



The Art of Jewish Parenting: Torah Parenting An Introduction #1

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

The Torah says that our forefather Avraham was chosen by Hashem to father the Jewish nation, "*Ki yedativ l'maan asher yitzava et banav acharav lalechet bederech Hashem. I know he will teach his children to go in the ways of Hashem.*" The Jewish people are called *bnei Yisrael* because we are products of our parents, specifically our forefather Yisrael, who brought forth the twelve tribes from which the Jewish nation emerged. So we see clearly that raising children in the path of Hashem is the core mission of every Jew. Many times, the Torah emphasizes teaching children and passing on to them the traditions of our forefathers. The verse in *Shema* says, "*V'shinantam l'vanecha. You shall teach your children.*" The Rambam in Hilchot Kriat Shema notes that teaching Torah to our children is one of the most important *mitzvos* of the Torah. Everything else revolves around

it. This is because you can't have any clear idea of the fundamentals of Torah if you don't learn properly. Parents are the one who should teach Torah to their children. In *Shema* we speak about a complete Torah environment. Whether you're in the house or outside, whether you're going to sleep or waking up. In every place that you find yourself, you have to be involved in learning Torah and teaching it to your children. If someone doesn't have children, he can fulfill the *mitzvah* of *v'shinantam* through teaching Torah to his students. In fact anytime we share Torah with anyone, we are fulfilling the *mitzvah*. We can all have spiritual children.

We say in *Shachrit*, "*V'talmud Torah keneged kulam.*" Learning Torah is the foundation of all other *mitzvot* because it teaches us the ways of Hashem. If we want to be good parents we

have to teach our children the *derech Hashem*. We aren't born knowing it. We have to acquire it through Torah study and thinking how to apply what we've learned to our lives. So our first lesson in Jewish parenting is that we ourselves must learn and practice as much Torah as we can. If we do that we will have the wherewithal to pass the Torah we acquire on to our children. Read, study, go to lectures, listen to shiurim on CD, mp3, in your car, while working, or at home. Get a learning partner. The goal of parenting as established by our forefather Avraham has never changed. Whether delving into the laws of *Shabbat*, *brachot*, or *bein adam l'chaveiro*, only through Torah will we be able to get it straight. Torah is our blueprint. It is a tree of life to those who cling to it. If we want to enjoy the blessings of good children we have to study it and pass it on.

Connecting to the Inner Spark #2- Part 2

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Eliezar Miller

Shlomo Hamelech says in Mishlei, "As water reflects the face of a person, so one heart to another." The Gra explains that this refers to *deveikut b'Hashem*. When a person cleaves to Hashem, Hashem in turn will cleave to him. Rav Dessler explains this with a parable. When digging a tunnel, two sets of workers may start on both sides and then meet in the middle. When a person begins working on himself to come closer to Hashem, he only has to do half the work. For every move and effort he makes, Hashem responds by moving closer to him. The more we attach ourselves to Hashem, who is above nature, the more we connect to our inner divine spark and reveal within ourselves supernatural strength.

The Ohr Hachaim writes that Hashem's main desire is the *nachat ruach* (pleasure) he derives from His creations. There are three

levels. The lowest level is the praise Hashem gets from the heavenly chariot, the sun, stars, and angels. Above that is the praise he receives from the souls of *tzadikim*. The highest level of *nachat ruach* is when a Jew on this world faces challenges, yet remains strong in his faith continuing to bless and thank Hashem.

The Sefer Naharei Esh asks, how does a person know if he's doing chesed because it's his nature or because Hashem wants it? He answers, if he's given the opportunity to do a kindness which he'd rather not do and he does it any way, it is a sign that he is doing it because it's Hashem's will. When a person connects to the inner spark of the Shechina inside him, it strengthens his willpower to do Hashem's bidding even when it's against his nature.

In Parshat B'shalach the Midrash says, there's nothing more beloved to Hashem than a messenger who is sent to do a *mitzvah* and then puts his soul into succeeding at the task. The Sefat Emet says in the name of the Chiddushei Harim that we are all messengers sent down to this world to fulfill Torah and *mitzvot*. Hashem expresses much greater love for a person who is *moser nefesh* in this world to do His will, to the love He has for all the souls and angels in the next world.

The Zohar in Parshat Yisro says that the 613 *mitzvot* are ways to come closer to Hashem. Yet there may be things that are not expressly forbidden by Jewish law yet are still not in the spirit of Torah. The key question, we must constantly ask ourselves is, "Is this *ratzon Hashem*, is this bringing me closer to the Creator?"



Rebbetzin's Perspective IV #2

Excerpted from Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller's Q&A series on Naaleh.com

Question:

I was wondering about *lashon hara* when sharing personal stories with friends or on a date. When trying to let someone into your life, I feel it's important to let them know where I am coming from and sometimes that includes describing the hurt I experienced from other people. I could imagine the most ideal way to express it would be to just say, these are my sensitivities without specifying why. But most people are more empathetic when they understand the context. In a way it's using what could be *lashon hara* (which is normally a disconnecter) as a connector. Is this a justification for speaking negatively about others? Are there guidelines I can use? Part of me thinks that if I just tell myself it's off limits I will set myself up for failure.

Answer:

How would you like it if you were the one under discussion? Imagine this. Your friend tells her sister, "You know I have a great friend Lisa. We go places together, but I don't know, Lisa never opens up. It's strange why she is that way. Maybe it's her upbringing, maybe her mother wasn't the kind of person you could talk to. But that's the way she is and her other friends tell me this about her as well."

If you were Lisa would you like being the example? I think the very first thing you have to consider is that you are disconnecting from the person you are talking about by using her as a model. It's a bad idea because you're dehumanizing a person whom you've reduced to an exemplary figure in a negative way.

We live in a society where people think that

honesty and depth equals negativity. That means if you use words like control, abuse, disconnect, or toxic, you're honestly describing a situation. The situation may in fact be like that on the surface. But when you talk about people or events using the language of cliché or stereotypes you often miss the fact that you're discussing people with real emotions. You might describe someone as toxic because of her constant criticism. Someone else however, might view her as caring or wanting to help. Even a situation you might describe as abusive because of the constant yelling and screaming, might be described by someone else as freedom to express your feelings. So neither side is right or wrong. Neither of them sees the whole picture, only their own perspective.

It's critical to remember that the person you're describing is human. You may view her as hypercritical but in reality she might be a person who has really suffered and realized that there are things that need to be fixed. She may be going about it in the wrong way, but deep down all she wants is to correct, build, and change. It's not as simplistic as you describe. Using other people as examples, not only disconnects you from the person you're speaking about, it's also inherently shallow.

Another question to ask yourself is whether talking about how much you've suffered through other people is really the best way to build emotional intimacy. I know a woman who was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. It's a particular difficult diagnosis for her as it runs in her family. Her way of dealing with the problem was to implement a healthier lifestyle. MS victims can often prolong the amount of time

between one attack and the next by taking good care of themselves. Over time she joined a running club and decided to run in the NY marathon. The night before the marathon there was a party given in a beautiful home overlooking Central Park. When the party was over, everyone began heading towards the bank of three elevators. My friend figured she'd save time by just going down the stairs. She noticed another woman doing the same. Little did she know that this woman was the famous Central Park Jogger, a successful Jewish lawyer who was mugged in Central Park, severely beaten, and left for dead. She suffered neurological damage and wrote a book about her recovery. She and my friend became instant sisters under the skin. They understood each other and their yearnings to move on.

This story is an archetype of another kind of story. It's a story where intimacy was built on the basis of positivity. Neither my friend nor the jogger deemed it necessary to discuss their difficulties at work, their hypercritical parents, or their toxic environment, in order to build their friendship. In marriage that's the way to go. It's what makes your partner love and respect you. Of course there will be times when you'll feel compelled to share things that are painful and this is permitted according to *halacha*. But it shouldn't be your core basis of communication. Work on redefining yourself. Share yourself in a positive way. And when you get to know other people, try to connect on a meaningful plane. You will find that your relationships will acquire new depth in a way negativity would have never given you.