

PRACTICAL GUIDANCE - PART I

by Rabbi Dov Brezak

A few months ago, a boy was chosen winner of a mishnayos contest in Haifa. Although he attended a non-religious school, he put in many hours of study to memorize full masechetos of mishnayos. Rather a remarkable feat for someone from a non-religious family, wouldn't you say?

Even more remarkable in this case were the number of obstacles the boy had to overcome to reach this plateau of accomplishment. The biggest among them being that his name was something like Jamal, and he wasn't even Jewish. (He was an Arab.)

A man looking to break the world record recently held 17 scorpions in his mouth for a period of about 1 minute. (Upon being interviewed he said that this really wasn't dangerous and the only thing he really was concerned with was that no scorpion try to crawl down his throat.)

A man wishing to become a "saint" according to the rules of his particular religion tied himself to a tree and did not move from there for seven years! (Even for purposes of personal hygiene.) Throughout that entire period, his diet consisted of nothing but grass.

This same man, feeling that he was not yet "holy" enough, decided to roll on the ground for a distance of over 2000 miles to reach a certain temple. Dressed only in shorts and bare from the waist up, he made his journey by rolling on the ground daily from sunrise to sunset. After several months of this, he finally reached his destination.

Motivation is a powerful force. Not only does it serve the insane and mentally ill (like the people mentioned above), but it can serve us as well-especially when it comes to doing mitzvos.

Last week, I went to visit a student of mine who was born without the ability to walk. He has always

been in a wheelchair since his legs do not function at all. His brain was also slightly injured at birth. (When I once brought this boy to Harav Shmuel Auerbach, shlita, for a blessing, Rav Shmuel stood up for him.)

Recently, this boy was operated on. His doctors had come across a new method they hoped would give him a chance to walk. They said they would operate to widen the bones of his feet so they could support his body.

The boy was told that the post-operative pain would be considerable. Still, this young hero of the spirit was willing to go through the operation.

The operation was a failure. The pain was excruciating.

When the doctors told the boy they thought they could succeed if they operated one more time, the boy said he needed some time to think it over. His decision was to go through with it.

My visit to him just a few weeks ago came a short while after his second operation. I asked him what it was that pushed him to go through such pain a second time. He told me he felt the operation would give him his only chance to walk and that the Ribbono shel Olam (G-d, lit. "Master of the Universe") wanted him to be able to walk. This is what gave him the strength and motivation to agree to the second operation.

A person can accomplish great things when he is motivated. With motivation, we can accomplish that which otherwise might have been considered unattainable.

If we can motivate our children, they too can reach success.

Positive discipline is training a child to behave properly by offering him a positive consequence if he does so (as opposed to a negative consequence if he does not).

First, clearly state the specific behavior expected of the child. Then, choose a specific consequence.

The consequence can be a reward, a certain privilege, or even a natural consequence that is an outgrowth of the child's actions (i.e., if the child gets ready for bed quickly, there will be enough time for Mommy to sit and read a story).

After clarifying the consequence and the specific behavior necessary to earn it, it is crucial for a parent to stand firm and not give the child the positive consequence unless the child actually did what was asked of him. It is at this point that the positive becomes discipline. If the child behaves, he will receive the consequence. If he doesn't behave, he won't. It's that simple

The main value of positive discipline is that it harnesses a child's willpower and motivates him to want to do what we want him to do. It is therefore an invaluable tool for the chinuch (education, raising) of our children, especially nowadays.

This discussion will continue in Part II, to be posted next week.

Check back soon!

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