



ITS IN THE SOUL

Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

The calendar tells us that it is the month of Adar so allow me to share a small quip. A local computer company recently ran an advertisement for its latest machine, which promises to become a huge success and is worthy of our attention:

"Buy the latest model of our computer. Each one is guaranteed and comes with an accompanying grandchild!"

This flippant announcement may give you cause to chuckle, and so it should, because in truth, everyone over a certain age finds all this computer stuff a bit of a mystery, and we often have to turn to our grandchildren for advice. A recent study showed that those over the age of forty are really not wholly comfortable with this new world of technology, whereas children are. It's as if they are wired up differently, and their thinking works in different ways. We old folk may well learn how to get around the byways of a computer, but it's as if we are learning a different language; it never becomes our mother tongue, and at best we speak it with an accent. For the young, opening documents and such is a given, and all this techno-babble is completely native to who they are.

This has caused in some ways a gap in the generations, and we dare not turn our backs to this reality. It isn't simply that the youngsters know how to contact their friends easily, or that they can obtain information we oldies can't. Their entire worldview is different, and we must reach them where that world is.

These times toss up huge new challenges, and with them come new questions that demand responsible answers. Our youth today find it difficult to understand our fears; after all, they are creating their opinions with different information. True, it may seem that this has always been the case, and that young people have always felt that their elders really

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didn't understand what goes on in their lives. However, this time there are unique differences, and we ought to discuss them openly.

For one important example let's examine the period that followed World War II. Yeshivas were smaller, and whilst the kehillos were growing, they were still very much more intimate than they are in our times. Today's hiemisha communities are kein horah huge – larger than Jews ever before experienced. Kids can get lost in the shuffle, and their loss wreaks havoc on us all. Stemming this breach has become the stuff of a whole new field of chinuch, but even more dangerous are issues regarding those who have not gotten totally lost. What are these 'average' kids thinking? What is their reality?

There are many who are connected with our Torah and are experiencing spiritual growth that is certainly heartwarming. However, there are also those who slip by, whose minds are in a different place; they will not cause any great eruption to their parents' hopes, but in their hearts, they are simply cold. They will behave as our culture asks of them, yet there will be that edge, that place where they just aren't alive to the warmth of the Torah, and we had better be concerned about them, for they will soon be the parents of the next generation.

In Mishlei we read:

"The innocence of the upright will guide them, but the corruption of the faithless will despoil them."

The Gemara mentions this statement when it tells us of a nonbeliever who criticized the nation of Israel for accepting the Torah without even knowing what it held. Rava quoted to him our passage and said that one who seeks to be righteous will be led onto the proper path, whereas one who seeks evil will be led to corruption.

The Yidden knew, sight unseen, that the Torah was the righteous path, and their feet led them to it as a result of the devotion of the holy generations that lived before them.

This innate feeling has held our people together through our long golus. We have nurtured that sweet tendency for the truth, and that has enabled us to keep on the path leading us ever closer to Hashem despite all odds.

The tragedy we face today is that the next generation is being corrupted on such a basic level that our youth can be snatched away from that path before anyone is aware. The youngsters who show openly that they are in peril are at least visible, and we can reach out to them. Those who are silently losing their bearings can fall between the nets and become lost without even a murmur. What can we do? How do you preserve what may well be already crumbling? Lets visit Mishlei once more:

"A man of kindness brings good upon himself, but a cruel person troubles his flesh."

A simple answer is that we must become purveyors of kindness. Every parent loves his or her children, but in the mad rush of daily life it takes an extra effort to show this. We are meant to give of ourselves to our children, through our actions and deeds. We shouldn't just pawn off our basic responsibilities to rebbes and teachers, we must be there for our kids with a full heart. Nothing is more valuable than the gift of one's self. Sharing time, doing things together – that is where a bond

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is cemented. If the young feel that attachment, then even if other forces sweep through their landscape, they will feel drawn toward the path of their parents. One who loses sight of this responsibility, who acts unkindly in this realm, will bring trouble upon his own flesh, upon his own children.

“The fruit of a righteous one is a tree of life, and a wise man acquires souls.”

Righteousness is like a tree, with roots that go deep and create nourishment for its fruits. We parents are meant to be the roots for our young, and their strength comes from what we have for them. Although children today are in many ways much more independent than ever before, the truth is that they need us more than ever. With all their access to information, a false sense of wisdom tends to create an impression of maturity. They travel farther than ever before and have ways of communicating that we never dreamed of. The difficulty is that this is a mirage, and that underneath it all are young souls that are thirsty for love and support.

The wise parent works on acquiring the soul of his child. This takes great effort; beyond all the guidebooks and self-help articles ... it takes an open heart. Seeing the fruits, that have grown on the tree that is a Torah family, becoming dried up and tasteless is distressing. Sure, they will cling to the tree, hanging on the branch, but they will never be fresh. Yet they are meant to become the roots of their own children, and what nourishment will they have to offer? We must pray for understanding, and do so with a fullness of feeling. Everything depends on it, for this is the tree that must grow for generations.

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