



## FOR THE CHILD'S SAKE

Dear Parents,

A great educator once described misbehaving children as 'aggressive researchers.' Children will test limits in whatever setting they find themselves. They want to know if the adults really mean what they say. They experiment with defying the instruction and watch to see the reaction. The results of this 'research' will help the child determine how seriously to abide by the rule.

This research takes place at home as well as in school, and begins at a very early age. In some families, the research seems to be never ending, as the children are constantly testing limits. In other families, the children seem to go with the flow and are more accepting. Is there some magic formula that these families employ that creates more cooperative and compliant children?

Perhaps the answer can be found in a startling statement by *Moshe Rabbeinu*, in this week's *Parsha (Bamidbar 11:12)*. In response to the complaints of the *Bnei Yisrael* demanding that *Moshe* provide them with meat, *Moshe* exclaims: "Did I conceive this entire people, or did I give birth to it...?" The *Seforno* explains that *Moshe* was explaining his inadequacy in calming the people by virtue of the fact he was not *Klal Yisrael's* father. A father would be able to handle the situation. *Moshe* could not. The *Seforno* goes on to explain that a father has his children's absolute confidence that he always acts out of love for his children and will go to any (appropriate) lengths to help his children. The *Seforno* concludes, that *Moshe* is saying that since *Klal Yisrael* doesn't have trust in him (*Moshe*) they suspect and they constantly test to see what he will do for them.

The *Seforno* is teaching us that 'researching' doesn't take place under all circumstances. The people confronted, tested and complained to *Moshe*, because they lacked confidence in his absolute devotion to them. It seems from this, that when followers are convinced of their leader's absolute devotion to act in their best interests, they will not test, nor suspect, but will be able to accept what the leader says and instructs.

The leader of every child is his parent. A child naturally is deeply connected to and respectful of his parents. While the parent may have a head start in enjoying his child's confidence, maintaining that level of closeness and trust needs to be earned anew and built upon as the child grows. All children will, at times, question, complain and assert independence. It's a healthy part of growing up. However, when a parent acts consistently in the best interests of the child, even at the expense of his or her own personal needs, the relationship grows, builds upon the initial instinctive trust and the child develops a powerful confidence in their parent's integrity, values, thinking and decision making. There's less need for 'research' because the child has found the parent to be so trustworthy and therefore has developed so much trust.

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Examples of different motives for parental behavior are endless. When guests come, the parents may be very invested in their children's good behavior at the *Shabbos* table. If they are motivated to train the children in the sanctity of *Shabbos* and *Shabbosdik* behavior then it makes little difference if there are non-family members there or not. If, however, the parent's motivation is to show off how well behaved their children are, then that is about the parents' ego and may eventually erode the child's trust and compliance.

If a child is receiving poor grades in school and the parent takes measures to help improve the child's performance, is the motivation stemming from a sincere desire to act in the child's best interests? Or perhaps, the motivation stems from a desire to enhance the family's reputation of being superior academically?

Another example: Perhaps parents are very strict about an early bedtime for their children. The motivation might be to preserve and strengthen the child's overall health and wellbeing. Another possibility is that the parents themselves want to get some quiet, or to go out, or to get more sleep, and establish the household schedule to serve their personal needs. It may not be an improper motivation, but it will not engender the same level of confidence and trust as when the parents act purely in the best interests of the child.

When a child knows and feels in his heart that his parent can be relied upon to do whatever it takes to help him and further his best interests, there's less need to test, less inclination to resist. There are fewer grounds for suspicion or for being defensive. A child growing up in such an atmosphere will be infinitely more capable of being a giver, caring for others, of being a team player and handling disappointments. When such a child wishes to go to a questionable venue, and his parent thoughtfully ponders the pros and cons, and the answer is no, there will certainly be disappointment and perhaps complaints, but not accusations or criticism. The child knows deep down that his parent truly loves him and therefore is doing what is best for him. The child will respect that.

None of us will ever reach the lofty level where our motivation will be 100% pure and our children will be 100% accepting. We can, however, understand the dynamic at work and strive to be conscious that every decision and action surrounding our child needs to be with the ultimate goal of helping each one succeed. That is our mitzvah of *Chinuch HaBonim*. When a parent is loyal to the potential that lies within each precious child, and shows genuine interest and concern, our children will surely feel the love and respond in wonderful ways.

Best wishes for a beautiful *Shabbos*,

Rabbi Baumann

*Erev Shabbos Parashas Behaalosecha 5781*

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