

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the Home

TRANSLATING IDEAS INTO ACTION

This week's *parshah* includes the Torah's command: "*Tzedek tzedek tirdof*—pursue justice, justice." The repetition of the word *tzedek* is confusing at first glance. Is there more than one type of justice? If there are two types, how can one pursue both with a single "pursuit"?

The Yesod Ha'avodah provides an intriguing explanation. He explains that the first type of *tzedek* involves an intellectual absorption of what justice is. The second type is taking that intellectual understanding and appreciation of *tzedek* and putting it into action — moving it from thought to deed.

Understanding *tzedek* can be easier for some people than for others. However, internalizing and behaving according to the principles one holds is certainly a far greater challenge for everyone.

The significance of the singular pursuit after both of these, teaches us that we must initially set out to achieve both *tzedeks* at once. A path that leads only to an intellectual grasp of *tzedek* without encouraging us to put it into practice is not the path we should choose.

This concept can be applied to *chinuch*, where, all too often, we are very aware of the first type of *chinuch* message, the one that tells children what to do and from what to refrain — but when it comes to the second type of *chinuch,* the part that involves putting principles into action, we leave it to the child's own free will. But "informative" *chinuch* alone, education that doesn't inspire a child to actualize the messages being transmitted, is not *chinuch*.

Certainly the results of our efforts are not in our hands, but that does not mean that we may overlook the likely outcome of how we bring our children up. *Chinuch* that leads to inspiration and long-term implementation is not achieved via force but by example and by inspiring our children to genuinely appreciate Torah and *mitzvos* and to choose to live their lives accordingly. Whenever we give over a *chinuch* message, we must ensure that it is delivered in a way that a child will accept it willingly, not just because he must. The word "*chinuch*" is derived from the term *chanukah*, as in "*chanukas habayis,*" which suggests that it's about completion, about having the intention to guide our children to become *ehrliche Yidden*, not merely telling them what to do.

This week's essay is sponsored in honor of a wonderful friend who offers immeasurable help and support

Yoely Bodek שיחי'
Happy Birthday!

יה"ר שתזכה לאריכות ימים
ושנים טובים בבריות גופא
ונהורא מעליא



Q QUESTION

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

First of all, many thanks for all your *shiurim* including those I've listened to on phone hotlines. I know many people have been helped aside from myself.

Baruch Hashem my wife and I have a large family, and our oldest child is a *bachur* who is almost 18. He's a good boy who does what he's told, davens and learns like an average *bachur*, and although I feel he has the ability to *shteig* more, I don't pressure him and allow him to relax and listen to (of course only kosher) phone hotlines when he's home, and so forth.

There's just one thing that really bothers me, and that's his choice of friends. He prefers to associate with *bachurim* who are more casual about Yiddishkeit than we are, and doesn't want to come across as a *"chanyok"* (too frum). Nonetheless, he does have a warm feeling for Chassidus and sometimes goes to our Rebbe's *tish*.

Recently, he's mentioned that he wants his own cell phone. He says that his circle of friends have their own phones. When he's home, he has a cell phone available for whenever he needs it, but he wants his own one, and to be able to text with it, not just make calls.

In fact, he's so hung up about this issue that he sometimes avoids getting together with friends as he's so embarrassed about not having a phone of his own and is worried that his friends will find out.

Should I buy him a phone? Should I give in just because his friends have phones? Should I allow him a phone with text capability? And what about my oldest daughter, who is 16 — should she be allowed a phone too?

Thank you



A ANSWER

As our children grow older, *chinuch* becomes more challenging, especially in this day and age when the whole world and its temptations are at our fingertips. Aside from learning how to deal with the challenges of an older child, parents must also know how to gradually alter their approach as their children grow older. In Parshas Bechukosai, the Divrei Yisrael (commenting on the *passuk* that compares the way that Hashem reprimands Klal Yisrael to the way in which a father reprimands a son) notes that if a father sees that his son is no longer obeying his instructions, it's time to set aside the stick (*chinuch* by force) and speak to his son gently, which will accomplish far more.

This doesn't mean that we should *davka* use a stick when our children are small. There is a place for the *chinuch* of red lines and consequences as our children grow up, when explanations and giving choices only detracts from what we are trying to achieve at a time when our children are too young to appreciate the liberty inherent in "choosing" a certain way. But it's important to keep in mind that being overly strict may

backfire as our children grow up, and lead to the necessity of being far more lenient later on than we would ever want to be.

Far better is to find a middle way from the outset, before trouble arises.

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How do we know when our children have reached the point when strict discipline is no longer appropriate? The Shulchan Aruch (based on the Gemara) tells us that a father may not hit his son once he reaches the age of bar mitzvah. The reason for this is that an older child may not be able to endure the experience of corporal punishment, whether out of shame or for another reason, and could lose control and strike his father in return. While this may seem a far-fetched scenario, it really is not, and the fact that the Torah sees fit to warn us of this occurring is more than enough reason to take it very seriously.

The Pele Yoetz quoting Rishonim explains that this *halachah* applies to children even below bar mitzvah age, if they might hit a parent due to their nature or other factors. He therefore stresses that parents must remain in tune with their children's development and customize their methods of *chinuch* accordingly.

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In the situation you describe, it seems that your son is far from such behavior. He's davening and learning and generally doing as he's told. This is not something to be taken for granted. Too often, parents assume that, "Of course he's doing all of that. He has to!" They don't seem to realize that, unfortunately, many *bachurim* are not keeping up with even minimal standards and that they have a lot to be grateful for.

Aside from being grateful, it's important that your son himself feels appreciated and gets positive feedback for the good things he's doing. Many parents take for granted things that their children do even when they themselves don't. It's much easier to be critical of what a child isn't doing right, but seeing the whole picture objectively is crucial in order to know how to approach a child.

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Concerning his friends, there's probably also a lot to be grateful for. True, they aren't exactly what you would have wanted, but it sounds like he isn't interacting with bad friends and certainly things could be far worse. In any case, by the time a *bachur* is 15 or so, there's usually not much a parent can do to influence his choice of friends.

You mention that your son has warm feelings for Chassidus, and presumably, you mean to say that in this area, he is following your lead to a certain extent. This, too, is certainly not to be taken for granted, as many children have very different "tastes" and opinions from those of their parents, and a feeling for something cannot be imposed.

Parents can't necessarily mold their children's characters any which way, regardless of the family environment. When we look honestly at ourselves, we will probably notice many ways in which we turned out differently from our parents and also from the way they would have wanted us to live our lives. So we can find ways to understand when our children, too, choose a different and equally valid path.

That said, guiding children to adopt our style of living is easier to accomplish when it is done without force and attempted only with positive encouragement, a positive and happy approach, and while setting a genuine personal example. Even then, we must guard against making demands that our children cannot or will not meet.

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Whether or not to "bow to peer pressure" can be a thorny issue. If "all" your child's friends are doing things that cross your red lines, you may have to examine his overall environment and reconsider whether he is in the correct framework. When the issue is more grey than black or white, as it seems to be here, it's worth checking up with your son's *menahel* or *rosh yeshivah* to find out how many of his friends really have cell phones. It may not be as many as your son is telling you.

If your son is the only one in his peer group without a phone, you should make your decision with that in mind. You may not have to give in, but you should be considerate of the facts and proceed with caution. Treating your son like a little child

who cannot make his own decisions when he is almost 18 could backfire and add to his sense of embarrassment at being the exception "because his parents won't allow it."

As a matter of fact, if your goal is for him not to have his own phone, you're more likely to achieve that by putting the decision into your son's hands. Of course the risk is that he'll choose otherwise, but it might be your best bet to treat him as a mature adult who is capable of choosing correctly, and he may be inspired to live up to your belief in him. When he can face his friends and tell them, "No, I don't have a phone. My father said I could buy one if I wanted, and I chose not to," he regains his sense of autonomy and actualizes the *chinuch* you instilled in him.

And what if he does choose to buy a phone? Would he have done so even if you said "No"? I don't know. But aside from the mounting resentment at not being given a choice, another component that should be taken into account is that it may be better to buy him the phone yourself and ensure it meets your standards, than to disallow it and risk him buying a more "open" model that exposes him to more damaging influences.

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The question of texting is complicated and experience shows that it can be problematic. There are things that children will text that they would never verbalize, and this can minimize their sensitivity to issues that should be off-limits. Again, if you feel you don't have much choice about this, based on the previous points, then at least if there's a way you can supervise his texting, or occasionally glance at the things he's writing and to whom, that is of course preferable.

This applies to all similar issues where a parent would like to insist on a certain red line but knows that the child will cross it regardless. A parent should never be afraid to state his red lines, even if he knows that the child is flouting them. Often, being confident in the path one is taking makes it so much easier to transmit the right values. But at the same time, *chinuch* in such circumstances can be complex and needs the close guidance of daas Torah.

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So much *siyatta diShmaya* is needed to build happy and *ehrliche* homes in which our children can grow and flourish. We all want our children to have the strength and conviction to stand strong against the dangerous winds that are blowing so strongly in our generation. Davening that our children have good friends and that they are exposed to good influences — and that they are a good influence on others — is essential.

We as parents must daven constantly for the clarity, guidance, and *siyatta diShmaya* to be to achieve our *chinuch* goals successfully.



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