

Rav Reuven Feinstein tells the story in which one of his students who had accidentally broken a borrowed tape recorder claimed that he didn't have to pay for the damage because "it was an accident." Rav Reuven was astounded that the boy didn't connect the incident to his studies. He was learning *Perek HaMafkid*, a famous Talmudic chapter about the laws of damages, and surely knew that a borrower was obligated to pay for even accidental damage.

When Rav Reuven asked his illustrious father Rav Moshe, zt"l, how this disconnect between learning and behavior could happen, Rav Moshe said that when students learn Jewish law in Talmud and then witness those laws not being adhered to in their community, they learn that what is taught in the Talmud need not necessarily be adhered to. 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 *midos* and *derech erez* -- character traits as expressed in one's demeanor and behavior.

There are many strange reasons given for declining a *shidduch* (a prospective bride) in today's Observant/Orthodox world: One's mother not using a white table cloth on Shabbos, not serving chicken at a Shabbos meal, etc. But on the ever-stranger list of reasons for declining a *shidduch*, 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* (Jewish dating), but to me this is a level of selfishness, accompanied by a lack of basic faith and trust in G-d that should be foreign to any observant Jew. Actually, I don't even know whether the story is true at all, and I certainly hope that it is not. However, if such stories are being told in the Jewish community, they seem to reflect a feeling that such thinking exists and that it "could be true".

There exists a broad disconnect between Jewish learning and living among our children.

In one sixth grade classroom a teacher asked one of her students to pick up a sheet of paper 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 chutzpah that she was at a loss regarding what to do.

Teachers and rabbis in our school system complain incessantly about the level of chutzpah they meet up with, and their feelings of helplessness to control it.

One of the most prominent features of the Haggadah is the section of the *Arba Banim*, the Four Children. Each Passover we renew our commitment to educating our children Jewishly and helping them to become *mentchen*, decent, ethical human beings. There is no time better than Passover to address the 'Great Divide' -- the lack of connection between our behavior and the ideals of the Torah.

In many ways, there have been significant and positive changes in the Jewish observant community in the last few generations.

In the Observant and Jewishly-committed world, many (if not most) of our children spend their Gap Year in Israel; yeshiva, seminary, college, or various other programs. The standards of *tznius* (modesty) that our women and girls adhere to today are much more stringent than those of 40 years ago, as a perusal of old wedding albums will attest. Our standards of *kashrus* have also been raised; few today eat ice cream or chocolate bars without a *hechsher* (certification). This was all quite common in all but the Chassidic and strongest yeshiva families 40 years ago.

Thanks to good education, many standards have been raised. But the one area where we've seen little or no change is in the area of *middos*. Some claim we've actually seen a decline in this area. Why? Let's look at three possible causes.

1) Children can be taught to develop good character

While some believe *middos* (character traits) are inborn or irreversibly formed very early in life, behavioral science has shown what Torah has always said; character can be taught and developed.

This concept was first stated in modern psychology by Thorndike in 1898: "Behavior is determined by consequences". This means that positive consequences increase the probability of a behavior being repeated, while negative consequences decrease the probability of it 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.

Maimonides stated this concept hundreds of years earlier:

*It is the nature of man not to do anything unless it brings him some gain or avoidance of loss.
L'fi sh'darko shel adam lo ya'as ma'aseh ela l'hasig bo toeles or lim'noa nezek*

If we wish to succeed with our children we can and must teach them proper behavior. We must reward proper behavior no less than we reward academic achievement, and where necessary, we must punish negative behavior, at least to the degree we do for *mitzvos bain adam l'Makom* (interpersonal commandments) and for school rules such as dress code.

To state this succinctly, we must insist our children engage in behaviors and actions that reflect concern and respect for others, so that such concerns become embedded in their very natures.

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. Mom) to serve them, and that they be conscious of not making work for others. Boys need to learn that neither their mothers nor their sisters are there to serve them hand-and-foot.

We need to teach our children to give up their seats to older people, be it at home, on a bus, or in shul. And older folks (i.e. you and I) should realize and acknowledge that one is never too old to change and grow to become more of a mensch. And in that process of growth, we will narrow the gap between what we know to be true and our actions.

2) The importance of role models

Years of research, most prominently by Albert Bandura in *Social Learning and Personality Development*, have taught us that children and adults learn much of their behavior from the role models they meet --

parents, teachers, and other prominent adults. It is from these role models that our children learn their ways of thinking, their attitudes toward values, and their belief that they can exercise self-control.

Torah literature, of course, has expressed this idea clearly many times over.

-- *A person should live in proximity to his rabbi/teacher*

-- *The speech of a child in the street reflects what he hears from either his mother or father*

-- *Our children shouldn't hear us preach and then see us fail to perform.*

Modeling the behavior we want our children and others to become is persuasive.

Rabbi Simcha Weinberg related an incredible story about his renowned father, Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg, zt"l. When R' Simcha was young his father once asked him for some water from the refrigerator. To R' Simcha's surprise, R' Yaakov proceeded to stand up, walk to the fridge and open the door, holding it open for his son. R' Simcha said, "Abba, why did you ask me for water, and then get up and open the refrigerator door?" R' Yaakov responded:

Simcha, I wanted you to know that the reason why I asked you for the water wasn't because I needed your help in getting it. I asked you for the water to give you the opportunity to fulfill the mitzvah of Kibud Av v'Aim (Honoring One's Parents). By getting up and opening the door, I've made it clear to you that was my intent.

And on the flip side, it won't do 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 concern we might be disturbing people in their sleep. Our children and others should learn from our behavior to connect what they learn, to what they do.

3) *Frumkeit* -- External Religiosity, or Religious Rapture

One of the difficulties in getting people to adhere to interpersonal mitzvos (*bain adam l'chaveiro*) is that they aren't simply 'grabbed' by them emotionally. This is because they don't see these mitzvos as part of being *frum* -- truly religious. They don't get the 'frum high' that they get from mitzvos between themselves and G-d, such as matzah, prayer, or even fasting.

Where does *frumkeit* come from?

Rabbi Shlomo Volbe explains that there is a basic instinct, inborn in all creatures, each according to the level of its *neshama* (soul) to want to come close to one's Creator. *Frumkeit* isn't true reverence for G-d, or an indication one is necessarily careful in observing the details of the mitzvos. *Frumkeit* is simply an instinct, and like all instincts it is egotistical, i.e. concerned only with its own satisfaction.

Frumkeit can be positive to help us to carry out mitzvos in spite of hardships. However, our religious choices must be guided by rational thought, i.e. Torah knowledge and priorities. If not, *frumkeit* will seek satisfaction in inappropriate ways. A person driven by the need to satisfy their *frumkeit* will engage in activities that he imagines will lead to a "spiritual high", even if in the process he transgresses very real Torah prohibitions. Such as:

-- Pushing his way through a throng in shul to get close to visiting rabbi.

-- Publicly shaming someone who makes a mistake in religious observance

-- Walking out of synagogue when the person leading services isn't 'religious enough', causing embarrassment to the one praying.

Sermon/ Drasha Shabbos Chol HaMoed Pesach "The Great Divide" *
Rabbi Ze'ev Smason, NHBZ 5774/2014

One in the throes of religious rapture (*frumkeit*) doesn't consider that his violation of the interpersonal mitzvos that fall under the rubric of "Love Your Friend as Yourself" may remove him from true holiness. Nor does the performance of interpersonal mitzvos (*bain adam l'chaveiro*) attract him; it doesn't make him feel more spiritual or holy.

This is an age-old problem, but we can't declare ourselves free of the obligation of trying to tackle it, and change it.

Let me conclude with the following story.

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,

*"Adoni," he says, "Katuv b'Torah lo tignov!!
Sir, the Torah tells us, 'thou shall not steal'!*

The neighbor exclaims,

*Mah naim liyos b'aretz, ochlim tapuzim v'shomim divrei Torah.
How wonderful it is to be in Israel, we eat oranges and hear words of Torah.*

This fictional anecdote illustrates "The Great Divide": A rather sad disconnect between our understanding of Judaism and our living of Judaism that many admit exists in our communities. It's fictional, but its truth is often replicated in real life.

We can close the gap between Torah learning and Torah living if we really want to. It requires us to change our attitude about interpersonal mitzvos (*bain adam l'chaveiro*) and the importance of good character. We need to realize that character (*middos*) can be improved. We must provide our children and others role models of the people we want them to become. And we must do so with a clear awareness of Jewish and Torah priorities; specifically, the fundamental mitzvah of "Love your friend as yourself."

And then, we will be able to connect Torah to life, and life to Torah.

* based upon an essay by Rabbi Aharon Hersh Fried