



DIVREI MENACHEM

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We live in a world tending toward personal freedom. Individuals, it appears, can map out their own journeys, decide for themselves how to run their lives, and not be beholden to any set of ethical principles proscribed for them. "Be what you want to be!" – That is the watchword.

It would then appear that one should be wary about instructing the young or the uninitiated into set patterns of behaviors or moral virtues. Of course, there are opposite extremes concerning the possibilities of intervention. But Rousseau would have us let people find their own ways of coping. Furthermore, protagonists of the "non-directive approach" to education would allow young people to flounder in the world and learn from experience, from their mistakes and not from the wisdom of their elders.

This approach to education has been labeled "Laisser Faire." Let the people do as they wish; let circumstances take their

course like feathers floating in the wind. So, in that case, we might take a more pertinent look at the opening command in our Parsha, which requires Moshe to teach the Kohanim the laws of purity. Following various rabbinic interpretations of the double use of the terms "say" and "tell them" (Vayikra 21:1), it appears that Hashem was stressing the importance of the elder Kohanim passing these stringent laws on to their children and to those who would seemingly not be directly affected by those instructions.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe noted that two other commands are similarly denoted by the notion of elders cautioning the uninitiated, namely, (1) the law forbidding eating insects and (2) the directive not to eat blood. What do the three directives have in common?

All three, the Rebbe indicates, involve



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ingrained habits, behaviors that break out of the norm in extreme circumstances or commands that defy logic – such that a parent or teacher (educator) would despair of even trying to convey the laws or of changing the individual's tendencies. The Rebbe cites the Talmud that when a person loses self-control, even insects are tasty and welcome food! As for drinking blood, the Midrash tells us that the Israelites were, indeed, accustomed to so indulging (cited in Rashi on Devarim 12:13). And, as for the strict laws of Tum'a (impurity): They certainly defy reason.

So, why bother to teach these edicts, especially in the freewheeling world that describes present times – or even in the distant days of Moshe's tutelage? Why? – Because our Torah is based on the assumption that we have free choice, that we can exercise our will under any circumstances, that we can do Teshuva, and that following Chassidut, there is within us a holy spark only waiting to be awakened.

But more so, there is the positive command to instruct our children: We should never give up hope! Surely, we are probably better off applying the concept of "saying" rather than "speaking" (in a harsh way). But, notably, "Purity" demands the highest of standards. Thus, the additional requirement implied is that the older generation teaches by setting an unambiguous personal example. ■

Shabbat Shalom!

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