

PARENTING

by Rabbi Berel Wein

One of the most important tasks in life is being a parent. Since every person and every family situation is different one from another, there are no particular instructions or guidelines that can affect every particular situation of parenting. But there are some general, common sense pieces of advice and observations that I believe are true and valuable in being a parent. Over the long history of the Jewish people, the home and the parents who were the backbone of that home served to preserve the Jewish people and to create an atmosphere of pride, self-worth and holy continuity for Jewish children and generations. One requirement is undoubtedly that the house, the parents, have a sense of serenity, of love of each other and of their children that is present in the home. This is the duty of parents to make their marriage work and to serve as role models as successful people to their children. Children born into a dysfunctional family situation have a decided disadvantage in their own lives and their future attempts to succeed. Parents must always have their children in mind in what they say and do, not only what they say and do to their children but what they say and do to each other in their daily normal relationships. Children are sensitive to the atmosphere that exists in a house, even more than to the words and directions expressed to them. Only the parents can create such a wholesome and reassuring atmosphere. But they can do so only if they are aware of its necessity and importance in forming their family and raising their children.

A sense of family is important. Children should know who their ancestors were, who their grandparents are or were. They should be aware of the legacy of the past to them. We live in a world where the past has been blotted out in so many Jewish families. Without the past being part of their lives, children cannot place themselves in any sort of perspective. They are thrust into a bewildering and oftentimes hostile world without having the great weapon of knowledge of their familial past at their disposal. The religious world of Jewry is far from perfection, but perhaps its greatest achievement is that it has somehow preserved the past for its children and future generations. In my opinion, one of the greatest crimes of secularism is its determined effort to blot out the Jewish past. In ridiculing traditional Jewish garb and behavior, it rejects the past and thus generations have grown up with no familial attachment or pride. There are dysfunctional families present everywhere, even in religious Jewish society. But secularism has succeeded in creating a dysfunctional society. And that is truly a tragic consequence of disinheriting children from knowledge, understanding and appreciation of their ancestors and past family. Children need a sense of family ties and support to guide them. Lassiez faire tactics do not empower children; they

weaken their self-image and allow for hostility and aggression to replace serenity and self-confidence.

Children need goals and tasks. Children also need a childhood. A child is not a small adult. Every child is different. The wise parent realizes that one-size-fits-all education and child rearing is unrealistic and unwise. King Solomon stated in Proverbs, "Educate and guide the child according to its (the child's) path and ways." This is the way to make certain that even when the child grows older it will not stray from its roots and family upbringing. Parenting therefore requires infinite patience and unconditional love. It demands consistency and quiet, wisdom and determination, optimism and positive reinforcement. It also demands the knowledge of when to let go and to allow the child to be a child. A parent's job is a permanent one and even in old age a parent remains a parent just as a child remains a child. The situations of life naturally change with the years but the roles and status of parents and children vis a vis each other remain pretty much constant over all of the decades of life. Because of this the role of a parent is constantly one of growth and wonder, of opportunity and challenge. And in the last analysis, one must take into account the words of the Talmud that children and how they turn out is a matter of mazal - of fortuitous good fortune that is beyond our control. So added to all of the other parenting advice and tips advanced one must add prayer for the correct mazal that happiness and satisfaction should reign in one's family and generations.

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