult child will grow into a well-adjusted, productive adult.

3. Strengthening the Kehilla

A woman approached a colleague of

mine at a public gathering. She had been recently divorced and asked him to arrange for someone to take her school-age sons to shul on Shabbos. He related to me that his initial reaction was that a situation like this would be unthinkable in a small town, or in a kehilla-type shul setting. People often speak about children falling through the cracks. The reality is that all too often, it is the families that are falling through the cracks.

In large metropolitan areas, where most Orthodox Jews live, one can daven in several shuls throughout the week without being a member in any of them. Although this may be very convenient for the individual *misppalel*, the family – lost in the anonymity of city life – forgoes the unique protection that the *kehilla* has to offer. An involved Rabbi and *Rebbetzin* guide young couples and their children through the inevitable difficulties that they will encounter. They are there to notice troubling tendencies in *shalom bayis*, the *chinuch* of the children, or any one of a host of issues.

It is critical in the development of a Torah home that the family belong to a *kehilla*, attend *shiurim*, and above all, to actively nurture a relationship with the Rabbi and *Rebbetzin* of the shul. Doing so will add many strands to the communal safety net that we so desperately need.

4. Simcha Schedules

People are always asking what has changed so dramatically (regarding the at-risk teen issue) in the past decade. There are some obvious answers – and more subtle ones. One of those that fall into the latter category is that we are more “stressed out” than any generation ever was. Please allow me to rephrase this. *We are not home enough.* Our family life is unraveling. We are working longer hours in more stressful situations. Perhaps much of this is unavoidable, with the enormous pressure to provide *parnassa* for our growing families. One area, however, where significant improvement is not only possible but absolutely necessary is our *simcha* schedules.

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Our *gedolim* have – for years now – been requesting that we limit conspicuous consumption at our *simchos*. Although there are some exceptions, as a group, we have been reluctant to take their advice⁸. If we cannot or will not bite the bullet for the sake of a lifestyle of *tzeniyus*, then *asei lemaan tinnokos shel beis rabban* – let us do so for the sake of our children.

Every evening that we dress up after a busy workday and travel a half hour to wish a young couple *mazel tov* at a *lechayim* (to be followed by a *vort*, wedding⁹ and *Sheva Berachos*), we are depriving our own children of desperately, desperately needed quiet time with us.

While I am not recommending that we all become social dropouts and refuse to attend any *simchos*, it is clear that we need to limit our time away from home. Our primary obligation, after all, is to raise and nurture the children that *Hashem* blessed us with and whose upbringing He has charged us with.

5. *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov* – an island of tranquility... hopefully.

Shabbos Kodesh. A time for spiritual and emotional rejuvenation. A time for children, relaxation, and family. No telephone calls, no appointments, no distractions. Your children can now get your individual attention as you – and they – unwind from the pressure-filled week. *Me'ein Olam Habba*¹⁰.

Sadly, the hectic nature of our lives is unfortunately spilling over into the last bastion of our home life – *Shabbos* and *Yamim Tovim*. After a forty/fifty-hour school week, when most children would treasure some down time with their parents and family, or simply the luxury of being left alone to unwind, many are subjected to long *Shabbos* meals with company present, where they are expected to behave in a picture-perfect manner. This despite the fact that the entire conversation at the table is geared to the adults¹¹. Children who are naturally shy are pressured into reciting *divrei Torah* in front of strangers. Par-

ents go *Kiddush* hopping until well past noontime – with the unrealistic expectation of coming home to a clean home and relaxed children; or leave their children¹² with friends or relatives to attend weekend *Bar Mitzvas*.

It is of great importance that we pause and take stock of our objective for our *Shabbosos*. We must strive to create – at least once a week – this zone of *menucha* (tranquility) in our homes so that our children can relax and look forward to this special day with their family.

THE 'BROKEN HOME' COMPONENT

Allow me to state the obvious. Children's needs are best served growing up in a two-parent household. Chazal's comment that the *mizbayach* "sheds tears" when a couple divorces needs no elaboration¹³.

Having said that, divorce in and of itself does not consign a child to a bleak educational and social future.

While statistically, children from broken homes are in a high-risk category, it is only so, in my opinion, when there is strife and unhappiness in the child's life. Children can adjust to the painful reality of growing up in a single-parent household – when both parents maturely put their own feelings aside for the sake of the children.

Please allow me to share with you two incidents regarding children from broken homes that I am currently involved with¹⁴. With the help of *Hashem*, I am confident that the first child will mature into a self-confident, well-adjusted young woman. I hope that I am wrong, but I do not share that optimism about the teenager in the second story.

Aviva is a bright six-year old girl attending first grade in a local Bais Yaakov. Her parents divorced four years ago. Aviva lives with her mother, and spends most weekends with her father, who lives in the same community. Her parents are both very involved in her

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chinuch and secular education, even attending Parent-Teacher Conferences together. Recently, Aviva went through a difficult week when she was quite rude to her mother. Her mother's response was to call her ex-husband and discuss the matter with him. Twenty minutes later, the doorbell rang. It was Aviva's father. He took Aviva for a drive and discussed with her the importance of treating her mother with respect. Throughout the following week, Aviva's parents conversed nightly with each other to monitor the situation.

* * *

Yossie's parents divorced three years ago. It was a messy divorce, with endless litigation about joint assets, custody and visitation. Yossie's father threatened to withhold a get until he would receive favorable conditions in the asset distribution. Yossie, then thirteen years old, and his three siblings were made to appear before a judge to respond to highly personal questions about their relationship with the two parents.

This past Yom Kippur was not on the father's court-mandated visitation schedule. (All nine days of Succos were.) Yossie's father asked his ex-wife for permission to spend Yom Kippur locally (he has since moved away from his former community) and meet Yossie in shul for the davening so that "Yossie shouldn't be

the only child in shul without a father." This reasonable request was refused, and he was informed that any attempt on his part to follow through on this plan would result in court action.

Yossie is currently a bitter young man who has been in several yeshivos in the past two years. He spends his nights "hanging out," and has a strained relationship with both his parents.

It is of paramount importance that in the event of a divorce, all parties design a plan of action that will provide the children with the most pleasant home environment that is possible under the circumstances.

THE THIRD PARTNER

For the record, I do not think that children from orphaned homes are included in the high-risk category. Aside from the pledge of the *Ribbono Shel Olam* – the *Avi Hayesomim* – to watch over his special children, anecdotal evidence would indicate that the overwhelming majority of *yesomim* grow to become well-adjusted, very often outstanding young men and women. Fired in the crucible of the pain and loneliness of losing a parent, they often outgrow the inevitable "why me?" phase, mature earlier than their peers, are more sen-

sitive human beings, and become exceptional spouses and parents, having learned at an early age to appreciate life to its fullest. And yes, they usually develop an incredibly close relationship with the surviving parent who raised and nurtured them under such difficult circumstances.

MA TOVU OHALECHA YAAKOV

It is interesting to note that the initial attraction to *Yiddishkeit* for many *chozrei b'teshuva* is not a beautiful *d'var Torah* or deep thoughts of *hashkafa*, but rather their participation in the warm atmosphere of a Jewish family sitting around the *Shabbos* table. Throughout the generations, our homes have always been the anchor in our lives and one of the primary sources of the transmission of our *Mesora* to future generations. And it is in our homes – down in the trenches – that our generation's *milchemes hayeitzer* (battle for spiritual survival) is being fought.

May the *Ribbono Shel Olam* grant us the wisdom and *siyata diShmaya* to create the type of home life for our children that will inculcate them with Torah values and prepare them to transmit our timeless *Mesora* to yet another generation. ■

¹ Ground Zero refers to the epicenter of an explosion – the exact spot where a bomb explodes.

² As the Gemora (Shabbos 23b) clearly indicates, the phrase *shalom bayis* is not limited to harmony between husband and wife (or lack thereof). I refer to the overall sense of tranquility and *simchas hachayim*.

³ It is important to note that there are children who have none of these factors, who come from warm, loving homes, and slip through the cracks nonetheless.

⁴ Rabbi Sheinberg said, "Dovid HaMelech says in *Tehillim* (119, 111), 'Nachalti eidvosecha l'olam ki sasson libi heyima – I am in eternal possession of your statutes, for they are the joy of my heart.'" Rabbi Sheinberg commented that there are two levels of happiness. *Simcha* is an internal contentment with one's position in life. *Sasson* is when the inner peace manifests itself in a display of external happiness. He explained that when raising children, it is not merely enough to attain that ever-elusive goal of inner peace, *simcha*. A sense of happiness and *simchas hachayim*, *sasson*, must emanate from the home in order to create the optimum environment in which to raise

happy, well-adjusted children.

⁵ If our community succeeded in instituting the pre-marital screening test for the dreaded Tay-Sachs disease – as part of the outstanding Dor Yeshorim program – we can marshal our energy and collective talents to initiate *shalom bayis* and parenting classes to eradicate the more common epidemics of divorce and drop-out teens.

⁶ Several mental health professionals have mentioned to me that the birth of the first child, and financial pressure after parental support for the young couple is eliminated, are great sources of stress in young married couples. At that point, however, there is less time for the couples to work on improving their marriage.

⁷ Many *yeshivos* and day schools have initiated a series of parenting workshops that the entire parent body is required to attend. In fact, a *yeshiva* in the New York Metropolitan area actually offers a tuition discount to parents who attend the entire workshop series.

⁸ A must-read is Professor Aaron Twerski's article, "Are Things Bubbling Over?" (*JO*, Feb. '96)

⁹ One area that is in critical need of improvement

is the outrageous 60-90 minute picture session following the *chupa* that has unfortunately become the norm at our *simchos*. Proper planning of weddings must take place to eliminate this needless delay.

¹⁰ Comparable to the World-to-Come

¹¹ I often tell parents that if they wish to get a sample of what they are subjecting their children to – long conversations that are meaningless to some of the participants – they should have one of their teenage children invite a dozen of their friends to the house for a meal. Then both parents should sit quietly for one hour listening to *their* conversation.

¹² Parents should never, ever leave their teenage children at home for *Shabbos* without adult supervision. In today's climate, it is a recipe for disaster – especially in large metropolitan areas.

¹³ A noted therapist recently mentioned to me that he is like the *mizbayach*. The *mizbayach*, he pointed out, was singled out as shedding the tears, since the *mizbayach* seeks *korbanos* everyday.

¹⁴ Names changed to protect the identities of the children and their families.

BECHIRA/FREEDOM OF CHOICE & PSYCHOLOGY

by Rabbi Joseph Elias

The emergence of modern psychology, with its claim to be an exact science, was marked by three crucial ideas:

1. Man is not possessed of a Divine-given soul, but is governed by his physical and psychological apparatus – drives, instincts, compulsions, etc.

2. Freedom of will, *bechira*, is an illusion, since Man's thoughts and actions are determined essentially by his psyche; hence, there is really no moral responsibility. (This is in contrast with the Torah view that while a person is of course circumscribed to a degree by his physical, psychological, and intellectual limitations, this by no means robs him of his freedom of choice.)

3. Religion – including belief in G-d – is merely a construct of Man's mind, meant to serve certain presumed psychological needs.

Obviously, these teachings, and the practitioners who applied them in treating their patients, were – and are – totally unacceptable to the Torah.

The past two decades, however, have been witness to a marked diminution in the respect and popularity once offered to these schools of psychoanalytic theory (Freud et al). Many prevailing schools in psychopathology are rapidly replacing the aforementioned animalistic and deterministic purview of man, with a broader, more systemic, and yes, even somewhat more spiritual brush.

Alternative approaches now dominate the psychotherapeutic frontier, and are employed with increased acceptance, greater efficacy, and usually in

shorter-term duration. These include such schools as cognitive/behavioral techniques, family systems approaches, ego psychology, dynamic advances in psychopharmacology, logotherapy and combinations of the above.

They recognize that mental illness and dysfunctional behavior (when not related to biochemical or genetic processes) reflect one's deficiency in seeing reality properly – whether in interpersonal relationships or in controlling one's own emotions. These mental health practitioners seek to lead the patient to a more correct perception of the world and reality.

These approaches are acceptable – indeed, laudatory – when administered in a Torah-true environment by a therapist who is steeped in Torah values and an uncompromising *gestalt* immersed in Torah *hashkafa*. The patient is then secure; his belief system will always be fortified, never challenged. (See *Igros Moshe*, Yoreh De'ah 1157, p.77 for a discussion of the need

to utilize Orthodox, mental health professionals.)

Traditionally, *Rabbanim*, *Rabbe'im*, and *Mechanchei Hador* have always played a crucial role in helping those in need – and they continue to do so today. However, the complexities of today's world and its accompanying stressors, wreak unprecedented, emotional havoc on fragile psyches and vulnerable families. In this age of specialization, we are fortunate that the greater Torah community contains within it scores of men and women who are able to meld their clinical expertise with their unyielding Torah *weltanschauung*. These professionals work in tandem with their own carefully selected *Rabbanim/Poskim*, who mentor the therapeutic process and ensure its fidelity to *halacha* and Torah *hashkafa*.

Failing to make appropriate use of these services – or even delaying to call until it may be too late – is clearly inadvisable. As always, Rabbinic guidance should be sought for appropriate referral. ■

Rabbi Elias, a member of the editorial board of *The Jewish Observer*, is the author of a number of published works, including a new translation and commentary on Rabbi S.R. Hirsch's *The Nineteen Letters* (Feldheim). He acknowledges Dr. Yaakov Salomon for his valuable contribution to this discussion.

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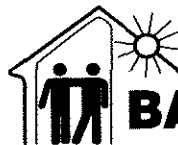
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Helping the "At-Risk Child"

A Guide to Therapy

Rabbi Yisroel Salanter commented that it is often easier to learn the entire *Talmud* than to change one *midda* or personal attribute. All too often, families come to us with heart-wrenching circumstances after having exhausted every other channel of help and advice. They turn to the therapist with a mixture of hope and skepticism sometimes aggravated by a fundamental misunderstanding of how psychotherapy works and what they can expect from it.

The purpose of this article is to address *What can therapy offer in such situations?* When should therapy be utilized? Who is the client? How do you best get an uncooperative child to attend sessions in a productive way? What are realistic expectations you can hope for from the therapy? Is it important that the therapist be *frum*? Where do you find a *frum* experienced therapist? Will going to therapy stigmatize you and affect *shidduchim* for your other children? How often and for how long should you expect to be having sessions? When does therapy end? Last, but surely not least, we try to address some of the *hashkafa* questions that invariably emerge when engaged in a treatment or practice so closely linked to one's thoughts and beliefs.

Dr. Norman Blumenthal is represented by "The TOVA Program – Adding to the Full Vessel," which appears earlier in this issue. Rabbi Russell is a co-author of "The 'At-Risk Child': Early Identification and Intervention," also in this issue. Their biographies appear in their respective articles.

When Should Therapy be Utilized?

It is unfortunately all too common that people tend to wait until they are facing an emergency before they seek help. The hard reality is that helping redirect a defiant, rebellious teenager into a better direction is a *hundred times harder* than addressing his difficulties while he is still in single digits. If you notice any distinct change in mood, or markedly defiant behavior in your child, a consultation with a therapist may be indicated. You may be reassured by the therapist that a normal process of development is occurring. Not every troublesome child is a child with a problem. Not every child with a problem needs psychotherapy. On the other hand, you may be fortunate that the therapist can help you to recognize a serious problem that has potential to bring harm to a child's development, when it is still in its infancy, and as a result you will have the opportunity to nip it in the bud. Remember Chazal admonish us that "*ayn adam ro'eh nigay atzmo*." No one can be totally objective about his or her own situation. We all can benefit from an outside objective view of our situation.

Who Is the Client?

Try to avoid seeing "the client" as only the child. When a child is going through a crisis or rebelling, the entire family is often embroiled and also seen as "the client." That does not mean that all family

members need to be in therapy. Generally it will suffice if the parents and the struggling child attend. Never, however, overlook the fact that other children in the family may be very conflicted as they watch the crisis develop. It is wise to ask them if they would like to talk with someone outside the family to vent their own frustrations. Don't push it on them, just offer it. It is surprising how often they will say yes. The important thing is to resist "sending the sick kid to get help"! Make sure that you communicate to him that you feel in as much need of help as anyone, and that you are more than willing to seek help yourself in order to make your home a happier one for him.

How do you get an uncooperative child to attend sessions in a productive way?

A famous psychiatrist once succinctly summed up the paradox of people's motivation to change: "Patients come to therapy for two reasons. One is to change and the other is to stay the same." Everyone both resists and desires change. It is normal and to be expected that most teenagers will balk at spending an hour of their precious time talking to a middle-aged "shrink." Fighting or locking horns with the teen over this matter is a waste of time. Try to avoid making him think that you see him as sick or crazy. Instead the teen should be encouraged just to try one visit allowing for the dispelling of any misconceptions about therapy. Oftentimes,

one visit is enough to win the youngster over. He can also be told that the situation is a family problem probably requiring the parents' participation as well.

A similar approach is to let the teen know that you are going to seek help to improve your relationship with him, and that he is invited and welcome to join now or whenever he feels ready. Assurances of confidentiality and how "normal" it is to resist attending therapy should be conveyed as well. Should you have your own doubts about psychotherapy, the therapist, or the costs involved, avoid expressing them to the child. This may only lead to exacerbating his preexisting reluctance to go to therapy.

What are realistic expectations you can hope for from the therapy?

Only Hashem can perform miracles. Therapy, as an instrument developed and practiced by humans, has both strengths and limi-

tations. When a patient asks us to change him, we often respond, "I can't change you – I can only help you be better at whom you are."

Essentially, we don't change people's inherent nature. Rather we help remove the impediments to their being more fulfilled and functional human beings, and observant Torah Jews. Many alumni of successful therapy feel that dormant and suppressed aspects of their unique and worthwhile personality have been freed up, allowing them to live happier and healthier lives.

With the rebellious and angry teen, much of the work requires helping the family reclaim the love and commitment to one another that may have been sidetracked by a long-standing sense of hurt and betrayal. For the teen himself, therapy is an opportunity to reexamine and explore where he fits in both his family and in his community. He can hopefully then learn more appropriate forms of expression of himself as a valued member of his family and com-

munity, other than the dysfunctional ones in which he may well feel inextricably trapped.

Why is it important that the therapist be frum?

For the clinician, the bedrock of successful psychotherapy is his ability to *empathize*. The understanding fostered by true empathy allows the therapist an instinctive sense to determine which of the numerous therapeutic techniques that are available to him, are optimally applied to this client system. Furthermore, from a strictly professional point of view it is hard to imagine the therapist being able to truly empathize with the client, unless he can profoundly relate to, and appreciate the sincere religious affiliation and yearning and struggles of the client.

Additionally there are unique halachic issues that invariably emerge in the course of psychotherapy. A practitioner who has access to *poskim* insures the halachic propriety of the therapy. Even hashkafa issues are part and parcel of the therapist's immersing himself in someone else's life. This is particularly true when working with a rebellious teenager, who may well be straddling the line between the *frum* and the secular world. Stories abound of secular and non-Jewish therapists incorrectly interpreting the teenager's struggles as being a natural life transition, and actually encouraging the teenager's behavior and the parents and community to learn to accept it! *Rachmona Litzlan*. Obviously this can be avoided by using a therapist with a background of Torah learning and observance. Such a therapist is in the best position to integrate an authentic Jewish outlook into the practice of psychotherapy. The experienced Torah observant therapist will naturally reject the above false understanding of the teenager's struggles.

A final point. By the time they have come to the therapist's office, many teens are quite bitter and cynically "turned off" by the traditional Torah or yeshiva perspective. The clinician's use of

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frum terminology or perspective can instantly lead to a tuning out or rejection of what the therapist has to say or even the entire therapy process. Like so many of those who work in *kiruv*, the therapist may have to reach the teen by drawing upon more secular or conventional ideas and concepts to bring him close enough to *Yiddishkeit* again and ultimately draw more freely upon our sacred sources and outlook. For example, very often the behavior of rebellious teenagers can be discussed from the point of view of personal morality, while the same teenagers will remain unapproachable from the point of view of religion. Only a *frum* therapist can have a true feel for that distinction, and consequently determine how best to approach the child.

(See *psak* of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, זצ"ל in *Igros Moshe, Yoreh De'ah* 2: 57, where he writes that one should not seek help from a psychotherapist that is either an atheist or an agnostic, unless there is no *frum* therapist available and the therapist guarantees in advance not to discuss any issues that relate to Torah or *mitzvos*.)

Where do you find a *frum* experienced therapist?

Many of us can recall a time when Orthodox psychotherapists were few and far between. Today there are a growing number of *frum* and Torah educated clinicians particularly in the large cities. Recent conferences for an international organization of Orthodox mental health professionals hosted close to five hundred participants.

Rabbanim, *mechanchim* and pediatricians often refer to psychotherapists, and are probably in an optimal position to recommend a therapist for a family struggling with a rebellious teen. There are many communal organizations that have developed lists of such practitioners, such as "The Yitti Leibel Help Line" (Tel 718 435-7669), and "Echo" (Tel: 914 425-9759). The relationship with the therapist is critical to the success of the therapy. Consequently the match between the child and/or family and the

therapist should be considered. It is entirely possible that one practitioner ideally suited for one client would be less than perfect for another, given their respective and mutual personalities and styles of relating.

Will going to therapy stigmatize you and affect *shidduchim* for your other children?

Both government laws and professional ethics mandate full confidentiality for those attending psychotherapy. More importantly, our Torah forbids the disclosure of personal information under almost all circumstances regardless of whether the information is acquired professionally or otherwise. It is, therefore, a safe presumption that your or your child's attendance in psychotherapy will not be public information.

While we should naturally be discreet about personal and family matters and should concern ourselves with our reputation, one could easily suggest that as a community we have gone overboard in this matter. At least as important as our "marketability" in the *shidduch* scene, should be the well-being of our children and family.

Taking this a step further, while knowledge that a family is struggling with children or family relationships could be perceived as a blemish, allowing an incipient problem to fester and grow can only further embarrass and humiliate all involved. The potential shame of being seen leaving a therapist's office is far outweighed by the almost inevitable hardship, pain and shame of an untreated personal or family problem.

Those of us immersed in this unfortunately escalating problem of rebellious teens, know fully well the extent to which this *nisayon* is present and how many families have been affected. It is often shocking and bewildering how homes replete with genuine Torah observance and true family harmony, struggle with a child or children who are teetering on the brink of *kefira* and secular pursuits. Those who, through Divine providence, are spared this heart-wrenching

experience need to be more tolerant and understanding of these families without exacerbating their pain by scrutinizing them for faults and shortcomings.

How often and for how long should you expect to be having sessions, and when does therapy end?

Having been previously dominated by theories and practices that prescribe lengthy and consuming treatments, there is a perception that psychotherapy requires years "on the couch" or tedious and endless endeavor. The truth is that there are today more active and focused treatments geared towards more rapid and identifiable change.

It is hard to pinpoint an exact schedule for psychotherapy since much depends on the severity of the problems. If there is steady progress, the rate or extent of change at that moment matters little since personal growth develops a momentum of its own that can extend even beyond the scheduled sessions of psychotherapy. The anticipated length of therapy is a legitimate question that one should not hesitate to ask of the psychotherapist once he has had a chance to size things up.

Similarly, the termination of therapy is usually a collaborative process that occurs naturally between the client and the therapist. Ideally, both

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should be in agreement as to when the therapeutic relationship is no longer needed. It is tempting for the client to end therapy when the presenting problem or crisis they brought in appears to have diminished. Often this is just a temporary state or a reflection of early but incomplete resolution, brought on by bringing things into the open. In truth, the real underlying issues may not yet have been touched. This can take time and patience on both the clients' and the therapists' parts to achieve.

Hasn't the practice of therapy been developed by secular theoreticians who either deny or are oblivious to basic tenets of Torah Judaism such as bechira chafshis, absolute versus relative values, kevishas hayeitzer, kibbud av v'eim, and the like?

Yes and no! The original formulations that inspired the development of the entire field are attributed to Sigmund Freud, an atheist who believed like Darwin that man evolved from apes, and was not a uniquely Divine creation. He believed that the

underlying cause of man's neuroses was that organized religion and society had artificially imposed restrictions upon man's innate primal instincts and desires. These impositions, he believed, have prevented man from acting upon these primal impulses and presumably finding emotional relief and pleasure by indulging these powerful forces that lay within him. Since its foundation, however, from his students and on, questions have been raised as to the validity of his postulations. Many present day practitioners have moved far from Freudian theory and instead lean heavily on other approaches such as *systemic psychotherapy*, and *cognitive behavioral therapy*.

Systemic psychotherapy, derived from systems theory, seeks to understand people's psychological problems and difficulties more in terms of conflicts in their significant relationships than in presumed underlying frustration of their innate animal instincts. In doing so, they have moved away from discussion about man's origin and instinctual animal desires, and moved instead towards seeking a better understanding of how an individual's family culture and system, life experience, particular nature, desires and hopes, goals and aspirations, and so on, impact upon his ability to find happiness in his life. *Cognitive behavioral therapy* focuses on altering specific behaviors or thoughts that engender depression, anxiety and the like. These theories do not concern themselves with any particular belief system or religion in general, and can be applied without tampering with one's Torah observance.

Can a treatment so linked to one's beliefs and outlooks, but developed for humankind at large, apply to a Jew with his unique heritage and status?

It is quite conceivable that even a secular professional may employ the right intervention with positive results, even if his theoretical background is, from our point of view, dead wrong. In the hands of even a highly skilled secular psychotherapist, how-

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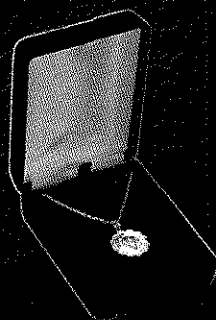
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ever, the results of treatment while quite possibly of value, will likely be limited, and possibly be spiritually damaging. Today we are fortunate to have the availability of many skilled *frum* mental health professionals who have worked hard to filter out the parts of their training that stood in contradiction to our values as Torah observant Jews. Many of these professionals have spent years in yeshiva and kollel. Most, if not all, have a close relationship with a *Rav*, whose guidance they seek to help them utilize, where appropriate, the skills they have learnt, without being influenced by the mistaken secular theories behind them.

Furthermore, properly applied psychotherapy can actually enhance one's spiritual life and practice. Someone beset by distress, morbid preoccupation, tension or panic, distracting habits or thoughts and the like, cannot adequately attend to his learning, *dav-ening* or *shemiras ha'mitzvos*. Similarly, common life stressors such as marital or family discord, illness or undue interpersonal and financial problems can hardly foster the equanimity and focus needed for a lifestyle governed by Torah. Once freed of these impediments and obstacles, the client can attain new heights of *shemiras ha'mitzvos* and *limud haTorah*. Therapists who continue to draw on their yeshiva background cannot help but to see the spiritual advancement of their clients as the ultimate barometer of successful treatment and intervention.

Aren't all the answers to human suffering and hardship in our Torah, and wouldn't it suffice to consult a talmid chacham rather than a therapist?

There can be no doubt that all truths and formulae for human fulfillment are embedded in the Torah and in the writings of our Chazal. Consulting regularly with a *talmid chacham* is essential not only for the prospective therapy client, but for the clinician as well. It is, however, unrealistic to expect a *Rav* to have the time or technical know-how for the

type of day-in-day-out methodology that is the hallmark of successful psychotherapy. In the field of *chinuch*, the optimal methods of teaching are best known to those who have exhaustively studied our Torah. Nevertheless, no one would suggest that schools should be staffed only with *talmidei chachamim* as teachers. The *Rabbanim* guide teachers and are available as resources, while the actual daily implementation of educational techniques is done by trained pedagogues.

Likewise, the *frum* therapist uses the techniques and methodology acquired through his professional training, all the while trying to maintain his study of Torah and regularly discussing issues and concerns with designated *Rabbanim*. These *Rabbanim* are then able, when they feel it is appropriate, to refer to therapists with whom they are familiar and who they feel confident are able to deliver therapy consistent with Torah values.

In Summary

By now the entire Torah observant community is well aware of the tragic incidents of our teenagers at risk. A major source of help and support for both these children and their families is available through the practice of psychotherapy. It is time for the community at large to recognize that many of the prevailing beliefs about both psychotherapy and its practitioners are both outdated and obsolete. The current reality reflects a brand of psychotherapy and practitioners that are aligned with Chazal and their teachings. We must promote the utilization of these valuable resources as a critical element in the battle to reach and redirect these precious *neshamos*. In concert with *mechanchim*, *Rabbanim* and caring *baalebattim*, the *frum* psychotherapist is often a key player in this *milchemes mitzva*, the sacred struggle. ■

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We appreciate and enjoy the freedom and relative physical safety of living in America. We have worked hard to create a Torah-based society here that provides opportunities, roles and role models. We succeeded in slowing the hemorrhage of the early years of this century that found the vast majority of youth from *frum* homes moving away from observance. It was the very freedom, the open and permissive nature of American society, that allowed us to succeed, and brilliantly so. Postwar America has seen a flowering of *yeshivos*, and *Bais Ya'akov* schools with unprecedented opportunities for Torah learning for all children. What seems to vex us most, though, is that in the midst of cultural and economic prosperity and success, with a multiplicity and variety of Torah education opportunities, a certain percentage of our youth are socially and educationally unsuccessful, become disaffected, and fall away.

Perhaps in perspective, it is a smaller percentage than in recent generations.

Zalman Lachman, M.S.W. is a social worker with Project Y.E.S. of Agudath Israel, and a career, family and adolescent counselor in private practice in Rockland County, NY.

In the 30's and 40's we were losing most of our children, and it didn't matter if the home was *frum* or not. The main communal support system was the *shul*, there were few if any other institutions. The father's or mother's independent ability to provide the basic resources and tools of *frumkeit* made all the difference.

In the 50's and 60's we were losing fewer children, but we could understand the loss because most came from homes that could be judged to be somehow weaker in their *frumkeit*. The institutions and organizations that provide support for families were beginning to be built.

Today we are losing even fewer of our youth, but the losses seem less acceptable and less understandable because they are coming from homes that seem to be good *frum* homes.

ISN'T THAT WHAT YESHIVOS ARE FOR?

We have a plethora of institutions, organizations and *mosdos* to support and educate. Our *yeshivos* are staffed by tremendously talented *mechanchim*. Each in his own way dedicates an enormous amount of time to his students, working to inculcate *yiras Shamayim* and good *middos*, but their primary function is to impart information and develop learning skills. We cannot expect the *yeshivos* to be the primary emotional support system for our youth, yet when we send our adolescent sons and daughters to a *yeshiva* or *Bais Ya'akov* school, we hope that our sons and daughters will find a warm, lifelong relationship with a *rebbe* or *rebbitzen* who will inspire them in ways beyond our own abilities.

I want my son to find the kind of per-

son described in *Reb Mendel and His Wisdom*, the wonderful biography of Rabbi Mendel Kaplan, so ably written by Yisroel Greenwald (Mesorah Artscroll, 1994). My friend said it to his son in this way: "I want you to have the type of relationship that when you become a *chassan*, you will feel there is someone special you must call, because without his presence, your *simcha* will not be complete." It will be sad for my friend if his son doesn't develop that kind of relationship, because he knows how important it can be. For that particular boy, the lack may not be critical. Even though he's a typical teenager in many ways, with all of the foibles of adolescence, he seems to have adequate enough inner resources, the strength of a decent family life, and knowledgeable, caring parents to help him through most difficulties.

SHLECHT ODER MESHUGA? BAD OR CRAZY?

What about the boys and girls who lack adequate inner resources—the ones who seem to suffer their way through school? Many of these, we now know, have learning disabilities (LD), or attention deficit disorders (ADD), which have gone undiagnosed and untreated. They may be brilliant, but emotionally immature, or socially isolated. They often develop conduct and discipline problems, becoming enmeshed in a cycle of underachievement and acting-out. This may further diminish an already poor self-image, bringing additional pressure from frustrated schools and parents. Feeling inadequate and angry, they are shuffled from one school to the next. These children are likely to exhibit unat-

tractive personality characteristics, be difficult to accept, and unable to seek out, or even to tolerate the close *rebbe-talmid* relationship that we as parents would wish for them. These are the teens often brought by overwrought parents to social workers and psychologists in the hope that we can "fix" what is "broken" in their child.

The story is told of the distraught mother who went to her *Rebbe*: "*Rebbe, mein kindt is meshuga gevorren—err est chazer, und tanszed mit shikses!* (My son went crazy — he's eating pork and dancing with Gentile women)" The *Rebbe* responded: "If he were dancing with pigs, and eating *shikses*, that would be crazy. This is simply bad behavior." While it is true that the boy is not crazy and the behavior is bad, it is unfair to label the boy himself as "a bum." Adolescents are practicing to be adults, but they have not completely arrived. The Torah hints that a young adult becomes *chayav b'yedei Shamayim* only at 20 (see *Rashi* on *Bereishis* 23,1) recognizing a process of ongoing development that is

more than childhood, but less than completely responsible. We must set proper limits and hold adolescents accountable for their actions, without blaming them for being who they are.

Clinical social workers sometimes use psychoanalytic techniques in working with clients, but we are particularly trained to approach problems from a "person-in-environment" perspective to arrive at a more complete understanding of how to help an individual or family. The nearby Hudson River may serve as an apt metaphor. We all know pollution is bad, but how much is too much? America, in its desire to maximize freedom and opportunity for all, issues pollution permits allowing industries to dump a certain amount of waste into the river. Most fish will survive, but every year some float to the surface, unable to make it. Something in their biological or genetic makeup was not strong enough to survive the level of pollution that was deemed "acceptable." Shall we blame the fish for having "bad biology"? We all face the chal-

lenge of living at a time in which even the best parenting and *chinuch* cannot eliminate the effect of secular environment and culture.

Our community, which has shown great resilience and strength in remaking and rebuilding itself in the post-Holocaust era, nonetheless experiences a higher level of environmental stresses than in the past. More families feel the need for two incomes. There are more demands placed on parents' time, as they care for aging parents, and nurture larger families. Perhaps that contributes to the lack of tolerance for the limitations of our spouses, and the increase in the number of marriages ending in divorce. More adolescents carry the extra burden of coming from homes where *shalom bayis* is less than optimal, or where respectful speaking is the exception and not the rule. For these youth, the positive influence of an adult relationship outside of home is of even greater importance. Given the turbulent and tempting environment, this comfortable *galus*, where so many of our

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fellow Jews have disappeared in the plague of darkness, we may well want to look at the larger picture, and consider our entire community "at-risk."

**PARENTS ARE NOT POWERLESS
- THEY JUST FEEL THAT WAY**

We are always more comfortable when we feel in control of a situation. Even though research studies show that most children negotiate the passage through adolescence with only a moderate

amount of difficulty, it just doesn't feel that way on a Friday night stroll through *frum* streets, observing serious breaches in behavior and even *chillul Shabbos*. As parents, we often feel powerless when confronted with provocative (or worse) teen behavior. By letting our fears and the intensity of our personal involvement rule us, we fail to realize our strengths and bring them to bear. It seems surprising, but these same defiant teens feel even less in-control of their lives than their parents.

A *rebbe* was doing his best to reach a difficult 15-year-old student. Yehuda was listless and would not be encouraged. No matter what the *rebbe* tried, the *kippa* kept getting smaller and moving ever forward on Yehuda's head, as the *payos* and *tzitzis* became ever less visible. Even when the *rebbe* would give *mussar* to the boy, he was always caring and respectful in his approach. Nothing seemed to help, and the *rebbe* was certain in Yehuda's case, he had failed. At the end of the year, Yehuda left school and the *rebbe* never saw him again. Twelve years later, a snapshot of a clearly Orthodox, young couple arrived in the mail. The woman was holding a baby and the man grasped a little girl's hand. There was a short note of thanks from Yehuda, who told the *rebbe* how much he appreciated all of the caring and guidance he had been given, and how much it had meant to him.

Just as it is impossible to completely understand the reward for doing even the "smallest" *mitzva*, we simply cannot know the positive effect of the time we spend working with our teenagers, in whatever capacity. Yehuda knew he was not doing his best, and he didn't feel good about that, but he had never experienced a relationship with an adult who did not yell or respond angrily to him. The *rebbe's* response to Yehuda's poor performance gave Yehuda permission to see himself as *tolerable*. For whatever reason, he had never been able to see himself that way in his parents' eyes. Yehuda had a rough time, and "hit bottom" at least once, but somehow pulled himself through. Part of it was his natural resilience, but when even that failed him, he was able to call up the memory of "that *rebbe* from 10th grade who...." He hung onto that memory like a life preserver, and it worked. Parents, teachers, and therapists often have no way to measure success, especially with the more "challenging" children and teens, and it is hard for us to live with *not knowing*.

**MENTORING:
A DEVELOPMENTAL ASSET**

One can evaluate a teenager's situation by looking at "developmental assets." Internal



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assets include things like the ability to exhibit self-restraint when confronted with urges—being able to say, “No!” when temptations beckon. Many otherwise successful adults still have yet to fully develop this asset, as their children are only too aware. Positive relationships with peers, clearly set parental limits, role models, and attainable, but high expectations from teachers and parents are examples of external assets.

“Having relationships with adults other than parents or teachers” and “feeling like valued members of the community” are also identified as significant and powerful external assets for teens. This is the theory behind big brother/sister and teen mentoring programs. Adolescents today spend less time with adults and more time with peers than in previous generations, and a consistent weekly commitment of even one hour proves to be helpful. An adult mentor can provide a non-judgmental, listening ear that can make a critical difference in that teen’s future.

An effective teen mentor training program includes skill training in listening, and tolerating the uncomfortable feelings generated by not seeing immediate results. We learn to ignore provocation and respond in a straightforward manner, or not at all. A volunteer mentor may meet with a teen for months, wondering if he or she is doing any good. They are tested, often over a period of months, by the teen. Simply having that adult available “as needed” means giving that teen a sense of security. For the mentor, the relationship may include the satisfaction of watching someone grow, the idyllic pleasures of a summer afternoon, and some just-plain-fun, but more likely there will be that unsettling feeling of *not knowing*. You get used to it, you stick with it, and the “good stuff” comes later—sometimes much later.

Our children are faced with new challenges that did not exist generations ago. Extended adolescence has become a normal part of life in America. It was difficult enough before a

higher level of “pollution” was permitted by the secular world, and unfortunately even in our community. We have the extra protections the world of Torah affords, but the onslaught is tremendous. Even the secular world is finally beginning to question the wisdom of “pollution permits” issued to all comers. Agudath Israel has taken its part in the effort to advocate for better public policies, but those at risk cannot wait. A strong volunteer mentoring program can begin helping teens today, even if the full effect is not felt until tomorrow. ■

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BUYING TIME

The phone rings. He's been thrown out of yeshiva. You're told come and get him. While driving there, you wonder, "what now?" Maybe you saw it coming, maybe you didn't. Now he's in a new yeshiva. It's been quiet for a few months. He likes his new yeshiva; at least he says so. But you can't rid yourself of that nagging feeling that it's a matter of time before the phone will ring again. A few months later it does.

Now he's home. The difference is that now you are receiving an abrupt introduction to a son you don't know. Instead of arguing about his homework, the battle rages about smoking, his new wardrobe, and why he must be in before four a.m. His old friends are gone. They've been replaced by a different set. They look scary to you. Going to *shul* Shabbos morning, *tefillin*, *tzitzis*, are all things of the past.

HELP!

You're at a loss. The slightest comment or question you pose is met with an explosive and angry response. Everything you try backfires. It seems that anything you try to prevent him from doing, only causes him to react in an even harsher manner, accelerating his descent. "You don't own me, it's my life and I'll do as I want," is the immediate response to anything and everything.

His siblings are scared, embarrassed and confused. What happened to him? You're not sure yourself. Can't everything go back to the way it was? Can't he just be the regular yeshiva boy you once knew?

The answer is no.

The moment you understand that *the child you see now is who he is now*, and you are now parenting the child you're

looking at, not the one you knew, you've started the long journey toward saving your son.

NOT KNOWING WHY

Something must have happened at some point that caused this. The possibilities are endless. Something at home, school, with friends, a learning disability, emotional problems, any of these or a few combined may have precipitated these events.

Don't try to torture yourself over where the fault lies. In the early stages, it's almost impossible to know. Although your child has formed a list of grievances in his mind about the how's and why's, it is safe to assume that he himself has no idea what caused him to change his mindset so dramatically. He may know he's unhappy; but lacking emotional maturity, he does not really know why.

Most boys in their early teens, while possessing many aspects of physical maturity, lack emotional and mental maturity. Your son doesn't know whether he is coming or going. He acts on impulse and emotion. He doesn't need a reason. Perceptive – yes; bright – maybe; mature he is not.

Half the process of retrieving the boy you once knew is time.

When he reaches the age of eighteen, nineteen, things will have gotten clearer to him. His outlook will change. He matures mentally. He begins to realize that his life is his and that his decisions will affect himself more than they will affect anyone else.

Time must pass to reach this stage. You must buy this time. The rates are steep. How the time is bought will determine much of what your son will think and want out of life when he gets to this stage. Everyone settles down

eventually. But when the dust clears, what kind of person will you see? It all depends on how you buy time during your child's adolescence.

HOW TO BUY TIME

For starters, it is wise to find someone with whom your child can file his complaints. A psychologist, a family member, or a family friend may detect something that has been overlooked. Sometimes breaking the fall is as simple as that. Even if the child uses this person to get at his parents, you can only gain more understanding by hearing another point of view.

When buying time, structure is the key. Take it in any form it comes; work, school, gym, *chavrusa*. The ultimate structure is High School. If the *yeshivos* he has attended have not quite worked out, but he still expresses a desire to go to a more lenient school, a school that does not necessarily have the same *hashkafos* as yours, do not reject it out of hand. Ask *da'as Torah*. Do not get caught up in appearances. It may save your son's life.

Sometimes sending him away to a foreign place will give him a fresh start and less cause to rebel. *Eretz Yisroel, however, should not be an option before he is seventeen years old*. He will not utilize his freedom to his benefit and it might ruin any chance of his gaining from this experience in the future.

If he shows an interest in *anything* – employment, computers, sports – grab a hold. Create some sort of schedule out of it. Never lose sight that even if every course you try fails, you have not failed. With each school and job that he tries, you are buying time. Time, which will bring you closer to your goal of getting him through his adolescence. If there are younger siblings at home that are

Rabbi Levy of Lakewood, New Jersey, is a high school *Rebbi* in Torah Academy for Boys, in Brooklyn.

being adversely affected, or the open confrontations with you have reached the impossible stage, try having him live with a relative or family friend to give both of you more space. Even so, it is absolutely essential to let him know that you're not writing him off. Make him understand that although you love him, he is not the only consideration in your family picture.

Don't pressure or impose. Don't draw artificial lines. Trying to prevent him from doing things he's already accustomed to will only foster more

rebellion, and is counterproductive to maintaining your relationship with him. And the key is to work on maintaining the best relationship possible during this tumultuous period. Discuss things, keep open the channel of dialogue.

Do not attempt to change things back to the way they were. You cannot. He must do it himself.

Turn the other cheek whenever possible. The more you ignore those little things (dress, language, etc.), the less shock value they have, and the greater

likelihood that he will tone them down a bit. At the end of this trying period, you want to see a young adult who, although he has not followed the lifestyle of his parents, has only good feelings for who they are and what their lifestyle represents. Then, when he embarks onto this new period of life, he may want to try out his old lifestyle once again.

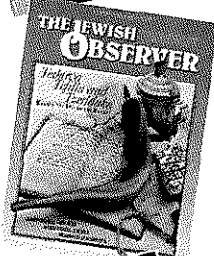
PHASING BACK INTO YESHIVA

The *yeshivos* that work with teenagers at risk employ many different methods. The common denominator of all these strategies is that the boy develops a new concept of what a *rebbe* is. *Rebbe shmuesses*, "chills," plays ball and teaches Torah in a language he can relate to. In general, *Rebbe* is one of the boys. He makes it clear that you can be perfectly happy, content and "cool" while living a strictly Torah life.

The yeshiva in this role does not necessarily change what is going on in the boy's head, nor does it curb all his activities outside of the yeshiva. But it does provide a strong alternative to those activities. Learning with "the rabbi" may not be hangin' out with the boys, but it's up there in the ratings. And if the boy maintains this commitment to yeshiva, then ultimately he will still identify himself as a yeshiva boy. This identification is critical when he reaches eighteen or nineteen and looks to make decisions.

Every boy is different, and so are his circumstances. Every single case must be weighed differently. The activities of some teenagers are more harmful (illegal) than others. Some of these problems must be treated in a professional facility. The concept of buying time, however, applies to all teenagers at risk. Implementing different methods of buying time is part of *giddul bannim* for some of our children. After all is said and done, *tza'ar giddul bannim* is a reality for all: less painful for some, excruciating for others.

Let us never forget that, come what may, these teenagers are part of *Klal Yisroel*. With a little *Siyata diShmaya*, the time we buy will ultimately result in keeping them there. ■



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As I take one of my usual strolls down this large avenue, my eye catches sight of a boy, without a *yarmulke*, smoking a cigarette. Although we do not know each other, he respectfully discards the cigarette, pulls out a *yarmulke* from his pocket, puts it on, and says, "Ah gutten Shabbos, Rabbi."

"Gut Shabbos to you. My name is Yitzchok Mitnick; what's yours?"

"My name is Dovid – whassup?"

M: "The usual. You look excited about something."

D: "Rabbi, I'm 'tripping' on two tabs of acid; everything's just great!"

M: "How 'bout coming over for a drink?"

D: "Sure."

As we start walking toward my home a couple of blocks away, we're joined by another five boys.

My family serves them pistachio nuts and drinks and we schmooze a little. I invite Dovid to come for a meal the following Friday night, which he does – coming in after we wash in a tee-shirt and bell-bottomed pants, reeking from cigarette

Rabbi Yitzchok Mitnick is a *Rebbei* at Torah Academy High School of Brooklyn, and recently wrote *Sefer Inyana D'Yoma* on *Mesechte Yoma*. He learned in the Mirrer Yeshiva in New York, and continues to maintain a close relationship with the *Mashgiach*, Rabbi Esriel Erlanger שליט"א.

smoke. He proceeds to make *Kiddush* and *Hamotzi* and we have a nice *se'uda* together. He particularly enjoys the dessert.

Although he doesn't come the next Friday night, he comes almost every Friday night after that, and we are sure to have the dessert he so enjoyed waiting for him.

[Note: No preaching – only acceptance of him as a person, allowing for the beginning of a sincere relationship.]

The final *Shabbos* before our family is scheduled to go up to the country for the summer, we sit on the couch after the meal.

M: "So what are you doin' during the summer?"

D: "Chillin' a little, and I might have some part-time work."

M: "What about September – any possibility of learning in Israel?"

D: "You never know."

During the summer, Dovid and I speak numerous times¹, and we decide that he will attend Yeshivas Lev Vane-fesh in Israel.

June, '99

Dovid speaks to my class for an hour, telling them about his year in Israel. He had learned about 30 *blatt Gemora*, and is now drug-free.

He has a long road ahead, but *b'ezras Hashem* he'll be a highly functioning member of *Klal Yisroel*.

Why? Because of "Ah gutten Shabbos,"

¹ Obviously, our conversations involved much in the way of heart-to-heart exchanges. No magic wand was waved, no mysterious potion imbibed.

and an interest to help without being judgmental.

YOU CAN DO IT TOO!!!²

April 11, '99

The telephone rings.

"Rabbi, my son will graduate from high school this year. He has no interest in *limudei kodesh*; in fact, his yeshiva allows him to come for secular studies only. Can you please talk to him to discuss his future plans?"

I answer, "I don't know your son – why should he want to talk, or listen to me?"

She pleads: "I don't have any dialogue with him – please, please try!" The mother goes on to tell me which pool hall he "chills" in during the evening hours, and I go visit him.

M: "Boruch, how 'ya doin'? My name is Yitzchok Mitnick. I've seen you around now and then. Got a minute to talk?"

B: "OK." (The usual one word answer.)

After patiently hearing the information the mother had already told me, we *schmooze*. I ask him what his plans are for the coming school year.

B: "Brooklyn College." (This time, two words instead of one!)

M: "And what are your career plans?"

B: "You're not going to believe this, but I want to be a cop." (Now he's talking!)

² To bring young *mechallelei Shabbos* into your home can be very rewarding – for your *mishpacha* as well as for your guests. However, it is not for every family setting. Seek guidance from your *Rav* or *moreh derech*.

M: "Great! You're going to be a Jewish cop. But what does 'Jewish' mean? Why don't you take off a year and study

in Israel, so you may find out more about being Jewish?"

B: "Listen here, I had enough study-

ing; all I want to do is finish college."

M: "If you rethink your decision, look into *Yeshivas Ploni* – you'll be glad you did."

B: "I told you – I have no desire...."

Seeing he didn't *seem* interested to hear what I had to say, I asked, "Can I give you a ride home?"

B: "Na, I'll walk." (i.e. *Tu mir nisht kein toivos* – I don't want to be obligated to you!)

April 25, '99

On one of my visits to the local pool hall, Boruch comes over. "Say, whaddaya know about *Yeshivas Almoni*?" Without blinking, I say, "That yeshiva is even better suited for you than the one I suggested two weeks ago!"

He tells me he was trying to make an appointment with the *Rosh Yeshiva* of that yeshiva to discuss entry in *Elul*.

September 6, '99

Boruch is learning and growing in *Yeshivas Almoni*.

Why? Because someone cared. An idea was *objectively* put into his *Yiddishe kopp*. Not by degrading him; but by showing concern.

Anyone can do it – with proper guidance. You can add your own personal 'touch' as needed, and get involved!

WHAT THE MASHGIACH DID

This past winter, on the coldest Friday night of the year, I walked to Boro Park to attend a *tisch* of my *Rebbe*, the *Mashgiach*, Horav Don Segal, שליט"א. After their listening to inspiring *divrei Torah* and *niggunim*, I mentioned to Reb Don that an "open house" was in progress nearby. I explained to him that his presence there might positively influence the boys. Without hesitating, he bid the gathering "*Ah gutten Shabbos*," and off we went into the extraordinarily frigid weather. Suffice it to say that the *Mashgiach* made the walk with great difficulty, as the wind chill factor rendered the temperature twenty below zero.

For those readers not familiar with the term "open house," let me briefly explain. When a teenager learns that his parents are going out of town for a

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weekend, he invites all his friends for a *Shabbos* of "fun." Generally, *chillul Shabbos*, and *promiscuity* (not to mention *geneiva*, drunkenness and drug use) are rampant.

I explained all this to Reb Don, but he was not deterred; to the contrary, he went with alacrity.

Upon entering the house, we immediately heard the music blasting from the stereo. Reb Don remarked that we shouldn't say anything about it, so they wouldn't turn it off and be *oveir an issur Shabbos*.

When the girls realized that Reb Don was there, they scurried off to the various rooms upstairs, or stayed in the kitchen. Four boys waited in line to talk to the *Mashgiach*. I watched as Reb Don spoke to them for about half an hour as if they were friends, encouraging them with his inimitable *varmkeit*.

Although one of the boys was subsequently thrown out from his yeshiva for drug use, he continued on in a local Torah establishment and completed *Mesechte Makkos*! The meeting with the *Mashgiach* surely left an indelible impression on this young boy's mind.

Reb Don told me that he sacrificed his own *ruchniyus* for the benefit of the boys' *ruchniyus*. If he felt it important and urgent enough to put his *neshama* on the line, shouldn't we? The ability to help these boys is not limited to people like Reb Don Segal שליט"א.

An *askan* (community activist) whom we'll call Yechiel, heard about the "open house" only one hour before *Shabbos*. Instead of making a tumult, which wouldn't have helped anyone, he dashed out to the local take-out store and spent \$300 on various *Shabbos* staples – *kugel*, *farfel*, cold-cuts, chicken, *cholent*, etc. He returned with the food – the only wholesome food in the house. He came back again after his own *seuda* and sang *zemiros* with them, interspersing the songs with words of encouragement and inspiration.

Actions such as these build trust in these children and help them open up. Yechiel is not a *Rav* or *maggid shiur*; he is a "simple" computer programmer.

Me'chelko yihiyeh chelkeinu.

(This is the way to a teenager's *neshama*: – with *hartzige* love, not tough love.)

WHAT SOME ROSHEI YESHIVA
HAVE DONE

Rabbi Shlomo Herbst שליט"א, *Av Beis Din* and *Rav* of K'hal Premishlan at 510 Avenue M, opens his *shul* Friday nights from 10:00 PM until 12:00 AM for an *oneg Shabbos* for these boys. The *oneg* is staffed by the *Rebbe's* unusually dedicated *baalei battim*. Reb Abish Brodt joins on a number of Friday nights and inspires all of us with his *hartzige niggunim*. Lay leaders come to be *mechazek* the boys, and often go home *mechuzak* themselves.

Rabbi Avrohom Gurvitz שליט"א, *Rosh Yeshivas Ner Moshe* in Eretz Yisroel, visits America frequently. Keenly aware of the teen situation here, he decided to befriend one of the boys and to stay closely in touch. Although Rabbi Gurvitz is busy learning, preparing *shiurim* and writing *sefarim*, whenever this boy calls on him, he is available for him. I have seen Rabbi Gurvitz talking to this *bachur* in front of the pizza shop. He has visited the boy in the place he "hangs out." And he has maintained regular phone contact with him from Eretz Yisroel. The boy is now on the *derech* and

is truly a model for other youngsters to follow.

It didn't happen by itself; a *Rosh Yeshiva* took time out from his busy schedule to *rattaveh* (rescue) a *Yiddish kindt*.

The *Rosh Yeshiva* of Zichron Mayir of Mountindale, Rabbi Shlomo Hakohen Rothenberg, שליט"א, spends his *Motza'ei Shabbos* during *bein hazmanim* (intercession), not raising funds the yeshiva desperately needs, but "walking the beat" in the streets of Woodbourne until almost sunrise. I've observed how his sincere caring and magnetic personality have drawn the boys to feel close to him.

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Rabbi Aaron M. Schechter, *Rosh Yeshivas Mesivta* Rabbi Chaim Berlin, on his way home from *Mincha* one *Shabbos* afternoon, chanced upon three boys smoking cigarettes. He proceeded walking with his coterie for another block, whereupon he walked back – alone, so as not to embarrass the boys – and said to them, “Boys, *ich hub eich lieb* – please come by and discuss anything you want. My doors are open to you 24 hours a day!” One week later, one of the boys showed up at the *Rosh Yeshiva*’s office. The *Rosh Yeshiva* spent much time with this boy whom he did not know.

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

There is much you can do, and should do. Don’t look at this boy as if he’s a “case.” He might have some difficulties in his life, as we all do, but he’s not necessarily in need of a psychiatrist!

After you’ve accepted him, put your hand out to him. Give him a firm, warm handshake. Look into his eyes, tell him your name, and ask him for his. Don’t inquire more; you’re not interviewing him for a job. You’re trying to make a connection, and that’s already been accomplished. You may tell him: “It was nice to get to know you,” or “Keep in touch,” and if you feel it’s appropriate, invite him for a meal. Generally, he will be at his best behavior in your home. Even in your home, don’t ply him with queries. It takes a while for one person

There is much you can do, and should do. Don’t look at this boy as if he’s a “case.” He might have some difficulties in his life, as we all do, but he’s not necessarily in need of a psychiatrist!

to trust another, and certainly these kids, who don’t trust anyone, need more time to warm up to adults.

Consider “adopting” a boy – make sure he has his financial needs taken care of (if his family is unable to provide for him, which is very often the case). He might need a basketball uniform, a hockey jersey, lunch money, clothes, money for entertainment, etc. Be there for him. It may be one of the best investments you’ll ever make. Is there a price for a *Yiddishe neshama*?

WHAT CAN THE COMMUNITY DO?

It behooves every member of our community to become personally involved in saving *unzere neshamos*. If you cannot get involved on a personal level to the extent that you would wish to, financial aid is desperately needed for the following five programs:

- A fund to ensure that any boy who wants to study in Israel, will be able to. For many boys, a year or two in Israel is the difference in being *frum* or otherwise.

- Summer camps are the haven for many boys who have various talents that may be nurtured and cultivated. Properly staffed camps help build boys’ self esteem and allow them to expend their energies in a “kosher” way. Intensive efforts should be invested to ensure that every boy has a place in a summer camp. Also, more summer camps should be made available for these boys.

- “Kosher” recreation facilities with structured programs are very helpful in keeping boys occupied in a safe, “clean” environment. Numerous *Gedolei Yisroel* have given their approval and blessings for such centers to open up.

- *Yeshivos* that teach these boys should allocate funding to hire *kollel yungeleit* to learn with these boys one-on-one for (at least) the first hour of the day. This has been a proven method to successfully motivate the boys to learn and *shteig*. It also helps develop a mentor relationship with a *kollel yungerman*, whose house he can go to on *Shabbos*, and to whom he can look for guidance and friendship.

Above all, more *yeshivos* must be founded that will accept these boys – preferably in an out-of-town (or a country) setting.

SUGGESTED “COMMANDMENTS” FOR PARENTS

Most kids want to please their parents and *Rabbeim*, but may be going through a rough time.

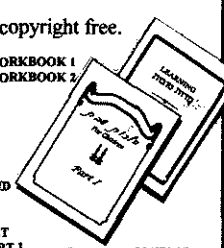
- After validating his feelings, you might tell your child: “I see you’re going

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through a difficult period. One day you'll see things differently, but until then, I'm always here for you.

- Nowadays, it is difficult to tell your teenage child to do (or not to do) something. Maybe it "worked" up until today, but it is certainly not the "way to go" in today's climate. It is imperative that we learn the art of suggesting our ideas and beliefs to our children, and give them the *bechira* to make the correct choice – with our calm input.

- Shaming or denigrating your children so that they'll do your will is counterproductive; it turns them off and causes resentment.

- Prepare short *ma'asim* about *tzadikim* to be discussed at the *Shabbos* table. As Rabbi Yaakov Meir Shechter שליט"א (from Yerushalayim) advises, look over ten *vertlach* and choose two that are most pertinent to your children. It takes time – but the results are well worth the effort

- Don't notice everything your child does. As my father שליט"א says: "*Menn darf amol zein blind un shtum.*" (Just like you wouldn't like if someone criticized you on every little thing you did wrong!) If he's acting inappropriately and you're not "reaching" him, find the *Rebbi* that he was (or is) close to, and have that *Rebbi* get in touch with him.

- Don't tell them you're embarrassed of them. They usually don't care. More important is to objectively discuss the actions they're doing (or not doing).

- Parents ought to "find an ear" to listen to their children's pent-up frustration. Allow your children to tell you whatever is on their mind. Don't punish them for telling you their true feelings. Listen carefully to what they're saying (and what they're not).

- Parents may try to draw their child into a conversation whereby the parents have an opportunity to voice their opinion. Do not offer your opinion immediately. Some time later you'll figure out a way to influence them and their decisions.

- Try as much as possible to trust them – from the earliest age possible. This is so important, that a separate discussion is warranted with detailed

examples to fully exhaust this principle.

- Don't be *mechanech* your children when you're angry. *Hagaon* Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe שליט"א explains that not only *shouldn't* you teach your child when you're upset, but you're *patur* (halachically free) from the obligation of *chinuch* (training) when you're upset.

- (Almost) never give your child ultimatums – even if you win, you lose. And, most often, you won't be able to carry out your threat.

- Think about toning down your style of living – even if you can afford the money, don't give in to every whim and desire you have. Forget about the Joneses – "Keep up" with *Hashem*, His Torah and *mitzvos*, and your child will learn what's important in life.

Successful *Rabbeim* might try these pointers:

- Search out the positive and look away from the negative – tell him how good he's doing so that he'll want to do more good. If you have to reprimand him, do so privately and without raising your voice (otherwise his ears shut down). He'll surely appreciate it. And he'll probably accept it.

- Also, try not to "buy into" their self-destructive behavior. Very often, a boy will do something stupid to ruin his streak of fine performance. The subconscious reason behind it is that they don't want you to accept only good behavior from them. Try to ignore (occasional) negative behavior.

- Connect physically. The *Rosh Yeshiva* of Zichron Mayir of Mountaindale, Rabbi Shlomo *Hakohen* Rothenberg שליט"א, along with the perfunctory handshake, hugs you goodbye. Besides the affection transmitted, a hug means: "I'm here for you and I'll never let you fall."

- Teach him that self control is the character trait that will give him the greatest pleasure life has to offer (not only in the next world, but in this world as well). Boys can be taught that overcoming their *yeitzer hara*, especially in *inyanei kedusha* – and when no one is looking – is one of the primary goals of this world. This lofty goal is attainable, and when accomplished, is tremen-

dously gratifying.

- Early on in the year, obtain a list of your *talmidim's* birthdays. Recognize that day – perhaps with a cake. I recently bought a cake for the 20th birthday of a *talmid*. Visibly moved, he blurted out, "This is the first birthday cake I ever got!"

- During the summer, I learn with *talmidim* of years gone by. A boy who worked during the day, exerted himself to be at the night *seider*. One night I had a *Sheva Berachos* and could not attend the night *seider*. When I arrived for *Ma'ariv*, I saw the boy in the *beis midrash*. I told him: "You can't imagine how glad I am to see you! It's really great that you came." (I really meant it.) He smiled from ear to ear. The next morning he had a day off from work, and came to learn. He declared, "*Rebbi*, I've decided to become *shomer negia* (avoid touching people of the opposite gender)."

I asked him, "Will you sign to it"? (From experience I have found that once a boy agrees to improve his behavior, it is very beneficial to have him sign to his commitment.) He said, "Sure!" which he promptly did. (Shortly thereafter, he took a decent haircut as well.)

Why? Because he was encouraged and recognized.

YOU CAN DO IT, TOO!

A SOLUTION?

People ask: what's the solution in a nutshell? There is no standard solution – *chanoch lena'ar al pi darko* – every single child is different! There are no set rules – *chinuch* is not a board game!

There are times that the problem is exacerbated due to a *shalom bayis* situation. Professional advice should be sought on this problem.

Tefilla by both parents is crucial and should be invoked with regularity *bechol levavam u'vechol nafsham*.

With *Hashem's* help, along with our heartfelt *tefillos* and the community's concentrated involvement, we will be *zocheh* that *all* our children will go *bederech Yisroel sabba* and bring us much *Yiddishe nachas*. ■



"Hereby Resolved..."

A Father's Kabbalos¹

I will remember that I am your *Tatty* (father) and that I love you.

I will remember that you are a child.

I will find ways to show you that you are loved. I will say "I love you" more often and I will express it in other ways as well, perhaps with touch, tone of voice, smile, look on my face, and by giving of my time.

I will not degrade you, laugh at you, ridicule you in any way.

I will say "I am sorry" when I'm wrong

I will criticize less and focus more often on the positives in you.

I will look for the big picture, keep

Jerry Lob is a clinical psychologist in Chicago working with families and teen-agers in the *frum* community. He is a *talmid* of Rabbi Yitzchok Feigelstock (Long Beach, NY) and a *musmach* of Bais Medrash Govoha of Lakewood.

perspective, keep my eyes on the prize, the prize of a loving, caring, joyful relationship with you.

I will remember that you are fragile, that my words and tone of voice can damage and slice through you, that you are soft even when you act hard. I will not be fooled when you act uncaring. I know different and I will remember.

I will tell you directly and assertively when I disagree with you, but not in a rage, and not with sarcasm, and with no eye rolling.

I will not hit you, no matter what. I will remember the words of Rabbi

¹ Note: While a *Kabbala* is a commitment to *Hashem*, I've chosen to phrase these *kabbalos* in the intimate, from me to my child(ren), in a way that may have more impact on me. To be sure, there is an awareness of *Hashem* as witness to these resolutions.

Shlomo Wolbe שליט"א, that in this era it is prohibited to hit our children, that it will lead to their hatred. And the words of my *Rebbi*, the *Rosh Hayeshiva* Rabbi Yitzchok Feigelstock שליט"א, that in this generation we need to follow the *derech* of warmth, no hitting.

* * *

I will smile more to you. I will smile more, period.

I will be attuned and more open to feel joy about you, to revel in your very existence. And I will display this joy more often.

I will respect you. I will respect your feelings, your need for space and privacy. I will respect your dignity. I will respect your opinions and your decisions, though at times I may overrule them (in your younger years).

I will be more patient. I will be more patient. I will think often of *Hashem's midda* of *erech apayim* (slow in anger).

I will set appropriate boundaries for you, for your safety, for your growth, for your *ruchniyus*, and I will not shirk my responsibility. And I will remember that it's OK for you to be upset with me. I do this out of love.

I will remember that you are a work in progress, not a finished product, and while your pronouncements may sound secure, confident, finished, they're not. I will patiently wait for you, with anticipation and some trepidation, through your journey.

I will be less concerned with *kibbud av*, and more concerned with *kavod habrios* (you are my most precious *briya*) and I will remember the *Mishna*

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that *kavod* comes to those who give it to others.

I will choose my battles and try to remember that the battles themselves are not personal, but part of the miracle of your growth. And I will learn to bite my tongue more.

I will be more loving to Mommy and always respectful to her. I will remember the look on your face when I've said something hurtful to her. I will make more effort to bring joy into our family, to bring to our home a spirit of song.

I will remember that no matter your age, you still look to me (as I look to my father), and what is important is not so much the information I impart to you, but who I am to you.

I will not take revenge when I am hurt. Even if you have intentionally hurt me and even if I am so angry, so very

angry, I will not respond in kind. I will remember that I am the parent and you are the child. I will try to find quiet and calm. I will not give you the silent treatment, either. I will ask for your apology, but I will not take revenge.

I will laugh more. I will be on the lookout to laugh more with you. At times I will try to laugh at myself.

I will remember the sparkle in my father's eyes when he saw me or introduced me to others, the sparkle that spoke more eloquently than words of his pride. And I will sparkle for you.

I will play more with you. I will give you your own time with me everyday even if only for a few minutes.

I will learn more with you. And I will try to make this time warm and joyous and not full of tension and anger.

I will be determined to be proud of

you. I will see your inner beauty, not your grades or how you look, but your *neshamah*, your goodness, your kindness, your unique strengths, skills, and talents. I will remember that each child is different and may have a different *derech*. I will love you because you are, not because you do. And not because of what you give to me.

I will attempt to bring more joy into *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov* and into *Yiddishkeit*. I will remember that it is my *simcha* in Torah and *mitzvos* that will draw you to them, my enthusiasm that will generate

Parents and Friends of Singles as well as others who care.

You can contribute to resolving the current "*Shidduch Crisis*" by participating in the Roundtable discussion at the **77th National Convention of Agudath Israel of America** at 10:30 a.m. on Friday, November 26th at the Garden State Exhibit and Convention Center, Somerset, New Jersey. Let us share each other's experiences, insights and suggestions, and help make "the system" work!

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I will not try to break your spirit. I will try to embrace, celebrate and guide your spirit.

I will not ignore your suffering. I will put aside my work and my tiredness and my *chessed* work and even my learning to be there for you, whenever you need me. You are my most important *mitzva*.

I will look deep into myself and remember how painful childhood and adolescence can be, and I will honor you and support you. I will not

abandon you when you need me most, even when it feels like you are pushing me away.

I will have more fun with you and I will remember that our shared laughter and love brings the *Shechina*.

I will remember that I am your *Tatty*,
and that I love you. ■

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WHAT THEY ARE DOING:

- CLOSURE NOTICE EFFECTIVE JANUARY 15, HAS BEEN SENT TO TWO SHUVU SCHOOLS, ONE IN NAHARIYA AND ONE IN NATZERETH AFFECTING OVER 300 RUSSIAN IMMIGRANT CHILDREN.
- PARENTS AND CHILDREN HAVE BEEN CALLED DOWN BY THE POLICE AND FORCED TO POST 2000 SHEKEL BONDS TO ENSURE THAT THEY TAKE THEIR CHILDREN OUT OF OUR SHUVU SCHOOLS.
- PARENTS WHO WORK FOR THE GOVERNMENT HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT THEY WOULD LOSE THEIR JOBS UNLESS THEY REMOVE THEIR CHILDREN FROM OUR SHUVU SCHOOLS.



שױבן-RETURN

לא תעמוד על דם רעך

WHAT WE MUST DO:

- **MUST LET OUR VOICES BE HEARD IN PROTEST.**
(SEE SAMPLE TEXT BELOW)
- **FAX OR E-MAIL TO PRIME MINISTER EHUD BARAK**
(011-972-2-670-5415, rohm@pmo.gov.il)
- **FAX OR E-MAIL TO EDUCATIONAL MINISTER YOSSEI SARID**
(011-972-2-560-2246, sar@education.gov.il)
- **FAX OR E-MAIL TO GENERAL DIRECTOR
OF THE EDUCATIONAL MINISTRY
SHLOMIT AMICHAI**
(011-972-2-560-2336,
mankal@education.gov.il)
- **SPONSOR A CHILD**
**PUBLICITY HAS ACTUALLY
INCREASED THE NUMBER OF
APPLICATIONS TO ATTEND
THESE NEW SHUVU SCHOOLS.**
**TODAY THERE ARE 300 STUDENTS,
HOWEVER, IT IS OUR ACHRAYUS
TO RESPOND TO THE MANY MORE
STUDENTS WAITING TO ENROLL.**
- **PLEASE FORWARD ALL YOUR LETTERS,
FAXES AND E-MAILS OF PROTEST
TO SHUVU-NY (718)692-1233
OR SHUVU-ISRAEL 011-972-2-537-6173**

Dear Sir,

As a strong supporter of Israel who has visited the country on a number of occasions, I was very surprised to read the recent press reports about the impending closures of the Shuvu schools in Nahariya and Nazareth.

As the only democracy in the Middle East, Israel has stood apart from its neighbors for years by providing its citizens with the freedom people such as myself take for granted in America. That is why I was shocked when I read that the families who send their children to these Shuvu schools have been called to local police headquarters for questioning.

I can only imagine the trauma these children and their families have suffered from these interrogations. I am asking that you take the appropriate steps to ensure that this kind of treatment does not continue.

I am also writing to urge you not to shut down the Shuvu schools. I know that they serve a very important purpose. They address the needs of hundreds of Russian immigrant children, many of whom come from underprivileged homes. I'm concerned that if they are forced to return to public school, no one will be available to address their specific needs.

Please turn your attention to this important issue and ensure that these citizens and their children are treated in the democratic fashion that sets Israel apart from its neighbors.

Israel is very dear to my heart and as a proud member of American Jewry, I have made numerous donations over the years to the many agencies that support Israel, including to the Shuvu school network.

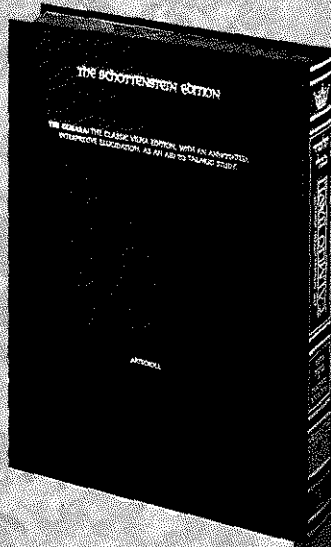
As long as the Israeli government works to protect its citizens' civil rights, I will be happy to continue supporting our very precious country.

Sincerely,

THE UNITED FUND FOR RUSSIAN IMMIGRANT CHILDREN IN ISRAEL

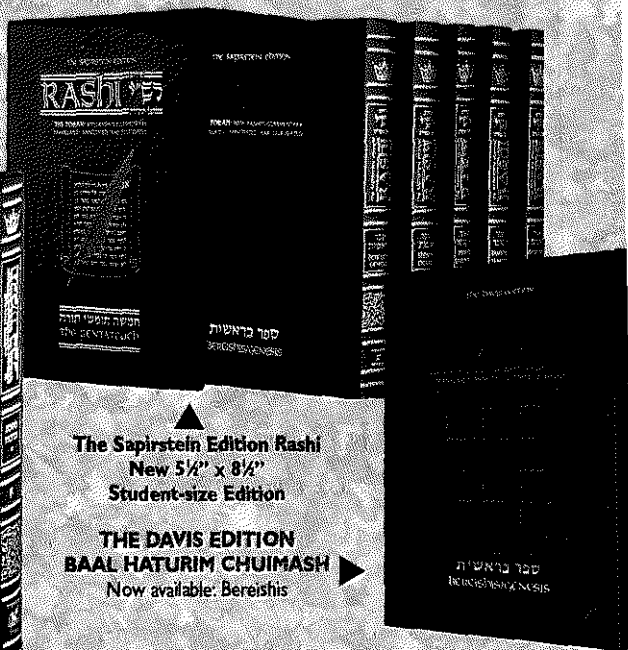
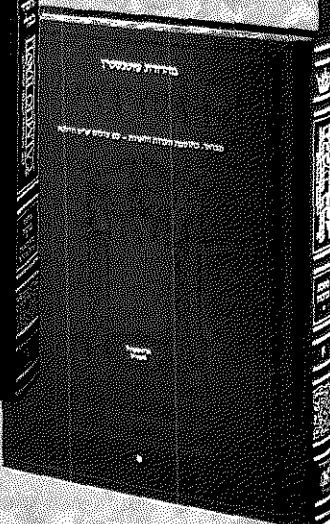
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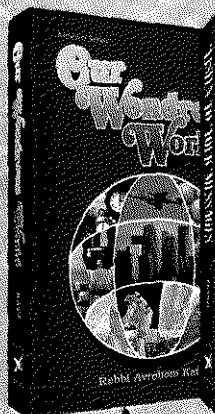
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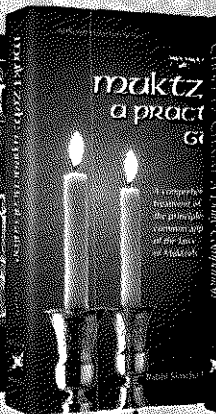
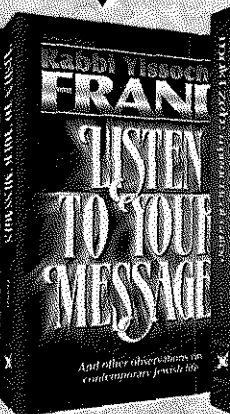
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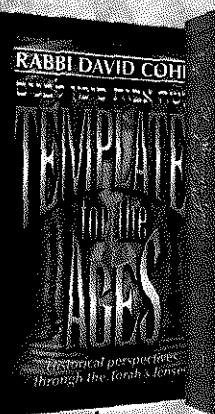
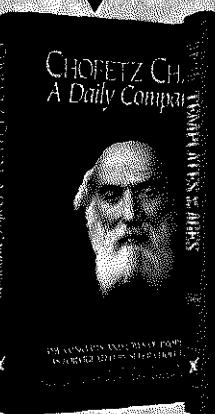
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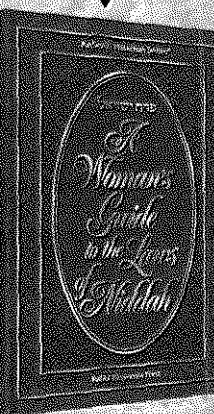
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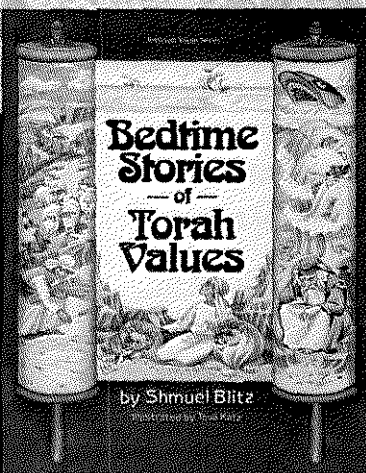
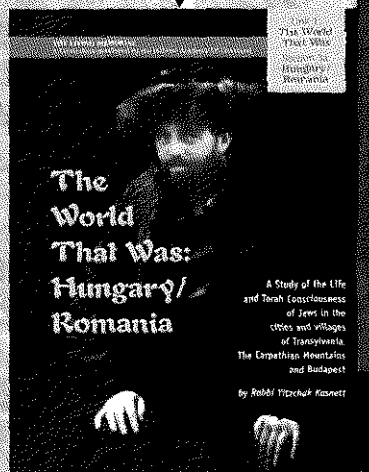
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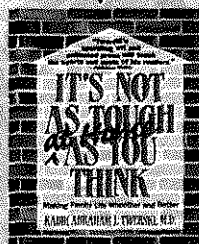


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