

## Now Yaakov heard that he had defiled his daughter Dinah, while his sons were with his cattle in the field; so Yaakov kept silent until their arrival. (34:5)

There were no cellphones in those days, so Yaakov *Avinu* had to wait until his sons arrived home before he could tell them of the outrage that had taken place. **Abarbanel** explains that the Patriarch waited for his sons, because he was not going to make a decision without first consulting them. Their input was important to him. **Horav Yaakov Meir Shechter, Shlita**, explains that including mature children in decision making is good parenting. In fact, this is specifically how one should relate to his children.

This is especially true under circumstances in which one is compelled to point out a son's errant ways, in the hope that he will alter his present activities. For instance, if one son is acting inappropriately, the father should approach him to discuss a problem which he feels exists with regard to the behavior of his siblings. By including this son in the decision-making process, he raises his self-esteem, and, at times, can point out areas of behavior which he sees in the other children. This is actually a ruse, so that the father can point out these same issues to this son. Subconsciously, as the son "advises" his father concerning his brothers, the message will invariably be reflected back on himself.

That a parent loves his child goes without saying. It is the manifestation of this love under everyday circumstances that is not all that common. *Rav Shachter* quotes *Tanna D'vei Eliyahu Zuta* that says, "One should act with humility toward all men. This is especially true with regard to members of one's family. It is important that, upon occasion, he acts as one of them, including them in affairs and decisions concerning activities in the home. In this manner, he will inspire them to follow the correct path, without the need for discipline."

Indeed, Yaakov *Avinu* referred to his sons as brothers. "And Yaakov said to his brethren, 'Gather stones!'" (ibid. 31:46) *Rashi* explains that the Patriarch was speaking to his sons who stood by his side in trouble and war like brothers.

While the above is the principle to which one should adhere, how this plays out in each individual family and when to apply this principle are based upon a parent's common sense. Every child is different, and every family dynamic is different. The bottom line is that a child must feel a parent's love, and that love should be manifested on more than an annual basis.

*Horav Eliyahu Roth, zl*, was a master *mechanech*, educator, in *Yerushalayim*, who devoted his entire life to preparing the next generation of Torah students. He himself was a student of **Horav Shlomo, zl, m'Zvehil**, who was a saintly *Rebbe*, well-known for his devotion to Jews of all stripes. Aside from being a holy, esoteric individual, he was uncommonly wise. He was wont to say that *chinuch ha'banim*, child-rearing, may be compared to a hen resting upon its eggs. During the

twenty-one-day gestation period, it may not allow any cold air to enter between its body and that of the eggs. The air will have an adverse effect on the chick's development. On the other hand, it may not press down too hard with its body, lest it crack the egg. These two contrasting measures – tight, without permitting air to enter; and light enough not to crack the egg's shell – are requisites for the maturation of a healthy chick. Hashem provided the hen with the innate ability to bridge these opposing measures.

Likewise, a parent must take great care in protecting his child from the deleterious winds of contemporary society. This requires great care and often strong, practical common sense concerning what to allow and what not to allow. Unless the parent is himself a victim of society's pervasive permissiveness, he should be competent in making such decisions. If he has questions, he can always approach his local Orthodox Rabbi who should be well-versed and able to offer guidance and inspiration. All the same, pressing down too hard, too much discipline, inflexible and uncompromising demands, might create a fissure in the "shell" of the child.

In his *Generation to Generation*, Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski writes about growing up in Milwaukee, in the home of the revered *Chassidic Rebbe*, **Horav Yaakov Yisrael Twerski, zl**. His father was a giant of intellect, wisdom, compassion and inspiration. His legacy is his incredible family and the Torah community he left behind. He was also a *mechanech* par excellence, who imparted to his children a way of life steeped in Torah and *Chassidus*, while remaining cognizant of worldly disciplines. Rabbi Twerski remarks concerning his father's method of parenting and the manner in which he taught his children to distinguish between right and wrong.

We all know that the greatest challenge confronting parents is imparting Torah values to their children. Children must know what is right and what is wrong, and they must learn to choose to do what is right. This must be done while nurturing a sense of positive self-esteem within the child, so that if he does something wrong, he will not feel that he is bad. This requires discipline with love, a discipline whereby the child is made to feel that some of the things which he has done are considered to be unacceptable behavior. How does a parent teach this to a child, however, without somehow making him feel guilty or bad?

This is the question that Rabbi Twerski focuses on. He remembers once early on in life being disciplined by his father. His father heard what he had done, and it was something of which he disapproved. In a no-nonsense, quiet and firm voice, he said, *Es past nisht*, "It is not becoming (of you)." No screaming; no names; no corporeal punishment – just a simple, but stern, reprimand to the effect that such behavior, albeit acceptable by others, was unbecoming of him. Rather than put the child down, such discipline elevates the child's status and expresses the notion that more is expected of him. No put-down; rather, it was the exact opposite: "You are special. It behooves you to act differently."

As a practicing psychiatrist dealing with problems of addiction, Rabbi Twerski relates that he has employed this method in speaking to teenagers who have fallen prey to the scourge of drugs. A

teenager enters his office suffering from a drug abuse problem. This beautiful child has for years been putting these harmful substances into his/her body.

“Tell me,” Rabbi Twerski asks, “what do you do if you are working in the kitchen and you accumulate garbage? Where do you put the garbage?”

The teenager has a puzzled look on his face. “What is the question? I put it into the garbage can, of course. Where else?”

“Then tell me, my child, how is it that you have been putting all of this drug garbage into yourself? I am certain that you knew that all the stuff that you were taking was all garbage?”

This approach has rarely failed to elicit an immediate reaction. Tears well up as the children who appear lovely on the outside share the fact that they had never felt good about themselves. Thus, essentially, they saw nothing wrong with introducing garbage into their systems. They viewed themselves as trash cans – so, why not?

Imagine, if people would realize that certain behaviors are inappropriate because, *Es past nisht*, “it’s just not becoming.” We are a *mamleches Kohanim v’goi kadosh*, “a kingdom of Priests and a holy nation.” We are dressed in exquisite finery. We are not permitted to play in the mud. It is as “simple” as that! We are too fine, too important, too easily soiled, to be playing in the garbage dump. This is how a Jewish child is to be raised: *Es past nisht!*