

*Is There a Disconnect between Torah Learning and Torah Living?  
And If So, How Can We Connect Them?  
A Focus on Middos<sup>1</sup>*

By: AHARON HERSH FRIED

A Jew in Petach Tikvah was leading the good life. He had a little house, he owned the *pardes* (orange grove) behind it; all was well. One day an *oleh chadash* (new immigrant) moved in two doors down. For a while all seemed well. The new neighbor seemed to be a nice enough person and life went on peacefully. One day our resident Israeli looks out the window and sees his new neighbor climbing over the fence into his *pardes*, calmly walking over to a tree, tearing off an orange and commencing to peel it. The *pardes* owner runs out into his *pardes* and confronts the man, אדוני, he says, !!כתוב בתורה לא תגנוב!! (Sir, the Torah tells us 'thou shall not steal'!!) The neighbor exclaims, מה נעים להיות בארץ, אוכלים תפוזים ושומעים דברי תורה. (How wonderful it is to be in Israel, we eat oranges and hear words of Torah.)<sup>2</sup>

This fictional anecdote illustrates a rather sad disconnect between learning Torah and living Torah that many admit exists in our communities. It is fictional, but its truth is often replicated in real life.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is dedicated to the memory and merit of a close friend of mine, ע"ה מתתיהו צבי בן שרגא פייבל ע"ה, Mr. Marty Kirschenbaum, who was נפטר as I was completing this article on Wednesday תשס"ח (April 2, 2008). Marty led a life that embodied מדות טובות and doing חסד for others of every walk of life to such an exaggerated degree that it defies belief. He lived that which I can only write about. May we all learn from his ways and may he be a מליץ יושר for us all.

<sup>2</sup> I heard this from Rabbi Yossi Rosenblum of Pittsburgh.

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A friend of mine was *davening* with a *minyan* at Lud airport. The people leading the *minyan* took every possible opportunity to say a *Kaddish*, adding *Kaddeishim* after almost every paragraph of *tefilah* after the *Shemona Esrei*. After עלינו a yeshiva man approached one of the *minyan* organizers and said to him, “You know, the *Aruch HaShulchan* writes that it is not right to add *Kaddeishim* superfluously. The man heard the yeshiva man out respectfully. But when he was finished, he turned to his friend and exclaimed, חיים!  
!הוא אמר דבר תורה-קדיש! (Chaim, he said a *d’var Torah*; *Kaddish*!)”

In a previous article in this journal<sup>3</sup> I repeated a story told by Rav Reuven Feinstein שליט"א in which one of his *talmidim* who had accidentally broken a borrowed tape recorder claimed that he did not have to pay for the damage because “it was an accident.” Reb Reuven was astounded that the boy did not connect the incident to his studies. He was learning פרק המפקיד and surely knew that a שואל was הייב באונסין, responsible to pay for accidental damages to a borrowed object. When Reb Reuven *sblit*”a asked Reb Moshe זצ”ל how this disconnect between learning and behavior could happen, Reb Moshe told him that when בחורים learn *halachos* in *Gemara* and then witness those *halachos* not being adhered to in their community, they learn that what they were taught in *Gemara* is לאו דוקא, not necessarily so. They then fail to apply their learning to life, thus disconnecting their learning from their lives.

While this “disconnect” exists in many areas, I believe it is most starkly evident in the area of *middos* and דרך ארץ (character traits as expressed in one’s manners, demeanor, and behavior).

In the ever-stranger list of reasons for declining a *shidduch* (perspective bride), I heard one recently that truly shocked me. A young man declined to meet a girl because she had only one sibling, and he “was afraid of getting stuck with eventually having to take care of elderly parents.” He wanted to go into a family with more siblings who would help share the load.

I don’t know this young man’s family history and what experiences he may have had that prompted this approach to *shidduchim*, but to me this is a level of selfishness, accompanied by a

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<sup>3</sup> Fried, Aharon H., “Are Our Children Too Worldly?” *Hakirah*, Vol. 4, Winter 2007, pp. 37–67.

lack of אמונה ובטחון that should be foreign to a בן תורה. Actually, I do not even know whether the story is at all true, and I certainly hope it is not. However, if such stories are being told in the community, they seem to reflect a feeling that such thinking exists and that “it could be true.” It is certainly not what he learned in the words of *Chazal* or in the *Sifrei Mussar*. Where does such thinking come from?

On many occasions I have sat with parents whose children were being beat up or systematically bullied in school.<sup>4</sup> What is always most disheartening is the school’s response to these incidents. Many teachers, *rabbeyim*, and even parents have the attitude that there is not much one can do about it either because “you can’t be everywhere at the same time,” or because “boys will be boys, and you cannot legislate against human nature.” *Rabbeyim* who are less kind, sometimes “blame the victim.” In a recent case that I recall, a *rebbe* told a mother who complained that her son was being beaten up, “Make him normal and the others won’t hit him.” Is training our *talmidim* not to hit a classmate who is somewhat “nebbly” or “nerdy” (i.e., socially awkward) too much to ask?

A few years ago I sat with a couple who had asked me to do a psychological assessment on their son who was having problems in school. As a prelude to the assessment I was reviewing their son’s history with them. In the course of the conversation, they related the following: “Our son, a very sensitive boy, attended a certain very *frum* yeshiva where he was being teased a lot. The *menabel* (principal) suggested that perhaps we should send him to a less *frum* school where children tease each other less. So we switched him to a less *frum* yeshiva where he continued to have problems with academics...”

They said this in a matter-of-fact manner, and with no sense of irony. I asked them, I ask myself, and I ask the reader, “Is there not something wrong with this statement? Should we be accepting of the fact that “the students of a ‘less *frum*’ school should be more caring

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<sup>4</sup> Bullying is, of course, not unique to our schools. As I am writing this article, the New York Times is doing a series on bullying in public schools across America—unjustified, wicked, and violent bullying. Additionally, teachers and principals in the public schools often seem callous to this problem. Surely, no one would suggest that we use their problems to justify what happens in our schools.

and less cruel to each other?”<sup>5</sup> Additionally, if it is unfortunately true, should we not be asking ourselves why?

At workshops that I give to teachers on Behavior Management in the Classroom, I hear teachers and *rabbeyim* complaining incessantly about the level of *chutzpa* (arrogance) they meet up with, and their feelings of helplessness in controlling it.

In one sixth-grade classroom a teacher asked one of her students to pick a sheet of paper up from the floor. The student’s response? “I don’t work here, you do!” What’s worse is that the teacher had no response to this. She was so flabbergasted by the student’s *chutzpa* that she was at a loss regarding what to do.

In individual sessions with parents and their children, I hear children speak to their parents in ways I could not have imagined possible. The parents report that what goes on at home is even worse. Like the teachers, the parents accept this with resignation, chalking it up to “בעקבות משיחא הוצפא יסגא”, the prediction in the Mishnah that in the end of days before *Mashiach* arrives we should expect an increase in *chutzpah*. Some are actually afraid to say anything, frightened as they are by all the talk of children becoming “at risk” and going “off the *derech*” because their parents were “too strict.” They remain ignorant of the research literature that shows that the failure to give children guidelines amounts to “neglect” and is even more harmful to children’s development than strict authoritarian parenting.<sup>7</sup>

Having contemplated the history of the Orthodox community over the past forty years, as well as some of my more recent

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<sup>5</sup> I don’t know how true that is, but it is certainly the general perception. Many years ago, Torah Umesorah held a session at its convention, titled “*Are out-of-Town Children* (a.k.a. children from outside of the very *frum* communities of Brooklyn, New York and its environs) *better behaved than those from in-town, and if so why?*” Although no great solutions were offered for the problem, nobody at the convention disputed that “out-of-towners” were better behaved. The only question was “why?” Why should this be?

<sup>6</sup> סוטה דף מט עמוד ב.

<sup>7</sup> See Bee, Helen and Boyd, Denise, *The Developing Child*, Pearson Education, 2007, pp. 370-371, for a brief summary of the research in this area.

experiences in the community, I have come to what seems to be an inescapable conclusion. Namely, that *we have not fully connected our behavior (i.e., our middos) to the ideals of the Torah because we simply have not cared enough to do so.*

*Mechanchim* (educators) have in the last forty odd years brought about a sea change in the attitudes, aspirations, behaviors, and lifestyles of an entire generation of young people. Only one generation ago, almost every *bachur* in the *chareidi* world had to battle his parents about whether he should stay in yeshiva after high school or immediately go to college. This was not true in the *chassidic* world, but there the question for a not-insignificant minority was whether they should go to work at 18 or 19 or stay in yeshiva. In the Modern-Orthodox world, few even entertained the idea of putting off college and career plans for a few years of Torah study at a yeshiva. Today, virtually every *bachur* from *chareidi* high schools, *chassidish* yeshiva *ketanos*, and many if not most from “Modern-Orthodox” high schools continue in yeshiva after high school. Almost every *bachur* graduating from a yeshiva high school today goes to learn in Eretz Yisrael (if not immediately upon graduation, then within three years); almost every girl goes to seminary, most in Eretz Yisroel, some in America. Amongst the *chareidim*, only a minority of *talmidim* or even their parents entertain the idea of college at any point. Virtually every young couple stays in *kollel* for a number of years (including those considered “Modern” Orthodox). Unlike the trend forty years ago, only a minuscule number of the homes our young couples establish have a television in them. Very few ever go to a movie or read secular literature. The standards of *tzniut* that our women and girls adhere to today are much more stringent than those of forty years ago, as a perusal of old wedding albums will attest. Our standards for *kashrut* have also been raised; few today eat ice cream or chocolate bars without a *hechsber*. This was quite common in all but the *chassidische* and strongest *yeshivish* families forty years ago. General adherence to halacha, at least of *Orach Chaim* and parts of *Yoreh De'ah*, has grown.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The interested reader would do well to read Dr. Haym Soloveitchik’s article, “Rupture and Reconstruction, The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy,” in *Tradition* Vol. 28, No. 4, 1994. In this article the author traces an important aspect of the changes I have alluded to.

Thus, in the course of one generation, or perhaps two, *mechanchim* have accomplished many of their goals. That is, the goals they cared about.

The one area in which we have seen little or no change is in the area of *middos*. Some claim that we have actually seen a decline in this area. Why is this?

In the Klausenburger Yeshiva in Williamsburg there was a Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Vilner, זצ"ל. I heard from one of his *talmidim* (Reb Alter Burech Wieder, *olov hasbolom*) that when walking on the street he would tell the *bachurim*, “It looks like it wants to rain,” and then follow up with “Do you know how I know? Because it **is** raining.” He wanted to impress upon his *talmidim* that the real evidence of someone wanting to do something (e.g., learn) is that he actually does it!

By these criteria I am forced to conclude that our community, *mechanchim* as well as parents, has failed to communicate that *middos* and *derech erez* are important values. We have accepted improper behavior with an air of disappointed resignation, one that we would not allow in other areas of our children’s development. Our children picked up on our lack of resolve and have reacted accordingly. In the following pages I will outline some of the underlying causes for our failure to take more resolute action in this area, and will offer some suggestions for what we need to do.

## I. Our “Accepting Attitude” and *Resignation* to the Lack of “*Derech Eretz*”

A father once described to me how in *cheder*, his son was pushed down a flight of stairs by some of his rougher classmates. When I expressed horror at this he said, “It happens all the time. You can’t change it. It’s sort of a culture.” I told him that I was familiar with this culture. It is the culture that the *pasuk*<sup>9</sup> describes as תְּרִבוּת אֲנָשִׁים הַטְּאִים—a culture of sinners.

But why do we accept this? Would we be as accepting of the adage “boys will be boys” if our children snuck into McDonald’s, only occasionally, mind you, just to get a quick taste of “what a Big

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<sup>9</sup> במדבר לב, יד.

Mac is like?” Or to use a far less extreme example, would we be as tolerant of children who ate a bag of potato chips that had the “other” *bechsher*, the one we don’t fully trust? Would we say that it’s just “human nature” to want to eat a bag of chips when one is hungry”?

### **A Possible זכות, a Perceived Limitation on the Building of *Middos***

In thinking about what the sources of such a laissez-faire attitude to *middos* may be, it occurred to me that *mechanchim* may be taking a hands-off approach to *middos* because they recognize the tremendous demands being made on their talmidim, and feel that asking for more would be unrealistic.

Only once did I have the זכות of being in Reb Moishe Feinstein אצל’s study in his home. While I was there the phone rang. Reb Moishe picked it up and here is what I heard him say (in translation from the Yiddish):

“No, I don’t think you need to be מהמיר on that.” (pause) “No you don’t have to be חושש for that.” (pause) “No, it is not כדאי to be מהמיר like that.” (pause) “No, no,” (pause) “How many חומרות do you want to load on the back of one woman? She’ll collapse under the load!”

It would certainly seem, from Reb Moishe’s response, that there is a limit to how many strictures a person can handle.

Another way of putting this is that there is a limit to our capacity for self-control. A person who is trying to control himself from yelling out in pain because of a toothache will have great difficulty simultaneously controlling his responses to somebody who is irritating him. Empirical research reported by Muraven and Baumeister<sup>10</sup> suggests that our capacity for self-control is indeed limited, and furthermore that self-control saps our energy and tires us.

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<sup>10</sup> Muraven, Mark & Baumeister, Roy F., “Self-Regulation and Depletion of Limited Resources: Does Self-Control Resemble a Muscle?” *Psychological Bulletin*, 2000, Vol. 126, No. 2, 247–259. See also a NY Times Op-Ed piece published this week on this topic; Aamodt, Sandra & Wang, Sam *Tighten Your Belt, Strengthen Your Mind*, April 2, 2008.

For example, people who had to control themselves by not eating from a plate of delicious cookies placed in front of them were less capable of exercising self-control on a totally unrelated task. They could not concentrate on a set of insoluble anagrams for nearly as long as people who had not had to control themselves by not eating the cookies. The need for self-control is not confined to diets and the like. Self-control affects a broad range of our daily behaviors; concentrating on work or on a lesson requires us to exercise self-control (to make sure we are not distracted), sitting in a classroom and holding ourselves back from talking to a neighbor requires self-control, and of course, maintaining civility in the face of provocation requires great self-control.

Would I be totally off the mark if I were to suggest that one reason for the lapses in civil behavior (*middos*) of yeshiva and day school children is that they are quite simply tuckered out from exercising self-control all day in school? That they are “collapsing under the load”? They sit in school, under conditions requiring disciplined self-control and concentration, for long hours (in the case of many boys, for longer than their parents sit at their desks at work). They have limited outlets for their natural energy, which they must hold in check all day. Is it possible that *rabbeyim* recognize this and feel that after all the boys need to do, asking them to exercise self-control in how they talk to their siblings, their parents, and others would be a case of *תפסת מרובה לא תפסת*? Is it possible that because they feel that “something has to give,” *mechanchim* make a conscious decision to let *middos* education slide? If so, are we not akin to the *שומר* who properly locks a sheep in a corral, but under a hot burning sun? The *שומר* is then held responsible when the sheep breaks out and runs away.<sup>11</sup> More important, if this is the choice *mechanchim* feel they have been forced to make, is it the right choice? I believe it is not.

I believe that we have forgotten or confused our priorities as outlined in *Shulchan Aruch*. We tend to come down hard on children when they lapse in *מצוות בין אדם למקום* but are more accepting and tolerant when they lapse in *מצוות בין אדם לחבירו*. The *Shulchan Aruch*,

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<sup>11</sup> See Mishnah and *Gemara* at the beginning of *Perek haKones*: *בבא קמא נ"ה*. *ע"ב ורש"י שם*.



Rambam, and the Magid Mishna teach us that our priorities and concerns need to be reversed.

Rambam<sup>12</sup> states in הלכות גניבה, and the בית יוסף codified it in *Shulchan Aruch*<sup>13</sup>

ראוי לבית דין להכות את הקטנים על הגנבה כפי כח הקטן כדי שלא יהיו רגילין  
בה וכן אם הזיקו שאר נזקין.

It is fitting for Beis-Din to hit the young when they steal, accordingly with their strength, so that they do not become habituated to it. And so too when they cause other damages.

On which the מגיד משנה comments:

זה לא מצאתי מבואר אלא נראה פשוט, ואפילו למאן דאמר קטן אוכל נבילות  
אין בי"ד מצווין להפרישו ה"מ בעבירות שבין אדם למקום אבל בעבירות שבין  
אדם לחבירו ודאי מפרישין אותו כדי שלא יארע תקלה על ידו.

I have not found this *halacha* (of the Rambam) stated clearly (in the Talmud); however, it seems self-evident. And even according to the *amora* who says that “when a child is seen eating non-kosher meat, *beis-din* (i.e., the community aside from his parents who have the obligation of *chinuch*) has no obligation to separate him from the non-kosher meat,” that *amora* is referring only to mitzvot between man and G-d, **but when it comes to mitzvot between man and his neighbor, *beis-din* is surely obligated to stop him** so that no harm comes about through the child’s actions.

Clearly, we should be actively engaged in changing our children’s behavior rather than accepting it with “helpless resignation.” In fact, research shows that despite the limited nature of self-control, it can be strengthened and built up. Not by letting it go, but by exercising it at appropriate levels, by granting appropriate rest periods for rejuvenation and then exercising it again. We would do well to learn how to do this with our students (and with ourselves).

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<sup>12</sup> יד החזקה - הלכות גניבה פרק א הל' י

<sup>13</sup> חו"מ הלכות גניבה סי' שמ"ט ס"ק ה

## It is Not Just Fighting and it is Not Just Amongst the Children

This attitude of “helpless resignation” goes beyond accepting that children will hurt *each other*. It also extends toward the disrespect and disregard that children show toward their teachers and other adults.

A yeshiva in Brooklyn last year hired an African American to teach high school mathematics. The boys in his classes teased and insulted him with veiled and not-so-veiled racial comments, driving the teacher to tears. One of the boys in his class, the child of a friend of mine, complained bitterly about this to his father, who shared his concern with me. He was so distraught that I decided to call one of the *menahalim* (principals) at the yeshiva with whom I had a personal acquaintance. After speaking to the principal, however, I was deeply disturbed and disappointed. He assured me that “of course the yeshiva did not promote this kind of behavior, and did not condone it.” Furthermore, they had tried to do something about it but were not successful. I suggested that the yeshiva’s response was not strong enough and that had a *bachur* come to yeshiva wearing a pair of jeans or sneakers rather than the required attire of slacks and dress shoes, the *hanballa’s* response would have been more vigorous. He denied that, though not very convincingly. Finally, he told me that, if truth be told, he would not have hired the teacher in the first place. I asked whether that was because he lacked teaching skills, but he quickly replied, “No, no, he’s a good teacher, but I wouldn’t have hired him because, as we ask in our *davening*, אל תביאני לידי נסיון (G-d, do not test us). It’s not right placing the *bachurim* in such a נסיון!”

Is teaching our children not to denigrate and embarrass others too great a נסיון (test)?!

Children interpret their *rabbeyims’* and teachers’ acceptance of violations of בין אדם לחבירו as an indication that such violations are not really serious.

The 9<sup>th</sup> grade בחורים of a yeshiva had taken to teasing and otherwise being disrespectful to the yeshiva’s cook, a 73-year-old *chasiddisher yid*. The בחורים justified their actions by saying that he was an ignorant עם הארץ and that they knew how to learn more than he did. This class had an excellent *rebbe* with a reputation for being a strong בעל השפעה, exerting a strong influence in the molding of his students’ personalities. He was especially known for

his ability to deliver strong *shmuessen* (moral sermons), which he did regularly in class, especially during the time of this story, as it was the month of Elul. His *shmuessen* covered a wide range of topics (including why his 14-year-old charges should not marry a girl who went to college). They were delivered with great fervor in a thunderous voice with much pathos and lasted from about 25 to 40 minutes. One day the cook in the yeshiva had a heart attack. Though not necessarily brought on by the boys' teasing, it brought that issue to the surface. One of the *talmidim* told me that his *rebbe* did finally tell the boys that it was not right for them to tease an elderly person even if they did know more Torah than he did. I asked the *talmid* whether his *rebbe* actually gave a *shmuess* on this topic; did he get excited about it, and how long did his discussion take? The *talmid* told me no, it wasn't a *shmuess*, he just calmly told them and it took about two minutes.

The *rebbe* probably felt that he could not do much about the problem. Furthermore, he saw the incident as no more than an unfortunate distraction, certainly not part of his curriculum plan. However inadvertently, he not only failed to help the situation, he made it worse. Children learn from how their teachers react to situations and how they talk about them. When a *rebbe* addresses an issue with a lower level of enthusiasm than he appropriates for other "more important" issues, his *talmidim* internalize what they perceive to be their *rebbe's* value system. Important topics deserve a *shmuess*. Less important ones do not.

How different was the response of the Gaon Rebbe Shlomo Zalman Auerbach of Jerusalem to a similar issue:<sup>14</sup>

One Sunday morning Reb Shlomo Zalman gathered his students at Kol Torah and told them: "A terrible thing happened in my neighborhood and I must make you aware of it." The seriousness of Reb Shlomo Zalman's disposition and the somber tone of his voice only served to intensify their fear that the event was even more horrendous than their vivid imaginations could conjure up. Reb Shlomo Zalman related that on Shabbos he had seen a man dragging benches to the shul for a collation in honor of his son's engagement. The man's son, who was walking at his side, did not so much as lift a finger to help his father. "I could

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<sup>14</sup> Related by Rabbi Hanoach Teller in "And from Jerusalem, His word," NYC Publishing, 1995, pp. 139-140.

not contain my bewilderment,” the Rav told his listeners, “and I asked the *chassan* to explain why his father was doing all of the *shlepping*. He proudly explained that even where there was an *eruv*, he himself did not carry on *Shabbos* and was therefore unable to lend a hand.” This reply enraged the *rav*. The very idea of so-called religiosity taking precedence over honoring one’s father was anathema to him.

## II. Our Lack of Focus on This Area: It Just Isn’t Part of the Curriculum

*Mechanchim*, having put the topic of building *middos* “out of mind” (either as a result of feeling helpless, or because they have relegated the responsibility to the home), are not fully conscious of how their inaction, and sometimes their actions, may actually contribute to a lack of *middos* in their *talmidim*. This is especially true of the *הוראות*, the guidance they give their *talmidim*.

In a yeshiva high school a very good *bachur* chose two strong *talmidim* to learn with for two *sedarim*, and a weaker one to learn with during the third *sefer*. His *magid shiur* berated him for choosing to learn with and help the weaker *bachur*, saying, “You can *shteig* a lot more with a stronger *chavrusa*.” When it comes to choosing *chavrusos* for Torah learning, the Rebbe explained, the operative principle is *היך קודמים*—your life takes precedence over any considerations of helping and learning with another possibly weaker student. He concluded by saying, There is no *הסד* when it comes to Torah!

I don’t know what the source for this attitude would be. In fact, I’ve heard that *gedolim* of the previous generation like Reb Chaim Shmuelevitz זצ”ל taught the precise opposite. Reb Chaim told his *talmidim* that doing *chesed* in Torah will grant one the *siattah dishmaya* needed for success in Torah. But even if there was a basis for the other approach, should we not be worried that teaching such an “every man for himself” approach to **Torah** will result in an “every man for himself” approach to **life**, and will contribute to our developing a selfish “dog eat dog” society?<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> In the first *סעיף* in Shulchan Aruch we are told not to be embarrassed by those who scoff at us in our service of *Hashem*. The *Mishna Berurah*

Although, as I have already said, this “disconnect” between learning Torah and living Torah is perhaps most obvious in issues of *בין אדם לחבירו* (person-to-person dealings), and somewhat less visibly in issues of *בין אדם למקום* (person-to-G-d dealings), the “disconnect” exists there as well. As the Chazon Ish<sup>16</sup> writes, the one overriding *מדה* that a Torah-true Jew must have is self-control. To the degree that one has it, one has it in all areas of life. To the degree that one lacks it, one lacks it in all areas of life. If one seems to have self-control in one area, e.g. in the area of *בין אדם למקום*, but does not have self-control in areas of *בין אדם לחבירו*, then it is an illusion. It seems so only because the *מצוות בין אדם למקום* have not “stepped on his toes” (e.g. kosher meat is easily available, Shabbos is a pleasure), while people do step on his toes constantly. Such a person will transgress *בין אדם לחבירו* as soon as they “step on his toes.”

We say in our daily *tefilos*, *לעשות רצונך בלבב שלם*, ותלמדם חוקי חיים לעשות רצונך בלבב שלם, —“and you taught them (our forefathers) a **living** Torah, to do your will wholeheartedly.” Torah is meant to be a living Torah, a guide for life. How can we better connect the two—Torah and Life?

### **In Search of an Answer:**

I would suggest that the disconnect between learning and living in the area of *middos* needs to be addressed at four different levels. Each of these involves some misconceptions we have about the development of character traits and behavioral controls, or some misconception or deliberate forgetting of its importance. The first three speak specifically to Torah and *middos*; the fourth addresses connecting Torah and living in a more general way.

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ועכ"פ לא יתקוטט עמהם מפני שמדת העזות מגונה מאד ואין ראוי להשתמש ממנה כלל אפילו בעבודת הש"י כי יקנה קנין בנפשו להיות עז אפילו שלא להשתמש ממנה כלל אפילו בעבודת הש"י. במקום עבודתו ית' ועיין בבה"ל “But he should, in any case, not enter into disputes with them, for audacity is a very despicable trait and should not be used in the service of Hashem, because the person is likely to become habituated to the trait and use it even in his daily dealings with others.” This fear of becoming habituated to negative behavior patterns is well-established in our tradition. Why do we forget this in the cases described?

<sup>16</sup> ספר אמונה ובטחון פרק ד, סעיפים א-ו.

The four areas we will address are:

1. Our understanding of the development of character, and the role of learned behavior.
2. Our awareness and understanding of the importance of Role Models as demonstrated by Social Learning Theory.
3. Our misunderstanding of how morality and ethics are taught. More specifically
  - a. The realization that cognition, understanding of morality, is not sufficient.
  - b. Understanding that teaching sensitivity is important.
  - c. Understanding that the role of emotion is crucial and requires
    - a. teaching empathic distress.
    - b. fostering intuitive judgment.
    - c. seeing דרך ארץ as *frumkeit*.
4. Connecting the learning to life.

## **1. Understanding Character Development and the Role of Learned Behavior**

In discussions with both teachers and parents, I often sense, and sometimes hear clearly articulated, a belief that they can do little about children's *middos*. Some believe that *middos* are inborn, while others believe that they are irreversibly formed very early in life. Still others believe that the pervasive lack of *middos* in society would in any case destroy anything positive that they could teach their students (teachers blame bad *middos* on the homes, parents on the schools, and both on the larger society). Both parents and teachers feel they do not have the tools with which to improve children's *middos*. These beliefs and attitudes fly in the face of all of our *Sifrei Mussar*. Were they all written for naught? Sadly, most of our teachers and parents do not have the tools for character change at their disposal. They simply lack the knowledge and understanding of what Behavioral Science has shown to work in building children's character and behavior.

The Rambam said it long ago, and more recently, Behavioral Science<sup>17</sup> has taught us, that “behavior is determined by its consequences.”<sup>18</sup> This means that positive consequences increase the probability of a behavior being repeated, while negative consequences decrease the probability of its being repeated. Behavior, including the constellation of habits that define our “character traits,” is thus amenable to training and can in most cases be controlled and channeled in positive directions.<sup>19</sup>

Although it is true that children are born with different temperaments, and therefore often require different approaches, negative behaviors, as such, are not “in the child’s nature.” Negative behaviors, no less than positive behaviors, are “learned behaviors,” and can be unlearned. It is often important to understand the functions that negative behaviors have for some children, but in discovering those functions, and teaching them positive ways through

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<sup>17</sup> The research in this area is so vast that it is difficult to give any single source for it. I suggest the interested reader peruse one of the following sources. Alberto & Troutman, *Applied behavior Analysis for Teachers*, Seventh Edition, 2006, Pearson Education Inc., or Wesley C Becker, *Parents Are Teachers*, Research Press Publications, Champaign, Ill. The professionals running our institutions would do well to familiarize themselves with the literature of Behavioral Control and Discipline. Very few of our schools have formal programs in place. This is to the detriment of both children and teachers.

<sup>18</sup> First stated for modern psychology by Thorndike 1898, and later undergoing some technical revisions that are immaterial to our discussion. The earlier version of the “law” can be found in Rambam *Perek Chelek*, where he writes: לפי שדרכו של אדם לא יעשה מעשה אלא להשיג בו תועלת או למנוע נזק. “It is the nature of man not to do anything unless it brings him some gain or the avoidance of a loss.”

<sup>19</sup> In view of recent incidents in the Jewish community, I must make a disclaimer. When I speak of methods of Behavior Management or Behavior Modification, I refer to programs that aim to build children up by using primarily positive approaches, never harsh punishments. This does not include the so-called behavior modification “boot camps” that tear children down by use of harsh and dangerous approaches. These are unethical and, as I see it, אסור להלכה. (This issue has had wide exposure in the general community. It’s too bad that our community is, so often, the last to know.)

which they can achieve the same functions, we can realign their behavior and channel it<sup>20</sup> in a more positive direction.

Experience, corroborated by research, has also taught us that exhortations, rules, and expectations transmitted to our children without clear statements of what the positive consequences for adhering to those rules will be and what the negative consequences for breaking those rules will be, are no more than worthless “wish lists.” It is, to be sure, important to explain the “why” of proper behavior to children and to get them to “buy into it,” but ultimately there must be clearly stated and consistently implemented consequences for children’s behavior.

Thus, just as in any other area of life where we have succeeded, so too in the area of *middos*, if we wish to succeed, we must teach our children proper behavior. We must insist on their adhering to the guidelines for proper behavior that we set out for them. We must stress and reinforce proper behavior, and discourage improper behavior. We must reward proper behavior<sup>21</sup> no less than we reward academic achievement, and where necessary, we must punish negative behavior, at least to the degree that we do for מצוות שבין אדם למקום and for school rules such as the dress code. In the realm of מצוות שבין אדם למקום we reject the idea that “boys will be boys” and that “it is in the nature of children to experiment with the forbidden,” or sentiments of the like. So too in מצוות שבין אדם לחבירו, we must recognize that despite children’s individual temperaments, children develop character traits that to a greater extent reflect the training they have received, and that ultimately טבע שני הרגל נעשה, the

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<sup>20</sup> See the words of the GR”A in his Commentary on Mishlei on the Pasuk (משלי כב, ו) חנוך לנער על פי דרכו.

<sup>21</sup> Although the issue of the ethics and efficacy of rewarding behavior is not our topic in this paper, I can hear the reader protesting here, “But why should we reward someone for proper behavior?! Should we not be able to just expect that?! I would answer by referring the reader to Rashi’s explanation in כט פסוק כט as to why Lot deserved to be saved from the destruction of Sodom. Rashi says it was because he behaved properly and did not reveal Avraham’s secret when he claimed Sara to be his sister. שהיה לוט יודע ששרה אשתו של אברהם ושמע שאמר אברהם במצרים על שרה אחותי היא ולא גילה הדבר שהיה חס עליו לפיכך חס הקב"ה עליו.



habit becomes second nature. This is after all, the foundation of education programs, of הינוך: the belief that man can harness and train his nature. This belief is supported by a wide body of research that shows “that our actions influence our thoughts.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, we must insist that our children **engage in behaviors and actions that reflect concern and respect for others, so that such concerns become embedded in their very natures.**

We must not begin with lofty speeches and fancy programs. Instead, we must begin with the most mundane and simple parts of their daily experience and behavior. We must teach our children what to do, i.e., how to behave.

At home, we must teach them at an early age to pick up their toys and put them away. Not only because they should not leave a mess, but more important, that they not grow up thinking that it is the duty of others (i.e., their mother) to serve them, and that they be conscious of not making work for others.

Similarly, children, and especially the boys, must learn to clean off the table after they have eaten—at the very least, to place their dirty dishes in the sink, not to leave their own dirty plates for others to take off the table. They should feel embarrassed when they fail to do so. Boys need to learn that neither their mothers nor their sisters are there to serve them hand-and-foot. I have seen the unfortunate results in the development of boys who have not learned this basic sensitivity. Their well-meaning mothers and sisters, true נשים צדקניות, wishing to show respect to Torah, have inadvertently taught them to expect other to do their work. They have been told that all they needed to do was learn. They believed it, and they learned. But when

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<sup>22</sup> See כי האדם נפעל כפי פעולותיו in ספר החינוך where he writes ולבו וכל מחשבותיו תמיד אחר מעשיו שהוא עוסק בהם אם טוב ואם רע. This truth, which at one time was dismissed by the moderns, has by now been corroborated by research and is recognized so much that one of the leading Introductory Psychology textbooks writes, “Many streams of research confirm that *attitudes follow behavior*.” (Myers, David G., *Psychology*, 8<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2007, Worth Publishers, p. 726.) Even popular culture has now recognized this. See Brooks, David in a recent New York Times Op-Ed piece, “Pitching with a Purpose.” He cites from “The Mental ABC’s of Pitching,” a book on baseball, and writes, “Behavior shapes thought. If a player disciplines his behavior he will also discipline his mind.” N.Y Times, April 1, 2008.

they reached the age of young adulthood, it became glaringly apparent that they had failed to develop emotionally and to develop sensitivity for others. Their parents were afraid to take them to the *chupah* for fear of how they would treat their wives and children.

We need to teach our children to give up their seats to older people, be it at home, on a bus, or in *shul*. There was a time when this was the norm. If a grown-up came into *shul*, and there did not seem to be a place for him, fathers would immediately tell their children to get up and give their seat to the adult.<sup>23</sup>

- Today this is not the norm. I know people who have shown up at *שמחה* in a strange *shul* and found an empty seat, only to be shooed away by someone saying that it is his ten-year-old son's seat. One person told me this happened to him three times at one *שמחה*. He finally just gave up and *davened* in the hallway.
- An elderly man recently told me that he walked into a *shul*, noticed one empty seat, and headed toward it. As he was nearing the seat, one of the already seated men motioned to his son to quickly grab the seat before the elderly man could get to it. What message was this man giving to his son?

It would help if we would teach our children to hold a door open for someone behind them who is about to walk through it. And, if as some have told me, they are uncomfortable doing that, lest the person for whom they would be holding the door open be a member of the opposite gender, let them not look back! Whatever they do, they should not allow the door to slam in the face of the person behind them. Saying “please,” “thank you,” and “excuse me”<sup>24</sup> would not hurt either.

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<sup>23</sup> I cannot say that this was always done in the most decorous or respectful way. Often children were unceremoniously “shooed away” from their seats. And, they probably resented it. It can and should be done in a manner that respects the child as a person. The reason for giving up the seat should be explained to the child, and s/he should be given the opportunity to feel that he is doing a mitzvah rather than just being chased away.

<sup>24</sup> I do not of course mean the use of this term in the “attack mode” commonly used in Israel. There, if you hear *תסלה לי*, usually you know that trouble is looming.

It has become fashionable in some circles to refer to some or all of the behaviors I have listed as reflecting “mere manners” and therefore being unimportant. The claim is made that manners are superficial and that one should instead work on developing *middos*, *middos* being much deeper. There is some truth to that. Manners can be superficial, and developing *middos* is a much more arduous, long term, and profound process. But to have neither?! Furthermore, manners, superficial as they may be, are a first step in the development and growth of *middos*.

In addition to teaching our children what to do, we must teach them what not to do. We need to be on the watch to keep them from engaging in negative behaviors. We should not tolerate aggression, hurtful behaviors, or *chutzpa*. Such patterns of behavior *can* be stopped, but only if we decide we need to. With a properly thought-out and proactive plan of action, they can usually be almost fully eradicated. We must use all the means at our disposal—explanation, exhortation, reward, and punishment. We must stop negative behaviors from developing into the habitual parts of our children’s personality. Instead, we should reinforce their helpful behaviors until they become second nature.

## **2. The Importance of Role Models: Focusing on How We Speak, What We Say, and What We Do**

Years of research, most prominently by Albert Bandura (1963<sup>25</sup>, 1997<sup>26</sup>) have taught us that children and adults learn much of their behavior from the role models they meet,<sup>27</sup> i.e. their parents, their teachers, and other prominent adults. The field of Social Learning Theory has also demonstrated that, from the role models they see, children learn their ways of thinking, their attitudes toward values, their feeling that they are capable, and their belief that they can exercise self-control. *Chazal* and our *Sifrei Kodesh* have of course

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<sup>25</sup> Bandura, Albert and Walters, Richard H., “Social Learning and Personality Development,” Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1963.

<sup>26</sup> Bandura, Albert, *Self Efficacy: The Exercise of Control*, Freeman, 1997.

<sup>27</sup> For a timely piece on this topic in the popular press, see Bronson, Po, *Learning to Lie*, New York Magazine, Feb.10, 2008.

expressed these thoughts clearly many times over. As they tell us: <sup>28</sup>לעולם ידור אדם במקום רבו, *a person should live in proximity to his rebbe*, because having his *rebbe* as a role model will serve to dissuade him from negative behaviors. Similarly, *Chazal* tell us שותא דינוקא בשוקא או <sup>29</sup>דאבוה או דאימיה, “The speech of a child in the street reflects what he hears from either his father or his mother.”

### How We Speak:

It is not only of our general behavior that we must be careful. We must also take care when admonishing or castigating our children for their improper behavior. Uncontrolled and unbridled anger, even when seemingly justified, usually fails to improve the child’s behavior. Instead it engenders contempt and disrespect for the admonishing parent or teacher. Even worse, it provides the child with a negative role model for how to communicate.

The Chazon Ish in *אורח חיים* פרק ד' אות ט"ז writes:<sup>30</sup>

כאשר מיסר הרב את תלמידו בביטוי גס וזעקת רוגז על העוול אשר עשה, מתערב כאן רע וטוב, אם יש כאן תועלת תוכחה והחניך מתעורר על חטאו וגומר בלבו שלא לשנות חטא זה, [לעומת זה] יש כאן ענין רע שהחניך מתרגל בגסות ובקפדנות המקבל מרבו שרואהו משמש במגונות אלו בעת תוכחתו, וגדול שמשא יותר מלמודה, והתלמיד מחקה תמיד את רבותיו, ועל הרווב גם התוכחה לקויה כשמתלוה עמה ממדות הלא טובות.

When a teacher admonishes a child using a coarse expression and enraged screaming regarding the wrong that the student committed, there is a mixture of good and bad. There may be a positive gain of admonishment and the student becomes aware of the wrongness of his transgression and makes up his mind never to repeat it. [On the other hand] there is a negative aspect to this in that the student gets used to the coarseness and the impatience that he is receiving from his teacher, whom he sees using all of these as he admonishes him. And **its application and practice is greater than its learning** (i.e., watching a teacher applying Torah in his life

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<sup>28</sup> ברכות ה, ע"א.

<sup>29</sup> סוכה נו ע"ב.

<sup>30</sup> Rebbe Yosef Yitzchok Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe זצ"ל, writes very much the same in the *Klalei HaChinuch ve'ba'Hadracha*, p. 28 in the edition published by Yekuthiel Green of Kfar ChaBaD.

provides a stronger lesson than learning Torah from him), and the student always mimics his teachers, and in most cases even the admonishment itself is lacking, when it is mixed with bad character.

### **What We React to and How:**

We must react to a poor grade in התנהגות (behavior) on a child's report card, no less than to a poor grade in *Chumash* or *Gemara*. And when a child comes home with, for example, a 94 on his/her test, that should be good enough. We should suppress the urge to ask, "Was this the best grade in the class?" It teaches the child that the goal is not to do his best, but to do better than others.

As Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch writes,<sup>31</sup> one of the stressors that hinder the creation of good *middos* is the encouragement by home and school of an unhealthy kind of competition—one that emphasizes not being the best one can be, but rather, being better than others.<sup>32</sup> This raises a set of questions. Thus,

- Is it healthy, is it Jewish, for us to have a "best Yeshiva" list? How healthy is it when our בחורים rank the Yeshivas (not to speak of their ישיבות ראשי), and their *talmidim*, as "first" and "second" tier schools and people? Is the emphasis on attending the "best" schools good and healthy?<sup>33</sup>
- Is the emphasis on being the "best *bachur* (or girl)" in wherever, a healthy one? Does it breed good *middos*? Or, does it breed a sense of superiority, elitism, and arrogance?<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> See Hirsch, Rav Samson Raphael, "Ethical Training in the Classroom," in *Collected Writings of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch*, Vol. VII, pp. 49-50.

<sup>32</sup> BenZion Sorotzkin addresses this issue in a number of papers. There he refers to this negative competition as the unhealthy "quest for perfection" rather than the healthier "pursuit of excellence." (See Sorotzkin, B., "The Pursuit of Perfection: Vice or Virtue in Judaism?" *Journal of Psychology and Judaism*, Vol. 23, No. 4 179–195 as well as his other excellent articles on the topic.)

<sup>33</sup> See Hirsch, Rav Samson Raphael, On the Collaboration between Home and School, *ibid.* pg 109, on the damage done by "exclusive" schools to children's characters.

<sup>34</sup> Again I hear the reader's protestations. Do not *Chazal* tell us (בבא בתרא): (כא ע"א): קנאת סופרים תרבה חכמה, that "jealousy amongst students

- We tend to emphasize a degree of perfection in our children that causes them to be afraid of *chas ve'shalom* admitting any weakness. This fear leads to many adverse effects in their emotional and psychological health, in their religious practices, and of course in their *middos* (see Sorotzkin *ibid.*). Worst of all, it creates an overly cynical attitude toward life and Torah. (Much of this is, of course, driven by *shidduch* considerations, but also by other factors.)

Homes and schools must actively work against these trends. We must allow our children healthy growth and development.

We must teach our children to respect others and to refrain from disparaging others. Much time and effort is spent on teaching our children the *איסורים* involved in speaking הרע לשון. Thus we teach them that there are 16 *לאוים* involved in every הרע לשון. But that is not enough. Unless and until we teach children to respect other people's privacy, and unless we teach them that sticking our proverbial noses into other people's business is inherently disgusting, they will not cease to find "היתרים" for speaking הרע לשון, if only for the most "juicy pieces."

## How We Behave

As the Chazon Ish used to say, we must be careful שלא תהיה שמיעה גדולה מראייה—that is, our children should not hear us preach and then see us fail to perform. Thus, we must carefully model appropriate behavior.

It will not do for us to admonish our children not to be aggressive, and then have them watch us cut off other cars as we drive, and honk our horns at all hours of the night without any

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increases knowledge?" Firstly, *סופרים* refers not to students but to teachers (see the context of the *Gemara* in *Bava Basra*, as well as explicitly stated by Rashi in ע"א פ"ב (קידושין פ"ב), who can experience a mature level of envy (rather than jealousy), which inspires them to do more. Secondly, as I heard from Rebbe Mordechai Gifter קנאה, need not refer to jealousy or envy; it may refer to zealousness. In other words, watching the zealousness of others induces one to apply himself as well.

concern that we may be disturbing people in their sleep. We cannot teach our children to respect the needs of others when they watch us stop our cars in the middle of the street to have a brief *shmus* with a friend, while blatantly disregarding the traffic we are holding up behind us. We are in the habit of telling stories of *gedolim* that illustrate their greatness in *middos*. We all know the story of Rebbe Yaakov Kaminitzky זצ"ל who stopped the driver of a car he was in from cutting in front of a bus because the *Gemara* says that, when entering a narrow strait, a fully loaded ship has the right of way over an empty ship. We tell the story and marvel at Reb Yaakov's גדלות (greatness) in applying Torah to the minutest aspects of daily life. But why don't we follow suit? Why don't we connect to what we learn, and to what we teach and preach?

Children will imitate their parents, and students will mimic their teachers. In the case of both parents and teachers, actions have a greater effect on the beholders than do words of exhortation, even the teachings of their *rabbeyim*.

A *cheder* in Brooklyn instituted a program in *Hilchos Tefilah*, hoping that learning the *halachos* would improve their *talmidim's* behavior during *tefilah*. The program included a test of the material. One boy, a fourth grader, asked his *menabel* how long one needed to stand after walking back three steps following *Shemona Esrei*. The *menabel* told him that one had to wait until *kedusha* as stated in the *kuntras* from which they had been given to study. However, when it came to the test, the boy answered that one could sit down immediately after finishing *Shemona Esrei*. When the child was later asked why he wrote that answer, even after having asked the *menabel* for the correct one, the boy replied, "Because that's what my father does."

Yes, children watch their parents, and what's more, they *pasken* (decide the halacha) like their parents, and perhaps that is as it should be. But if so, parents need to accept the responsibility of modeling behaviors that are in agreement with the *Shulchan Aruch* (as do *rabbeyim*). Again, if we want our children to connect their lives to what they are learning, we must be careful not to sever those connections.

If we wish to connect our children's behavior to the Torah they learn, we need to demonstrate to them that we are all subordinate to

the halacha. Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch<sup>35</sup> writes that one reason that it is easier to teach children all of the *middos* other than obedience is because although they have models for the other *middos*, they do not have a model for obedience. He suggests that the child of observant parents will more easily learn obedience because “the free-willed, happy obedience which he (the child) sees his parents give to the commandments and prohibitions of this higher authority (the Torah) in every aspect of their daily lives may serve him as an inspiring example to follow.”

### **3. Focusing on How We Teach Our Children about *Middos***

#### **a. Cognitive knowledge and understanding are not enough.**

In the field of Psychology there is a well known theory of Moral Development developed by Laurence Kohlberg.<sup>36</sup> This theory focuses on how the thought processes and understanding of children in the area of Morality and Ethics develop over the years, and how children come to have progressively higher comprehension of morality and ethics. The theory also gave rise to programs of instruction that aim to improve moral thinking. In these programs, children are presented with moral dilemmas with which to grapple. It was the belief of those designing and implementing the programs that the process of struggling with and offering solutions to moral dilemmas would effectuate improvement in moral thinking, which in turn would lead to improvements in moral behavior. Unfortunately, although changes in moral thinking may have come about in these programs, they were only moderately successful in changing moral behavior. As Kohlberg writes, “One can reason in terms of principles

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<sup>35</sup> Hirsch, Rav Samson Raphael, “The First Years of a Child’s Life,” *ibid.* p. 135.

<sup>36</sup> For a comprehensive presentation of the theory and research, see Crain, William, *Theories of Development*, Fourth Ed. 2000, Prentice Hall, pp. 147–169.



and not live up to those principles.”<sup>37</sup> This is not to say that moral reasoning is not important. It is actually very important.<sup>38</sup> It is not enough, however, and by itself it will not guarantee better moral behavior. There are a number of reasons for why this is so. We will point to two:

- The importance of authenticity in the teaching of morality.
- The importance of empathy and emotional involvement in moral development and motivation.

### **Authenticity:**

In the Jewish world there are a few “*middos* programs” on the market. Best known of these programs is the *Derech Eretz* program developed in Toronto. A number of schools have also created their own *middos* programs in which children are taught the basic values and *halachos* that underlie proper *middos*. At the root of these programs lies the belief that learning about *middos* will improve *middos* (just as in Kohlberg’s approach). Children are taught *halachos* in areas like *kibud av v’em, ve’hodarto pnei zakein, kavod ha’briyos* and the like. No less than with teaching the *halachos* in other areas of life, teaching these *halachos* is of utmost importance. However, just as in other areas of halacha, if, after the *rebbe* has taught a halacha, the *talmid* observes the *rebbe* ignoring it, or if after teaching the halacha, the *rebbe* states that

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<sup>37</sup> Cited in Bee & Boyd *ibid*, p. 356, from Kohlberg, L, “The Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Moral Education,” *Phi Delta Kappan*, pp. 670–677.

<sup>38</sup> Our entire education system, with our tremendous emphasis on learning and mastering the thought processes of *Chazal*, aims to develop a mind disciplined in considering ethical and moral issues and adjudicating them following the principles of halacha. It is important that our children develop the ability to think. Only if we encourage them to think independently and to apply their learned “disciplined habits of thought” to everyday life will our education have its desired effect. If all they learn to do is repeat mantras and codified renditions of other people’s thinking, they will not develop the ability to think about ethics and to arrive at ethical imperatives for their actions and behavior.

actually, “we don’t *fir zich* like this” (we do not follow this ruling), the lesson is in effect erased from the child’s mind.

Years ago my son asked me at the *Shabbos* table, “*Tati*, why must we hate *goyim*?” I asked him where he had gotten this idea. He answered, “My *rebbe* said so.” I would have been disturbed by this “lesson” under any circumstances, but I was even more surprised because that Friday afternoon my son had brought home his lesson from the *Derech Eretz* program. It taught about *kavod ha’briyos*, complete with the anecdote about how Rebbe Yaakov Kaminetzky זצ”ל interrupted a conversation he was having on the street to pay silent respect to a non-Jewish funeral that was passing by, saying that the dead person too was created in the צלם אלוקים, image of *Hashem*. How, I wondered, did the same *rebbe* teach the two lessons in the same day or week? I did not wonder about which lesson had “taken.” That was unfortunately obvious.

Thus, of primary importance in teaching *middos* is **authenticity**; we must mean what we teach and preach. But it must go further than that.

### **Empathy:**

One of the critics of Kohlberg’s approach was Hoffman.<sup>39</sup> He emphasized and cited research to show that Moral Development and Behavior were strongly dependent on an understanding of and identification with the feelings of other human beings, especially those who are suffering. He argued that it is by this empathic distress (known in our own literature as being *משתתף בצער הבריו*), feeling another human being’s pain, rather than just moral thinking, that we are moved to altruistic behavior, to helping that person. Similarly, it is the sensitivity to the realization that our words or actions may embarrass and hurt another person, that may cause us to be careful of what we say.

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<sup>39</sup> Hoffman, Martin L., “Toward a Comprehensive Empathy-Based Theory of Prosocial Moral Development” in Bohart, Arthur C. (Ed); Stipek, Deborah J. (Ed), *Constructive & Destructive Behavior: Implications for Family, School, & Society*, (pp. 61-86). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association (2001).

We tell many stories of our *gedolim* (great and saintly leaders) practicing good *middos*. A cursory review of those stories will demonstrate that in most of them the greatness lay in the *gadol's* *sensitivity* to how another person felt in a given situation. We all know the story of how Reb Yaakov Kaminetzky insisted on sitting in the front seat of a car while Reb Moshe Feinstein sat alone in the back, while a *bachur* drove them home from an event. Reb Yaakov did this so that when Reb Moshe, whose home would be the first stop, would get out of the car, the *bachur* would not be left with a passenger (Reb Yaakov) in the back seat, and feel that he is merely a chauffeur. If we are to take these anecdotes seriously, we must teach our children sensitivity to the feelings of others. This can be done by way of stories, and by classroom discussions of anecdotes about people in dire straits. However, it is best done if the discussions are accompanied by actual experiences and activities in which our children meet up with people in need and are involved in helping them. Most of our schools for girls have such programs. Why not the boys' *yeshivos* as well?

### **Emotion:**

But even sensitivity is not enough. We must go still further. We must reach our children at the gut level. We must get them to have **an intuitive sense of right and wrong**. They must feel it in the gut!! A friend of mine who grew up with me in Montreal related the following personal anecdote.

In Montreal where we grew up in the 50s and 60s, there was no school bus transportation provided by *yeshivos*. We went to school each morning using public transportation. Most of the passengers that we traveled with were, of course, not Jewish, and we were told and taught and made to feel very conscious of the fact that our behavior on the bus could create a *kiddush Hashem* or *chas veshalom* a *chilul Hashem*. We were taught to get up and give up our seats to any older person who was standing, and to otherwise be courteous to others. One winter evening, when I was about 11 years old, I was coming home from yeshiva at 6:30 pm, extremely exhausted from a long day at yeshiva, and I managed to get a seat on the bus. I decided I was too tired to give up my seat, and when an elderly lady got on the bus at the next stop, I put my head down, and closed my eyes pretending not to see her. But, then sitting there, I felt my face getting warmer and warmer and then getting hot. I was

blushing! I was embarrassed by my behavior. Feeling extremely hot and uncomfortable, I got up and offered the lady my seat.

A moral person does not merely reason that something is wrong. S/he **feels** that it is wrong. The **pasuk** exhorts: אֹהֲבֵי ה' שְׂנֵאוּ רָע—“Those who love G-d abhor wickedness.” Abhorrence is an emotional state, not an intellectual decision. Where do such feelings come from, and how do we get children to internalize them? I would like to address this in the following paragraphs.

### **Moral Intuition:**

In what I found to be a very important and enlightening paper, psychologist Jonathan Haidt<sup>40</sup> addresses the question of what it is that drives and determines our moral judgment, “is it logic or intuition?” In a persuasive paper he argues against the widely assumed supremacy of reason in moral judgment. He points out that there is little evidence of a correlation between moral reasoning and moral action. In fact, to cite an extreme example, psychopaths have been shown to be capable of excellent moral reasoning, but feel no need to act morally. On the other hand, there are strong links between moral emotions and moral action. Because of this, and in combination with other arguments, he puts forth the thesis that most moral judgments are made intuitively, by way of a quick automatic, unconscious, and unreasoned reaction to a situation, rather than via rational, reasoned consideration and judgment. Haidt asserts that rational, reasoned logic is used often to back up, support and argue for the correctness of our intuitive judgments, but only after the fact. Reasoned logic by itself does not give rise to any emotional reaction to the immoral and/or the unethical. However, it is precisely this emotional reaction of disgust, that influences and guides behavior.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Jonathan Haidt, “The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail; A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment,” *Psychological Review*, 2001 Volume 108, No. 4, pp. 814–834.

<sup>41</sup> Haidt points out that arguments over moral issues rarely if ever result in one party convincing the other of their position. Instead, such debates end with one party saying something to the effect of “You are better with words than I am, and I cannot counter your arguments. I cannot prove it to you, but I know that I’m right.” This is because our

For example, when we hear that people in some cultures eat dog meat, our automatic reaction is that of disgust, even though there is no rational reason for differentiating between dog meat and the meat of any other mammal. Our reaction is intuitive, and based on our individual and cultural experiences.

Haidt puts forth an intricate theory to explain how our experiences create such intuitive reactions. In essence it comes down to childhood experiences with moral episodes—individual, familial, and communal—that create memory traces (somatic “markers”) in the mind, which in the future, when similar episodes come up, give rise to the emotions experienced, i.e., to the kind of “gut feeling” reactions described above. Haidt argues that “Moral development is primarily a matter of the maturation and cultural shaping of endogenous intuitions. People can acquire explicit propositional knowledge about right and wrong in adulthood, but it is primarily through participation in custom complexes involving sensory, motor, and other forms of implicit knowledge shared with one's peers during the sensitive period of late childhood and adolescence that one comes to feel, physically and emotionally, the self-evident truth of moral propositions.”

Similar ideas can also be found in Judaic sources. Thus, the Piaczesner Rebbe Reb Klonymous Kalman Shapira זצ”ל writes about different levels of knowledge, the superficial and the profound, each affecting us differently<sup>42</sup> (my translation):

There is knowledge that exists in a person's mind in a dormant state, being accessible when needed, but not constantly affecting one's thinking and/or behavior. There is a more salient and active kind of knowledge, whose presence influences, affects, colors, and drives one's thoughts all the time. As for example, an exciting new idea that one has just learned, or an insight that one has just had, which now causes him to interpret experiences and to see other ideas in its light... Certainly, a person's knowledge of himself, which encompasses his whole being, influences all he knows, to the point that almost everything that he hears or sees is influenced by his self-knowledge and makes him think, “what good will this bring

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moral convictions have taken root and reside not in our intellects, where the argument takes place, but deeper in the intuitive realm of emotions and feelings, which is not reachable by intellectual debate.

<sup>42</sup> ספר דרך המלך פרשת ויצא, בהוצאת הרב אלימלך שפירא, תל אביב תשנ"ה.

me?” or “can it harm me?” And this is so, to the point that he has to work very hard to remove himself from this self-interest even when he wants to serve G-d, because his mind and all of his thoughts are aroused and moved by his self-knowledge... And so too should be one’s knowledge of G-d. It should not be a superficial kind of knowledge that exists alongside other bits of knowledge that he possesses. Rather, his knowledge of G-d should enter his soul and should unite with his self to the same extent as his self-interest, and it should be with him constantly, be he asleep or awake, and it should arouse and move all of his thoughts, that in all of his thoughts he should recognize Hashem... Therefore **it is not sufficient to know G-d in thought alone. Nor in learning Torah alone, rather it requires active physical engagement in the practice of good deeds** (emphasis added). For as we have said, knowing G-d superficially is not sufficient. The knowledge must enter his soul and unite with his very self.

The **practice** of moral and ethical behavior, in a way that encompasses and envelopes the full life experience of the child, as an individual, as a member of his family, his school, and his community, is thus required if we are to imbue the child with an internalized intuitive feeling for ethics and morality. We manage this well in the area of ritualistic *mitzvos*, which are **בין אדם למקום**. Thus, all of our children, and all of us adults experience an intuitive reaction of disgust when it comes to *treifa* meat and the like. We pull our hands away as if from an electric shock when we inadvertently touch *muktzah* on *Shabbos*. And we feel a sense of almost physical discomfort after having left the bathroom and until we find a **כלי** with which to wash our hands. We arrived at such visceral levels of reaction as a result of years of experience with these phenomena. And these were not merely years of individual experience, but rather years of communal experience. We watched our fathers and mothers, our grandparents, aunts and uncles, rabbis, teachers, mentors and friends react to *treif*, *muktza*, *tum’ab* and the like, and we internalized those feelings. We developed a “yuk” reaction to *treif*, to *muktza*, and to *tum’ab*, and we often take pride in these developments. Too bad that our efforts were, in a sense, misdirected. We developed the “yuk reaction” for the wrong items.

The Yalkut Shimoni<sup>43</sup> addresses the question of what a Jew's attitude should be toward pork and other forbidden pleasures. Should a person say, "I wouldn't want to eat pork" or should he say, "I'd love to try it, but what can I do now that my Heavenly Father has forbidden it to me." The Yalkut concludes that it is the latter approach that is correct. Thus we should not feel a "yuk reaction" to pork. Instead we should feel removed from it only as a result of Hashem's proscription in the Torah. In the words of the Yalkut:

אמר רבי אלעזר בן עזריה מנין שלא יאמר אדם אי אפשי לאכול בשר חזיר אי אפשי ללבוש כלאים אי אפשי לבוא על הערוה אלא אפשי אבל מה אעשה ואבי שבשמים גזר עלי תלמוד לומר ואבדיל אתכם מן העמים להיות לי נמצא הפורש מן העבירה מקבל עליו עול מלכות שמים.

Rambam in שמונה פרקים points out, however, that this idea, that we should not be disgusted by things prohibited to us, is true only for the ritualistic prohibitions like eating pork and the like. However, when it comes to the prohibitions of harming others, stealing from them, killing and the like, it would certainly be improper for a person to say, for example, "I'd love to steal, but what can I do, my Father in heaven has forbidden it to me." In the case of such prohibited behavior we should certainly feel a sense of disgust, a "yuk" factor. In his words:

אשר אמרו, שמי שלא יתאוה אליהן יותר חשוב מן המתאוה אליהן ויכבוש את יצרו מהן, הם הענינים המפורסמים אצל כל בני אדם שהם רעים כשפיכת דמים, כגנבה וגזלה, ואונאה, ולהזיק למי שלא הרע לו, ולגמול רע למטיב לו, ולבזות אב ואם, וכיוצא באלו, והן המצוות שאמרו עליהן חכמים זכרונם לברכה, (יומא ס"ז) שאילו לא נכתבו ראיות הן ליכתב, .... ואין ספק שהנפש אשר תכסף לדבר מהן ותשתוקק אליו, שהיא חסרה ושהנפש החשובה לא תתאוה לאחת מאלו הרעות כלל, ולא תצטער בהמנעה מהן. אבל הדברים שאמרו עליהם החכמים, שהכובש את יצרו מהם הוא יותר חשוב, וגמולו יותר גדול, הן התורות השמעיות. (שמונה פרקים להרמב"ם)

It is unfortunate that yet again we have turned the tables and confused our values. *Chazal* say we should be disgusted by stealing, but not by pork. Most of us are disgusted by pork but not by stealing. This is something we picked up in our cultural environment, and will bequeath to the next generation unless we change the habitual responses to לחבירו בין אדם in our culture. And we must do so if we

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<sup>43</sup> ילקוט שמעוני ויקרא - פרק כ - רמז תרכו

are to bring about a change in *middos* in our children. Unless and until children see people as excited, as moved, as affronted by lapses in *מצוות בין אדם להבירו* as they are excited, moved, and affronted by lapses in *מצוות בין אדם למקום*, we will not see significant improvement in the *middos* of our children. The topic of *middos* needs to become at least as prominent in conversation as a new *eiruv* in some community (minus the acrimony that usually accompanies that topic). This is of primary importance. It is an imperative.<sup>44</sup>

Schools can and should run school-wide projects in *מצוות בין אדם להבירו*. These projects should reach deep into the souls of our children by involving their minds, their hearts, and their creative energy. These projects should also reach wide into the community, involving the parents, the *shuls*, the rabbis, and the lay leadership. Only when such projects are undertaken seriously, only when children come to feel that by being good to their friends they can also feel *frum* and come closer to *kedusha* will real change come about.

### But is it *Frum*?

One of the difficulties in getting people to adhere to *מצוות בין אדם להבירו* is that they are simply not “grabbed” by them emotionally. This is because they do not see these *mitzvos* as a part of being *frum*. That is, they don’t get the “*frum* high” that they get from *מצוות בין אדם למקום*, such as *מצה*, *שופר*, or even from fasting.

Years ago I taught a *parsha* class in a girl’s high school. As an introduction to my lesson on *parshas* *קדושים* I asked the students to tell me what makes a person *קדוש*. As they listed the behaviors that lead to *קדושה*—*davening*, learning, fasting, *tznius*, and so on—I wrote each behavior on the board. After a few minutes I stopped and

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<sup>44</sup> A parent or educator may ask, “What can I do if I simply don’t feel the same level of disappointment and anger when I see a student transgressing a *מצוות בין אדם להבירו*?” I would say to them, in the meantime “fake it!” Then work on your own *middos*. *Sifrei Kodesh* (for example: *ספר* (מגדל עוז ליעב"ץ - בית מדות - עליית האמת) admonish us in any case not to actually get angry at our children when they do something wrong. They suggest that when necessary we should fake a moderate level of anger to show disapproval of negative behavior. Thus the only switch we need to make is *when* to fake it.



pointed out to the students that they had not mentioned even one מצוה שבין אדם לחבירו! Most students recognized this as a valid criticism. But one actually argued with me that the omission was correct, because one does not become קדוש via מצוות שבין אדם לחבירו. Proper קדושה in such מצוות, she argued, is a result of קדושה, but not its creator.

Yes, מצוות שבין אדם לחבירו do not have the aura of קדושה that some other rituals carry. Helping another person does not make us feel *frum*. Children have not seen or felt that the adults around them invested these activities with קדושה and rated them as being holy, קדוש. Such an attitude stems from gross ignorance and a total lack of understanding of Torah and of what קדושה means. After all, when the נביא tells us to “cleanse” ourselves, he does not advise us to engage in rituals, rather he says, in G-d’s name:<sup>45</sup>

(טז) רְחַצוּ הַזְכוּ הִסִּירוּ רָע מֵעַלְלֵיכֶם מִנְּגִד עֵינֵי הַדָּלוּ הֲרַע: (יז) לְמַדוּ הַיָּטֵב דַּרְשׁוּ מִשְׁפָּט אֲשֶׁרוֹ תְמוֹץ שִׁפְטוּ יָתוֹם רִיבוּ אֶלְמָנָה:

16. Wash, cleanse yourselves, remove the evil of your deeds from before My eyes, cease to do evil. 17. Learn to do good, seek justice, strengthen the robbed, perform justice for the orphan, plead the case of the widow.

This is, thus, by no means a new or modern phenomenon. As we see from the above *posuk*, it was a problem in the days of the נביאים. It continued as a problem in the Second Bais HaMikdosh.

The *Gemara* in *Pesachim* 85a tells us that פִּיגוּל (a sacrificed animal that had been invalidated because the Kohen had the wrong intent while doing the עבודה), was declared by the Rabbis to be מטמא את הידים, to defile the hands of the Kohen who touched it. The *Gemara* explains that, according to one opinion, this was done because some Kohanim were suspected of deliberately invalidating the sacrifices brought by people they didn’t like, thus damaging them monetarily (since the damaged party would now have to bring a replacement sacrifice). It was hoped that declaring the hands of the offending Kohen ritually impure and requiring immersion in a Mikvah would prevent Kohanim from deliberately damaging their enemies in this way. Tosfos ask, if these Kohanim were suspected of damaging the

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<sup>45</sup> ספר ישעיה פרק א

property of a fellow Jew, how would declaring their hands ritually impure stop them? Perhaps they will just as likely ignore the laws of ritual purity and continue doing the service with impure hands? Tosfos answers that even wicked people (רשעים who ignore the prohibition against damaging another person) take the laws of ritual purity seriously. As support for this, Tosfos cites an anecdote related by the *Gemara* in *Yuma* 23a in which a young Kohen stabbed another young Kohen who was in competition with him as to who would get to do the service. The *Gemara* relates that in the ensuing commotion the wounded boy's father came running, and all present, including him, showed more concern with extracting the knife out of the still live body before the boy died and contaminated the knife, than they were with the act of murder. The *Gemara* in *Yuma* in fact declares that "the purity of the temple vessels weighed more heavily on them than did murder." In the words of Tosfos:

משום חשדי כהונה – וא"ת כמו כן לא יחושו לעשות בטומאה י"ל דאף לרשעים  
חמירא להו טומאה כדאמרינן ביומא (דף כג.) ללמדך שחמורה עליהן טהרת כלים  
יותר משפיכת דמים. (תוספות פסחים דף פה/א)

Rebbe Shlome Wolbe זצ"ל in a *shmuess* titled "על פרומקייט" "On *Frumkeit*,"<sup>46</sup> offers some explanation for this phenomenon. In this *shmuess* he puts forth the thesis that there is a basic instinct, inborn in all creatures, each according to its level of נשמה, to be "frum," i.e. to want to come close to one's Creator. *Frumkeit* is not יראת שמים, it is not a מדת הסידות, nor is it דקדוק במצוות. It is simply an instinct, and like all instincts it is egotistical, i.e., concerned only with its own satisfaction, unthinking, and given to satisfaction through fantasy. The satisfaction of this instinctual drive, he writes, serves as the force behind many people's *mitzvah* activities, and in a positive way, serves to help us carry out *mitzvos* in spite of hardships. However, because of its egotistical and unthinking nature, one cannot build one's service to *Hashem* on this instinct. The *frum* instinct, no less than any other instinct, must be harnessed, and must be guided by rational thought, i.e., by Torah knowledge and halacha. If not, it will seek

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<sup>46</sup> Later written up as an article in *הבאר*, a Torah journal published by Yeshivas Be'er Yaakov (כ"ה אלול תשל"ז חוברת ט"ו), and still later published in a somewhat digested form, but with some additional insights, in *עלי שור חלק ב*.

satisfaction in inappropriate ways. A person driven by the need to satisfy this instinct will engage in activities that he imagines will lead to a “spiritual high,” even if in the process he transgresses very real Torah prohibitions (עבירות). He will push his way through a throng in a *shul* to get close to a visiting *tzadik*, pushing one person, jabbing another, and tearing off a button from a third person’s jacket, all in the pursuit of attaining imagined proximity to קדושה, i.e. attaining a *frum* “high.”<sup>47</sup> He does not consider that his violation of בין אדם לחבירו may remove him from קדושה. Nor does the performance of *mitzvos* בין אדם לחבירו attract him; it does not make him feel more spiritual or holy, it does not satisfy his instinctual need for a *frum* “high.”

Yes, this is an age-old, deeply ingrained and intractable problem, but we cannot declare ourselves free of the obligation of trying to tackle it, and change it. If we don’t, we will not succeed in changing the attitudes and behaviors of our children in the area of מצוות שבין אדם לחבירו. The only way we can do this is by concerted and unrelenting educational programs aimed at the entire community.<sup>48</sup> Parents need to learn the sources<sup>49</sup> with their children, *rabbeyim* and teachers with students, *rabbonim* with their congregants, and each one of us with our *chavrusos* and friends.

One could cite many sources to show that בין אדם לחבירו are a necessary part of קדושה.<sup>50</sup> I will cite only a few here. Thus,

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<sup>47</sup> Scientists have reported findings of brain locations that respond to “religious rapture.” This neural activity may be in response to this instinctually driven “*frum* high.” See for example, Snyder, Solomon H., “Seeking God in the Brain—Efforts to localize higher brain functions,” *New England Journal of Medicine*, 2008, Jan. Vol. 358(1), 6-7 and Mossman, Kaspar, “God (Neurons) May Be Everywhere,” *Scientific American Mind*, 2006, Vol. 17, Issue 6, p. 12.

<sup>48</sup> Psychologist Dr. Yael Respler captured this idea well in naming her CD program for teaching children *derech eretz* “*Chutzpah* is *Mutzah*.” When children connect the two, and attach to *chutzpah* the same aura of *issur* that they attach to *mutzah*, we will see real results.

<sup>49</sup> See for example, the פתיחה of the נצי"ב בראשית that appears at the beginning of the העמק דבר. Putting together a list of suggested sources in teaching בין אדם לחבירו מצוות would be a service to the community.

<sup>50</sup> I received the following note from one of the reviewers of this paper: “*Middos* does not make someone holy or even Jewish—merely human.

R. Epstein (*Baruch Sh'amar on Pirkei Avot*) points out that there is no *brakhab* on charity, returning a lost item, etc. because these are all commandments that are universal—they apply to gentiles as well. It therefore makes no sense to say *Asheir Kiddishanu*, that he made us holy (i.e., unique or separate), when we perform these *mitzvos*.” Another reviewer, who had read this reviewer’s notes, responded, arguing that “It is true that *middos* are universal, but with us it is *metzuvah ve’osseh* and therefore brings *kedusba*. *Parshat Kedoshim* starts with *ish imo ve’aviv tira’u*, which I assume you consider universal.” Although the second reviewer clearly made the point, the first reviewer remained unconvinced, based on the Baruch She’amar’s explanation of why we do not say אשר קדשנו במצותיו on *mitzvos* like צדקה. In accordance with the importance I attach to this question, I feel I must respond and elaborate on the issue.

The question of why we do not say ברכות on certain מצוות is extensively discussed by *rishonim* and *acharonim* (see הר צבי מילי דברכות סימן ב). In fact the Rashba gives a different answer to this question. The Boruch She’amar’s answer is actually that of the הרמ"ע מפאנו. Be that as it may, the question of whether we make a ברכה has no bearing on the question of whether מצוות בין אדם לחבירו have קדושה. They definitely do, as I argue and, I hope, show, in my article. Rambam in הלכות דעות bases *middos* on the מצווה of הדבק במדותיו! Would anyone suggest that has no קדושה?

Furthermore, we need to remember that there are various levels of קדושה. As the Malbim (cited in הכרמל דף רצ"ו ויקרא from איה"ש תקט"ו) explains, the word קדוש may be applied to any one of many levels of separation and elevation. At a primary level it refers to man’s separation from base behaviors, from materialism, and from allowing one’s behavior to be determined and guided by physical drives of the moment. One elevates himself to loftier levels by placing his behavior under the control of his conscious mind and the rational, ethical, and moral choices his mind makes. Some מצוות serve to separate us from the nations of the world. Others apparently don’t have that specific property, but they still separate us and elevate us above that which is base. All the ברוך שאמר is saying is that universal ethical practices that are meant to be practiced by בני נח as well do not have the specific status of קדושה that separates us from the nations of the world, but they certainly do have קדושה! In fact the ברוך שאמר makes his comment on the statement by רבי חנניא בן עקשיא רצה הקב"ה לזכות את ישראל, לפיכך הרבה להם תורה ומצוות. The ברוך שאמר says that the "הרבה" refers to the “universal” *mitzvos* that we would have arrived at

Rambam<sup>51</sup> says that holiness is attained by keeping all of the commandments in the Torah, presumably including the מצוות בין אדם לחבירו.

קדושים תהיו והתקדשתם והייתם קדושים הם צוויין לקיים כל התורה כאילו יאמר היה קדוש בעשותך כל מה שצויתך בו והזהר מכל מה שהזהרתך ממנו.

Rambam then includes in his Halachik work, the החזקה יד, an entire section on *middos*, i.e. הלכות דעות. He begins this section, as he does all other sections, by listing the מצוות contained in it. As the first “foundation *mitzvah*” for this section, he lists להדמות בדרכיו i.e., “to model ourselves in accordance with His (*Hashem*’s) ways.” In the body of the *perek* Rambam then writes:

ו) כך למדו בפירוש מצוה זו מה הוא נקרא חנון אף אתה היה חנון מה הוא נקרא רחום אף אתה היה רחום מה הוא נקרא קדוש אף אתה היה קדוש.

Thus did they (*Chazal*) teach when explaining this *mitzvah*. Just as he is called Gracious, so should you be gracious, just as he is called Compassionate, so should you be compassionate, just as he is called *Kadosh*, so should you be *kadosh*.

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even had they not been commanded. But in the final analysis he says they are *mitzvos*! Are there *mitzvos* with no קדושה? In fact, at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> Perek of הלכות מלכים Rambam writes regarding the *mitzvos* given to אדם הראשון, and to נח, i.e. the “universal moral principles” that pertain to all of mankind, as follows: יא) כל המקבל שבע מצות ונזהר לעשותן הרי זה מחסידי אומות העולם ויש לו חלק לעולם הבא והוא שיקבל אותן ויעשה אותן מפני שצוה בהן הקב"ה בתורה והודיענו על ידי משה רבינו שבני נח מקודם נצטוו בהן אבל אם עשאן מפני הכרע הדעת אין זה גר תושב ואינו מחסידי אומות העולם ולא מחכמיהם. 11) “Anyone who accepts upon himself the fulfillment of these seven *mitzvos* and is precise in their observance is considered one of the pious among the gentiles and will merit a share in the world to come. This applies only when he accepts them and fulfills them because the Holy One Blessed is He commanded them in the Torah and informed us through Moses our teacher that Noah’s descendents had been commanded to fulfill them previously. However if he fulfills them out of intellectual conviction he is not a resident alien nor of the pious among the gentiles nor of their wise men.” (Trans. Elyahu Touger, Moznaim, 2001). Clearly, these universals are מצוות meant to be adhered to as *mitzvos*, and not as self-evident intellectual or humanistic truths.

<sup>51</sup> ספר המצות להרמב"ם - השרש הרביעי

The *Sefer Chareidim*<sup>52</sup> cites the example of אהרן הכהן, who in his role as the כהן גדול was entrusted with the most purely בין אדם למקום part of our service to Hashem, the קרבנות and the עבודה of the בית אהב. Yet the trait by which he is most well-known is as the אוהב שלום. *Sefer Chareidim* also tells of Rabbi Yosef Saragosi of Zefat, who was constantly involved in arbitrating for and bringing peace between husbands and wives, including non-Jewish couples, and (as a result) merited seeing Eliyahu Hanavi:

ומה שאמרו שילמדו מאהרן, לפי שהיה לו זה אומנותו, מתבטל מתלמודו והולך לשים שלום במקומו ורודף שלום למקום אחר כשהיה שומע שיש מחלוקת. וכן היה פה צפת הרב רבי יוסף סאראגוסי רבו של הרב רבי דוד בן זמרא, שהיה משים שלום תמיד בין אדם לחבירו ובין איש לאשתו אפילו בין הגוים, וזכה לראות את אליהו. ובמקום שראהו, קרוב לציון התנא רבי יהודה בר אלעאי, שם חצב לו קבר.

Rabbi Yaakov Sakili, in his *Sefer, Toras HaMincha*,<sup>53</sup> talks about the “filth” that accumulates in one’s soul from having shamed another person, and says that it is graver than any other form of impurity (i.e., it removes one from קדושה more so than any other impurity):

ואם כן צריך להשתדל ולהזדרז להטהר מזה הלכלוך המגיע לנפש מצד העלבון כי הוא חמור מאד מכל טומאה.

The *Sefer HaBris*<sup>54</sup> too, at the start of a chapter that he calls "דרך" הקודש, writes that “the love of friends and the *mitzvos* and behaviors between man and his neighbor (בין אדם לחבירו) are the main facets of the “holy path” and the foundation of the entire Holy Torah”:

והנה מה שצריך לי להזכיר בזה המאמר הנקרא דרך הקודש הוא אהבת רעים והמצות וההנהגות אשר בין אדם לחבירו כי זה עיקר דרך הקודש ושורש כל התורה הקדושה.

The Alshich<sup>55</sup> writes similarly that the reason the High Court, the Sanhedrin, had its seat in the *Beis HaMikdash*, close to the *miqbeach* (altar), was to show that in Hashem’s eyes the *miqbeach*, which represents the peace between G-d and man, and the Sanhedrin,

<sup>52</sup> ספר חרדים פרק ה.

<sup>53</sup> ספר תורת המנחה לרבי יעקב סקילי - דרשה יח.

<sup>54</sup> ספר הברית - חלק ב מאמר י"ג אהבת רעים - פרק ג.

<sup>55</sup> פירוש האלשיך ז"ל - ספר תורת משה על שמות - פרק יט פסוק א-ב.

which represents the law bringing peace between Man and his fellow, were both equal:

ומן הטעם הזה אחשוב צוה הוא יתברך לשים דיינים אצל המזבח, כמאמרם ז"ל (מכילתא סוף יתרו) על סמיכות אלה המשפטים אצל מזבח אדמה. כי למה שהמזבח משים שלום בין אדם למקום, כן הדיינים בין אדם לחברו. הורה לנו הוא יתברך כי לפניו שני הדברים שוים.

The words of the *risbonim* and the *sifrei mussar* are thus clear. And there's more where they came from, much more. Unfortunately, they receive little "press" in our homes and/or our schools. Thus, as far as our children are concerned, being nice and being *frum* are not related.

In some circles I have heard it said that "there is too much talk about *ahavas yisroel*," and they suggest that those who talk about אהבת ישראל and בין אדם לחבירו are being motivated by secular humanism rather than Torah. This is a sure way to kill the message. It also places those who advocate doing more about *middos* on the defensive. The bizarre and twisted message becomes, that the true חרדי, the true בן תורה, and the "real" Jew should not be overly concerned about מצוות שבין אדם לחבירו and מזכות. In a reversal of his usual role, the truly committed בן תורה is found pointing to קולות and היתרים in this area, showing us how all the בין אדם לחבירו in איסורים need not be taken so seriously. Thus, the same person who will go to great effort and expense to build his *succah* without even one nail in it, so as to be able to fulfill even the strict interpretation of Halacha by the Rashba (even when the *Shulchan Aruch* ruled it to be unnecessary), is now looking for היתרים for various איסורים that are, at the very least, questionable according to the *Shulchan Aruch*.

I heard an anecdote told about Rebbe Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk, the famous *gaon* whose *gadlus* in *chesed* was possibly even greater than his *gadlus* in learning, that encapsulates our point beautifully:

Late on a Wednesday night, a traveling Jew arrived in Brisk. The lights were out in all the homes, and he did not want to awaken the people with whom he had meant to be staying. Noticing one house in which the lights were still on, he decided to knock on the door and ask whether he could possibly stay the night. The homeowner opened the door and graciously welcomed him to stay the night. The homeowner remarked that coming from the road, the traveler must also be hungry, and went into the kitchen to prepare him something to eat. While the בעל הבית was in the kitchen, the guest got a chance to look around and he noticed that he was in a בית

מלא ספרים, a house filled with *seforim*, and quickly surmised that he was in the home of a *rav* or at least a *dayan*. At this point he became uncomfortable with this revered personage preparing a meal for him, and he voiced his protestations, saying to the בעל הבית, “You needn’t trouble yourself?” (איר דארפט אייך ניט מטרייה זיין) and repeating it. The בעל הבית did not answer him, continued preparing the meal, and served it to him, amidst his continued protestations. The בעל הבית then began to prepare a bed for the guest, who again protested, “You needn’t trouble yourself. Just put the bedding down and I’ll arrange the bed myself. Please, you needn’t trouble yourself.” Again, the בעל הבית did not answer, but continued to make the bed. The next morning, the בעל הבית (i.e., the Brisker Rav) took the man to *shul*. Being that it was Thursday morning and there was קריאת התורה, Reb Chaim told the *gabbai* to give the guest הגבה. As the guest was about to lift the *Sefer Torah*, Reb Chaim tapped him on the shoulder and said, “You needn’t trouble yourself.”

If we wish to improve the *middos* of our children, and especially if we want them to internalize *middos* and proper behavior, we must make them conscious of the “*frumkeit*” that is inherent in *middos*, and even more so, that one cannot be *frum* without good *middos*. As mentioned, this requires a steady educational program, but it can be done. How to teach this will be elaborated upon in the following section.

#### **4. The More General Concern: A Focus on How We Teach Torah**

I began this article by raising the problem of a general “disconnect” between Torah Learning and Torah Living. The article up to this point has focused primarily on this disconnect in the area of *middos* and מצוות שבין אדם להבירו. Yet, the disconnect exists in many other areas as well. It is often due, to a great extent, to our failure to make the connection for our students when they originally learned the material.



## **Making Connections at the Time of Learning:**

Research in Cognitive Science<sup>56</sup> suggests that memory depends on connections between different memory traces in the brain—that a memory trace is awakened whenever a connected memory is aroused. Thus, for example, when a news report from Iraq mentions the Euphrates and the Tigris Rivers I almost automatically think of Avrohom Avinu who sojourned in the land between the two rivers. Research also shows that when we learn something, we remember not only what we learned, but also whatever stimulated our consciousness at the time of learning. When we remember something we learned, we often also remember the room we learned it in, who taught it to us, and where he or she was standing. Research shows that people remember more of what they learned and do better on tests if tested in the environment in which the original learning took place. Cues from the environment trigger memories of material learned in that environment. Research further suggests that the best and strongest connections are those made at the time we originally learned the material.

Let us now revisit the anecdote I referred to at the beginning of this article related by Reb Reuven Feinstein *sblit"u*. We wondered why a boy who most certainly was familiar with the law that a שואל is responsible for accidental damage to a borrowed object, did not apply the law to himself when he was the שואל. Reb Moshe זצ"ל's answer to this question suggests that the boy made the connection between himself and a שואל, but failed to take it seriously. I would question whether the boy ever even made the connection that he was a שואל. Unless his *rebbe*, at the time of learning the דינים of a שואל, made the connection between the *Gemara* and real life, the boy is later unlikely to do so. Thus, his *rebbe* at some point in the שיעור should have said something to the effect, "Therefore, if you Chaim borrow a bicycle from Moshe you are a שואל. And if you properly chain the bicycle to a bicycle stand at night, and a bolt of lightning comes out of the sky and destroys the bicycle, you would still be obligated to pay for it." If the *rebbe* would make such a connection, then there is a

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<sup>56</sup> See for example, Reisberg, Daniel, *Cognition* 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Norton, 2006, Chapter 6, "Interconnections Between Acquisition and Retrieval" pp. 178–190.

much stronger chance that later in real life when the boy finds himself in the status of a **שואל**, he will make the connection. Without that connection, it is likely that the different spheres of knowledge in his mind will remain neatly and safely compartmentalized without touching each other. Thus in one memory network of his mind he will have a set of interconnected propositions about the various **שומרים** and their obligations. And in a totally separate memory network in his mind he will have a set of interconnected ideas about how he borrowed something from a friend, how it broke by accident, and perhaps, how when he was a little boy and broke something by accident his mother said it was ok. If we want to make Torah learning have an impact on life, we must make the connections for our *talmidim* at the time of learning, as we teach.

### **Making *Specific* Connections:**

There is much evidence from research studies that shows that people seek consistency between their attitudes and their actions. They would like to behave in ways that are consistent with their beliefs. There is however, just as much evidence showing, that quite often, people simply do not behave in accordance with their clearly stated and even deeply held attitudes and beliefs. Amongst the reasons cited for this failing are situational factors like social pressure and self-interest that pressure a person to act in ways that contradict his beliefs. Another factor is the level of specificity in the attitude and the behavior in question.<sup>57</sup> Thus, for example, if I believe that I should not steal, I am unlikely to place my hand in somebody's pocket and take some of his money. However, I might not hesitate to lie and tell a storekeeper that I could get the item for less, elsewhere. My belief about stealing may not have reached this level of specificity, and I may not see the connection, or even ask a *shaila*. It's the old, "I love humanity, it is people that I can't stand" phenomenon. If my belief did not reach this level it is because I did not learn to think about it at this level.

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<sup>57</sup> Ajzen, I & Fishbein M, Attitude-Behavior relations: A theoretical analysis and review of empirical research, *Psychological Bulletin*, 1977, 84, 888–918.

The connections we make must therefore be clear, and they must relate to very specific instances that come up in our daily lives. A child learning about השבת אבידה, returning a lost object, should be taught that the *mitzvah* applies to any instance of saving other peoples' money and property from loss or destruction. And specific examples should be given. Thus children learning אלו מציאות should be asked, "If you see someone walking down the street, and his coat belt is dragging on the floor in the mud and snow, are you obligated to point this out to him? What is the source of the obligation?"

### **Breadth and Broader Values**

I must add that it is not sufficient to make connections between Torah and life that are confined to, and limited by, the specific *halachos* we learn and teach. For Torah to be fully connected to life, we must connect it broadly. We must show our *talmidim* that each halacha or thought in Torah has wide ramifications, and deals with reality and in ways that they can relate to it. And we must connect Torah to life in as many ways as possible. Allow me a few examples.

A child sitting in a התחלת גמרא class learning תפילת השחר listened as his *rebbe* read the Mishna that states that שחרית may be *davened* until noon according to the *tanna kamma*, but only till the fourth hour according to Rebbe Yehuda and so on. The boy raised his hand and asked, "How did they know what time it was? Did they have watches in the time of the Gemara?" His *rebbe* could have answered, "They knew, it doesn't matter how, that's not pertinent to the Mishna." That would have been a tragedy because his *rebbe's* message could have been taken as saying that the Mishna has nothing to do with reality. Instead the *rebbe* praised the question, gave a lesson on the sun's progression in the sky through the day, explained about sundials and other clocks, and showed a picture of a *shul* in Yerushalayim that still has a sundial on which one can tell time. By doing this he connected the *Gemara* to reality and the child to the *Gemara*.

When, for example, we learn a Rashi with children, and Rashi cites מנהם or דונש, we should take the opportunity to take out the *sefer* מחברת מנהם or the תשובות דונש בן לברט and show the children the *sefer* from which Rashi learned. Doing this makes Rashi more real to them; true, an extremely lofty personage beyond our comprehension,

but still a real person. I've seen children's eyes light up with the excitement of discovery upon realizing the authenticity of Rashi and of the learning process. He learned and looked up ספרים, we learn and look up ספרים. We are all part of the same enterprise.

Another way to connect Torah to life is to show children the depth of meaning in Torah, by giving them rational reasons for the *mitzvos*, customs, and strictures that we teach them and expect them to adhere to. The *Sefer Hachinuch* was written, as the author puts it, להרגיל הנערים ולהטעים להם בתחילת בואם לשמוע דברי ספר, כי יש לדברי התורה טעמים ותועלות, "to habituate the youth and to make palatable to them as they begin to learn, that words of Torah have reason and purpose." ואל יהיו להם המצוות בתחילה כדברי הספר החתום, פן יבעטו בהם "and the *mitzvos* should not appear to them as being a closed book, lest they reject them out of a childish misunderstanding and they forever abandon them." When he could not find a reason for one out of 613 *mitzvos*, he was afraid to leave even that one *mitzvah* without an explanation, and he went on to write "what comes to mind."<sup>58</sup>

Furthermore, we must teach our children the broader values that underlie the individual *mitzvos*. As Ramban writes, וזה דרך התורה לפרוט ולכלול בכיוצא בזה, כי אחרי אזהרת פרטי הדינין בכל משא ומתן שבין בני אדם, לא תגנוב ולא תגזול ולא תונו ושאר האזהרות, אמר בכלל ועשית הישר והטוב "And this is the way of the Torah, to list specifics and then to write a general rule, for after stating the specific prohibitions in dealing with people do not steal, do not rob, do not deceive, and other warnings, it stated in general terms, do the just and the good."<sup>59</sup>

Similarly he comments on the *mitzva* of קדושים תהיו - אחרי שפרט - האיסורים שאסר אותם לגמרי, וצוה בדבר כללי שנהיה פרושים מן המותרות. "After it specified the prohibitions that are prohibited outright, it commanded us in general terms, to be removed from the excesses (of material pleasure)."

Teaching the values underlying the *mitzvos* demands and allows for greater application to a wider range of activities in our daily lives.

<sup>58</sup> See *Sefer Hachinuch*, מצוה קיז שלא להקריב שאור או דבש.

<sup>59</sup> רמב"ן ויקרא יט ב.

Furthermore, children should not only be allowed to ask questions but encouraged to do so. A student of mine related that when he was a young boy he asked a question in class. His *rebbe* told him that he should ask the question when he's a little older. A few years later he asked another *rebbe* his question. This *rebbe* said, "By your age you should already know that." And thus the question was never answered. "When was the window of opportunity to get an answer?" he wanted to know. There is nothing that disconnects Torah from life more than not being able to ask a question about it. A question is a child's attempt to take Torah seriously, to say in effect, "If I understood Torah correctly it implies something about life, but I'm puzzled. Perhaps I saw life differently, please help me make sense of it." Teachers who ignore such questions send a dangerous and terrible message to children. The message is, "This is what I say it says. Don't ask questions. There are no answers. What it says and what you see in real life are not necessarily connected." Children hearing this message get the wrong idea. They learn to disconnect Torah from life and, ultimately, life from Torah. We must send them a different message. We must connect their lives to Torah. They must learn that the two are inseparable, as the following anecdote involving Reb Yaakov<sup>60</sup> demonstrates.

A renowned professor of mathematics, Dr. Trachtenberg, became a *baal tshuva* and a *talmid* of Yeshiva Slobodka, thanks to the influence of the brilliant versatility of Reb Yaakov [Kamenetzky] and his all-consuming love for every aspect of Torah. The professor gained his respect for Torah when he became acquainted with Reb Yaakov and was overwhelmed by the profound understanding of mathematics which this young *talmid chochom* had mastered in one evening of leafing through some mathematics textbooks in the home of a relative.

His subsequent involvement in Slobodka was threatened with disaster when his *chavrusa* refused to continue learning with him. They had been studying a Talmudic issue relating to a strip of land [protruding] from the city of Akko. The professor challenged one opinion in the Gemara on the grounds that it was inconsistent with what appeared on a map of the area. "How can I continue to learn

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<sup>60</sup> From "HaGaon Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky זצ"ל His Life and Teachings," p. 105, published by Chug Talmidei Rabbeinu Yaakov Kaminetzky, Monsey, NY: distributed by Feldheim, 2000.

with someone who asks questions on the Gemara from a map?” asked the outraged *chavrusa*, a man who later went on to become a famous Rosh Yeshiva in the United States. But Reb Yaakov had a different attitude. **There cannot be a conflict between the reality of the map and the absolute truth of Torah.** He accepted the challenge and dedicated himself to resolving the conflict. The professor’s question was answered and he returned to his studies reassured.

### **Recap and Summary:**

In summary, we can close the gap between Torah learning and Torah living if we really want to. It requires us to change our attitudes about מצוות שבין אדם לחבירו and מדות. We need to realize that מדות can be improved. We must attain the skills with which to do that, and we must become more conscious of the role models we offer our children. We must teach our children sensitivity to the feelings of others, and make them aware of the feelings of others, and immerse them in a web of communal and familial experiences that foster growth in this area. We must provide our students with an environment and a schedule that allow them to breathe and promote self-control. We must also do all of the above in a spirit of enhancing the קדושה of our people. Above all, we must connect Torah to life, and life to Torah. ❧