

SOURCING CHILDRISING DIFFICULTIES

by Rabbi Chaim Morgenstern

Our generation is witnessing a strange phenomenon. Despite the abundance of books, shiurim, (both live and recorded), and parenting classes dealing with a wide spectrum of child raising issues, we are experiencing more child-raising problems and difficulties today than in previous generations. There are many reasons for this phenomenon. Firstly, parents who fail to feel the responsibility of their children's chinuch or who lack parenting skills, (as previously mentioned), will certainly encounter child-raising difficulties.

However, there are two more primary causes of child-raising problems that are mentioned by contemporary rabbanim and educators:

1. parents' approach towards chinuch, and
2. the is the negative influence that our anti-Torah society has on both parents and children. (Other reasons will be mentioned at a later point.

A. The Proper Approach Towards Chinuch

Rav Yechiel Yaakovson (one of the foremost Israeli lecturers and authorities on child-raising and children off the derech), once remarked that when parents speak or complain about their difficulties in child- raising, their intention is how to respond when a child isn't behaving. Many parents are under the misconception that chinuch is how to react to negative behavior of children, and invest very little time and energy into genuine chinuch and how to apply its principles. This results in the majority of their efforts being directed towards how to punish their children and applying the commonly used methods of anger, screaming, giving rebuke and mussar to assert themselves. Furthermore, parents are constantly telling their children what they are doing wrong, for example, not sitting and eating orderly at the table, or not behaving properly, without taking out the time to explain patiently what, how and why they should be doing them properly. This approach is NOT chinuch as Rav Shlomo Wolbe writes, "How foolish are parents whose thoughts and ideas on chinuch are limited to the question, 'When should we hit our child?' Woe to such chinuch!" (AleI Shur Vol. 2 p. 219).

This approach is counterproductive since children who are constantly criticized and punished by their parents have a tendency to resist being mechunach from them.

B. The Influence of our Society

The Rambam writes "people are influenced by the society in which they live." (Hilchos Dayos 6:1 ; Rav Chaim Friedlander, in his preface to the Guide for Chasanim writes that lack of patience is a cause of many problems in family relationships.) Our society, which is replete with impatience, bad midos and anti-Torah hashkafos on chinuch and family relationships, is wreaking havoc on the Jewish family.

One of the key midos that is necessary to succeed in child-raising is patience. As Rav Wolbe writes, "Only with limitless patience can parents educate their children" (AleI Shur ibid). Yet, the mindset of today's hi- tech fast-food society is just the opposite of patience. The microwave and ready-made foods offer meals in minutes; computers and cell phones enable people to communicate across the globe in seconds. People become frustrated if, for some reason, the connection takes a few seconds longer than usual. Although by making life easier, people can accomplish more in less time, nevertheless the big downside of these many conveniences is that people are not trained to face the challenges of life.

Therefore, when parents experience child-raising difficulties, they seek instant solutions. They may read a child-raising book or listen to some tapes, expecting that they will receive the exact necessary advice for their problem. Sometimes general advice works, but in many instances it doesn't. Problems in child-raising are not like a headache or infection that can be automatically cured with painkillers or antibiotics. Each situation has many variables that depend on the child's individual make- up, the parents' capabilities, the existing parent-child relationship and numerous other factors. Realistically speaking, there would have to be tens of thousands of books on child-raising in order to cover every possible family situation. Parents must know how and when to apply child- raising principles to their individual situation, and patiently wait until their children absorb these principles and put them into practice.

There is an anecdote about a couple who were in the midst of a quarrel, when the husband suddenly excused himself for a moment and took out a book on shalom bayis. He remembered that the chapter dealing with quarreling discussed a similar scenario to the one he was having and gave instructions regarding what to say and do to resolve the dispute peacefully. He quickly memorized the guidelines, returned to his wife and started to repeat and act according to the book. To his surprise, the advice didn't work.

Rav Wolbe once remarked that the purpose of general guidance is mainly to teach us not to do the wrong thing. Finding the proper way to handle any given situation involves many variables and often requires on-the-spot decisions. Even when parents seek counseling, their patience will be limited by their expectations of receiving a solution in one or two sessions. They often fail to realize that deep-rooted problems, especially the ones that exist for lengthy periods, need time to solve.

Lack of patience will cause a person who encounters difficulties in his child-raising to seek instant solutions and become frustrated if these solutions are not readily available. A parent who becomes

frustrated will either become a "control freak" to his children order to enforce discipline or let the child do whatever he wants. Either way is harmful for the child's development.

The conveniences of our affluent society are another cause of frustration. When purchasing food, clothing, appliances or electronic devices, we can usually acquire or order the exact make and model that suits our needs; settling for the second best has become a thing of the past. This lifestyle has lessened our ability to cope with life's challenges because we also expect that everything in our lives should suit our exact needs. Therefore, when we encounter difficulties in life, whether it's between husband and wife, parents and children, at the workplace or in school, we become frustrated because we are not prepared to face these challenges if the situation or relationship is not suitable for our individual needs.

How other influences of our society create new challenges in child-raising will be mentioned in the forthcoming chapters.

Main points to work and focus on:

- 1. Parents must learn proper child-raising skills (parenting classes and workshops are a good source).
- 2. Chinuch is educating the child how and why to do what's proper in the eyes of the Torah, not to constantly focus on telling the child what he's doing wrong or how and when to punish him.
- 3. Parents must learn how to apply child-raising principles to their individual situation.
- 4. There are no instant solutions for child-raising. Much patience is needed to raise children properly. (Our society, which is the antitheses of patience, is adversely affecting our ability to properly raise children.)

Text Copyright © 2008 by Rabbi Chaim Morgenstern and **Torah.org**