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ADMONISHING WITHOUT DESTROYING[1]

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A young couple become parents. They begin to imagine all the positive and uplifting interactions they will have with their children. Admonishing and criticizing children is most likely not part of this blissful scene. Unfortunately, the reality of life and the *chinuch* obligations of parents soon intrude and require parents, on occasion, to correct, reprimand and admonish (i.e., give *"tochacha"* to) their children. However, when they try to implement these measures they often find their efforts to be ineffective at best or counterproductive at worse. Yet it is clear that we are halachically obligated at times to admonish our fellow man and to guide and correct our children.

This article will explore how *chazal* look at the issue of reprimanding and admonishing - particularly regarding *chinuch* - and their advice on how to maximize its positive impact and minimize the likelihood of it backfiring.[2]

The meaning of *tochacha*

In the very commandment to admonish, the Torah already cautions us not to do so in a counterproductive manner; ñYou shall admonish your neighbor, but do not sin in the process.ò Rashi explains that this means to not embarrass the rebuked person publically.[3] This is not only good advice, it is a *halachic* imperative. The K'sav Sofer writes in a *teshuvah* that it is more difficult to properly fulfill the *mitzvah* of rebuke than any other *mitzvah* because it is not easy to ascertain ahead of time if the rebuke will be accepted. If it is rejected it would have been better to say nothing![4]

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[1] Based on a presentation to parents at the Garden View Estates in Loch Sheldrake, NY, Summer 2016. I thank my son R' Eliyohu Meir for his considerable input for this article.

[2] Most dictionaries distinguish between "admonishing" and "reprimanding" thus: "Admonishing" is gentle or friendly reproof or criticism; counseling against fault or oversight; warning, while "reprimanding" is a severe, formal or official reproof; rebuke, private or public. In the context of *chinuch* the former is almost always more effective than the latter. See footnote below from the [illegible] where he distinguishes between [illegible] (perhaps comparable to "admonishing") and [illegible] (perhaps comparable to "reprimanding").

[3] [illegible]

[4] **כתב סופר** : [illegible] **חובת התלמידים** ([illegible]) **מהשל"ה** [illegible]

This point is emphasized in contemporary times by Rav Matisyahu Salomon, the Lakewood Mashgiach who stated:

> We must ask ourselves if there will be any benefit from the reprimand, or if it will cause him to be more resentful, in which case it is better to refrain from confronting him, just as the Ribbon Shel Olam exercises patience and does not immediately reprimand us when we sin.[5]

The word *tochacha* is related to *hochacha*, meaning ñproof.ò Rashi says that *hochacha* and *tochacha* mean „×¼ „x„×Ì - determining the facts.[6] This paints admonishment or reproof in a different light than how we typically look at it. Rather than "telling the person off," the goal is that it should be a learning process. To determine what caused the person to act improperly and perhaps even explore how this situation could be dealt with in a more appropriate manner in the future. The importance of this aspect of *tochacha* is highlighted by the masters of *mussar* who caution us that in the battle against the *yetzer harah* it isn't sufficient to fight harder: it is necessary to also fight smarter. We have to analyze ourselves and the situations where we are likely to falter. This can help us avoid spiritually dangerous situations and to plan alternative means of coping with challenging situations that can't be avoided.[7]

In the good old days

When contemporary *mechanchim* or therapists discuss the importance of admonishing with sensitivity, people often roll their eyes. In their minds this concern is purely a result of the pathetic level of pampering that today's "spoiled" children enjoy. In the good old days, they claim, you could yell at and even humiliate children and it would only make them better (or at least the damage wouldn't be readily apparent!) Is the need to be cautious when reprimanding primarily a result of the weakness of today's generation?

It surprises some people to learn that this sensitivity for the emotional reaction of the rebuked has a very long history. In fact, it "concerned" *Hashem* when he admonished Aharon

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[illegible]

[5] *With Cords of Love: Reaching the Struggling Teen: Based on the Teachings & Guidance of Harav Mattisyahu Salomon shlit"a,* by Ezriel Tauber (2016), p. 174. While the book deals specifically with rebellious teens, the editor asserts that "the book contains important *chinuch* messages for all parents" [p. xxvi].

[6] [illegible] **הריב"ש** [illegible]

[7] **רבי יחזקאל לוינשטיין:** [illegible]

and Miriam for speaking ill of Moshe *Rabbeinu*! Rashi says that Hashem "requested" of them to listen. The *Sifsei Chachomim* notes that if Hashem would have spoken angrily He wouldn't have been heard!! This by people of the exalted level of Aharon and Miriam being spoken to by Hashem Himself!![8] Yet some make fun when told that we shouldn't speak harshly to children!

While it is clear from *chazal* that there has been a steady deterioration over the generations in people's ability to productively tolerate rebuke,[9] nonetheless, it is also clear that it was always the case that one had to exercise caution and good judgment when admonishing. It is also clear that regardless of whether there has or hasn't been major changes in recent generations in children's ability to productively make use of rebuke, we have to make *chinuch* decisions based on current realities.

Rav Shlomo Wolbe makes this point in a letter of *haskamah* to the *sefer Nefesh Hayeshiva* where he praises the author for being sensitive to the emotional vulnerabilities of contemporary children. ñWere previous generations [emotionally] healthier?ò asks Rav Wolbe. ñWe donôt really knowò he answers, but we do know that in our times we have to be very sensitive to these vulnerabilities.[10]

Admonishing ourselves

The importance of admonishing with wisdom applies equally when admonishing others or admonishing ourselves. Rav Yitzchok Hutner states that the *gemara's* statement that there wasn't anyone in that generation who was capable of admonishing (giving *tochacha*) in a respectful (and thus effective) manner could equally be applied to *charata* (regret) - which is, in essence, *tochacha* directed at the self.[11]

When parents admonish

In addition to the general imperative to admonish in a matter that is respectful and effective, parents need to be especially cognizant of the impact of their admonishment on their overall relationship with their child. Since the transmission of our *mesorah* is primarily dependent on the parent-child relationship, it would be foolhardy to thoughtlessly undermine this relationship.

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8 **שפתי חכמים**: [illegible]

9 See my article (at www.DrSorotzkin.com) "Corporal punishment: Have the times changed?" for numerous sources.

10 [illegible]

11 **הפחד יצחק** **ספר רשימות לב** [illegible]

HaRav Shmuel Yaakov Weinberg emphasized this point in a powerful message to *mechanchim* at a Torah Umesorah Convention:

> ñListen to me carefully please. We are living in an age where the most important thing we as parents have going for us is the personal contact and caring we have with our children. We no longer have any other method of disciplineé [If you] send them out é you are hurting yourself worse than you are hurting themé Since the greatest effect we have on our children is through our personal relationship with them, the first and most important thing that a mother and father must do for that relationship is to win their affection, loyalty, and care. And you cannot do anything that in any way diminishes that feeling of affection, loyalty and care. You must give that first and greatest priority of all.ò[12]

Likewise, Maran HaRav Shach states that ñthe underlying purpose of the *mitzvah* of *kibud av v'eim* is to ensure the transmission of the *mesorah* from generation to generation, since our *mesorah* is dependent on children valuing the teachings from those from the previous generations. If children become alienated from their parents then the next step is for them to become alienated from their teachings and thus break the chains of the *mesorah*.ò[13] Needless to say, it is therefore incumbent on the parents not to behave toward their children in a manner that would make it almost inevitable that they will become alienated from their parents. This point is also emphasized by the *Sefer Chassidim*.[14]

HaRav Shach also emphasized that ñone of the most important tasks of parents is to provide their children with a warm, loving and emotionally supportive home. With this foundation children are able to develop the internal fortitude to resist outside negative influences. Parents who do not do this are destroying, with their own hands, the soul of their childrené . All parents are required to do is to provide their children with warmth and love together with setting a positive personal example. Today, parents are afraid of giving children love. They donôt understand that this is the most important factor in being *mechanech* children; to provide them with a lot of warmth and love!!ò[15]

Interestingly, a recently published report by a distinguished scholar on a major study on the transmission of faith from one generation to the next came to the same conclusion. For

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[12] Chinuch Insights from the Rosh HaYeshiva ï Transcripts from Q & A sessions at the Torah Umesorah Conventions, Edited by Doniel Frank (pp. 2-3).

[13] "**אורחות הישיבה**" (**הגרא"מ שך**, ...):

[14] **ספר חסידים** (...):

[15] "**אורחות הבית**" (**הגרא"מ שך**):

על ההורים מוטל רק להעניק לילדם הרבה חום ואהבה ï עם דוגמא אישית...."...

almost four decades, Vern Bengtson and his colleagues have been conducting the largest-ever study of religion and family across generations. They have followed more than 350 families composed of more than 3,500 individuals whose lives span more than a century--the oldest was born in 1881, the youngest in 1988--to find out how religion is, or is not, passed down from one generation to the next. They found that despite enormous changes in American society, a child is actually more likely to remain within the fold than leave it. And while outside forces do play a role, the crucial factor in whether a child keeps the faith is the presence of a strong family bond. Parents who take their faith seriously and interact with their children during their formative years in a warm, affirming and respectful manner are more likely to pass on their religious tradition, beliefs, and practices.[16]

Some parents may react to Rav Shach's statement incredulously: "Perhaps it was true years ago that parents were afraid to love their children, but today's children receive **too much** love, they have it too good!" they exclaim. "They are spoiled!"[17] However when they give examples of the "too much love" that the children received, it is most often related to "things" (toys, clothes etc.) they give children, and not to love, attention, respect, or sensitivity to their emotional needs. In fact, to truly spoil children, you need to both give them too much of what they don't need (e.g., expensive toys) and too little of what they do need (e.g., love and attention). I once saw a wise quote: "Too much love never spoils a child. Children become spoiled when we substitute *presents* for *presence*."[18] Some parents consider being inappropriately over-indulgent and even disengaged as examples of being "too good" to children. This is, of course, not the case at all.

Rav Matisyahu Salomon recently made it clear that this hesitancy to be loving of one's children can still be a challenge in today's day and age. He stated:

> Perhaps the following statement will shock people, but the reality is that nowadays, many parents don't love their children, and many others don't do enough to convey that love to their children.[19]
>
> One of the things that I began to realize when I started to study the subject [of struggling teens] was that so many people are not capable of loving. They don't know what love is; it's not something you can speak to people about. To them love is like a *vort* of the *baalei mussar*, about the man who says, "I love fish," and then cuts it up and eats it. That's how far their love is capable of going.[20]

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[16] *Families and Faith: How Religion is Passed Down across Generations.* (2013) by Vern L. Bengtson.
[17] Alfie Kohn documents in his book *"The Myth of the Spoiled Child"* (2016) how every new generation of parents for hundreds of years have complained that "today's kids are so spoiled, unlike the kids in our days."
[18] Anthony Witham.
[19] *With Cords of Love: Reaching the Struggling Teen: Based on the Teachings & Guidance of Harav Mattisyahu Salomon shlit"a,* by Ezriel Tauber (2016), p. 99.
[20] *Hamodia's Inyan Magazine* "Indestructible Cords." Vol. XIX No. 943, 1/11/17 - pp. 16-23 (p. 20).

When teachers and leaders rebuke

The concern that rebuke may undermine the teacher-disciple relationship or the parent-child relationship is found by both Yaakov Avinu and by Moshe Rabbeinu.

Rashi tells us that Moshe Rabbeinu waited until shortly before he died to admonish Klal Yisroel because he was concerned with a negative reaction. Rashi explains that he learned this concern from Yaakov who refrained from admonishing his children until shortly before his death because he was concerned that his children would rebel and join up with Eisov. Likewise, Tosfos Ri Hazokein asserts that when parents are relentlessly punitive with their children they "inflame their children's *yetzer horah* and cause them to sin."[21] If Yaakov Avinu and Moshe Rabbeinu were concerned that their admonitions may backfire how can we feel that we can admonish with impunity?!

Does the underlying motivation of the admonisher matter?

I had always wondered how waiting to admonish until shortly before their death alleviated Yaakov and Moshe's concern of a negative reaction? Why would this timing make it less likely for the admonished to feel rejected, hurt and insulted, feelings that could cause them to rebel?

Then I saw an amazing insight from the Ben Ish Chai that may help us understand Rashi. The *posuk* tells us that Hashem chastises us "like a man disciplines his son". Asks the Ben Ish Chai; why doesn't it say "like a **father** disciplines his son"? Why does it state; "like a **man** disciplines his son?" After all, we are talking about a father and son. He answers that when a father disciplines his son there may very well be a selfish motivation in addition to the father's concern for his son's well being. Perhaps he's embarrassed by his son's misbehavior. When the *posuk* uses the term "man" it means someone who took a homeless child off the street and he is trying to educate him. In this situation whatever misbehaviors the child exhibits wouldn't reflect on the father. Therefore such a person disciplines without any selfish motivation. Likewise, explains the Ben Ish Chai, when *Hashem* disciplines us there is only His concern for us.[22]

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[21] **רש"י** [illegible]

[22] **בן איש חי עה"ת,** [illegible] **אב** [illegible] **שיעורי תורה לרופאים** [illegible] [569].

תוס' ר"י הזקן (ד.): [illegible] **ומטיל בו יצר הרע,** [illegible]

Likewise, Rav Matisyahu Salomon states: A struggling child ... needs to be convinced that his parents' desire for him to improve is motivated by pure consideration of what's best for **him**, not by their shame of how he is viewed in the public eye [*With Cords of Love*, p. 134].

This insight can perhaps shed light on why waiting to admonish until shortly before their death made Yaakov and Moshe feel that their admonishing would be better received. Perhaps the admonished would be less suspicious that their admonisher is motivated by selfish motivations when they are about to die.

The importance of the motivation of the *mechanech* is emphasized by Rav Matisyahu Solomon:[23]

> Unlike in our relationship with the Ribono Shel Olam [where there is a value to doing a mitzvah for an extrinsic motivation], our efforts in *chinuch* have no value without the proper motives and intentionsé *shelo lishmah* has no value in *chinuch* [i.e., when the parent is motivated by his own needs]. In fact, it is destructiveé .
>
> When a parent demands a certain behavior from his childé not because it serves the interest of the child but because it serves the parentôs own interests, that is not *chinuch*. It will not succeedé When a child senses that his parent is demanding something from him because it suits the parent, he may very well feel used and exploited, he will be upset and angry.é People ask their children to show off in front of friendsé how much *Mishnayos* [theyôve] learnedé The child recognizes right away that the parent is doing it for his own glory. The parent, of course, may tell himself that he is doing it for *chinuch*é . But more often than not, he is only showing off his child because it brings him reflected gloryé He may not know it, but his child does, and he is not happy about how he is being used**….**
>
> **The primary purpose of having children is not to have *nachas* from them** but rather to help them lead the kind of life that will culminate in their holy *neshamos* entering *Olam Haba*é The *chinuch* of a child is not an investment that is supposed to bear fruit for the parent.[24]

Rav Matisyahu Salomon relates this to the *posuk* we are discussing:

> The Torah tells us, ñAnd you will know in your heart that just as a man disciplines his son so does *Hashem* discipline you.ò What does this mean? It certainly doesnôt mean the way some fathers discipline their children, with anger, negativity, [and] vengefulness. We would be in deep trouble if thatôs what it meant. No, the *Ribono Shel Olam* disciplines us as a loving father disciplines his child.[25]

The degree to which the motivation of the one administrating discipline impacts on its effectiveness can be learned from a *halacha* regarding the *shliach beis din* who administered

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[23] *With Hearts Full of Love,* Mesorah, 2009, pp. 45-47.

[24] Perhaps the explanation for this distinction is that in *avodas Hashem* since ultimately it really is for our own benefit, itôs not so terrible if we initially do it *shelo lishmah* ï in contrast to *chinuch* where itôs crucial that children feel that our expectations from them are solely for their benefit.

[25] Ibid. pp. 39-40.

molkos. The *gemara* rules that the officer of the court who administers lashes needs to be wise and weak.[26] Now we can understand why it's important that he not be so strong so as not to inflict too much damage. But why does he need to be wise? Administering lashes doesn't seem to be a task that requires a great deal of wisdom!

Rav Yitzchok Kirzner answers that wisdom is required to properly understand the Torah's attitude toward punishment [e.g., that it isn't revenge; rather it's for the benefit of the transgressor]. ñApparently that difference in attitude is conveyed in the lashes themselves - a certain energy flows from the whip to the recipient's back. He can discern the difference between lashes of love and correction and those of destruction and rejection.ò Apparently, if the person receiving *malkos* perceives (nonverbally!) a distorted view of the Torah's understanding of discipline then it undermines its effectiveness.[27]

Admonishing effectively

Should these concerns regarding the possible negative impact of admonition lead us to the conclusion that we should avoid admonishing our children, students and ourselves at all costs? Certainly not. Rather one needs to be aware of those factors that *chazal* teach us make admonishment more effective.

Consider your own contribution to the problem

Before admonishing, it is crucial that admonishers honestly consider and reflect upon their own contribution to the problem. Besides the unfairness in laying the complete blame on the admonished if the admonisher contributed to the problem, it also causes understandable resentment and anger. Consider a father who is a major talker in *shul* who admonishes his son for speaking in *shul*. Or the older teen I knew who on occasion would oversleep and *daven* at home. His father would reprimand him severely. The comical part was that the father usually did this while he himself was *davening* at home in his *talis* and *tefilin*. This father was self-employed and had no time pressure to be at work early yet rarely went to *shul* weekday mornings.

Or consider the following confession related by the secular father of a 9 year old girl. His daughter's room was painted while she was in school without anyone telling her about it beforehand. When she came home and saw her messy room, she exclaimed: "What the h... is going on here!?" To which her father angrily retorted: "Who the h... taught you to speak that way!?"

This point that the admonisher needs to consider his own contribution to the problem being addressed was made by the author of *Chovas Hatalmidim* in a talk to *melamdim*: "We tend to look down at our troubled youth as if only they are responsible and we are blameless. We

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[26] [illegible]

[27] *Making Sense of Suffering*, ArtScroll 2002, p. 64, fn.

should also feel pained and distressed over own our negligence. Only then can we find solutions."[28]

Likewise, when Dovid Hamelech's son Adoniyah rebelled against him, the *posuk* notes that Dovid "never saddened him by saying 'Why do you do this'?" The Maharal asks, Why indeed did Dovid fail to admonish his son when he observed him acting inappropriately? The Maharal gives an amazing explanation based on the Ralbag. Dovid attributed the rebelliousness of his sons to the fact that their mother was a captive woman (אשת יפת תואר). Even though *chazal* explain that Dovid took a captive woman *leshem shomayim* in an effort to save *Klal Yisroel* from war, nonetheless since *chazal* teach us that taking a captive women will lead to having a rebellious son, Dovid felt that if he admonished his son: "Why did you do this"? his son would answer: "Because you took a captive woman."[29]

Likewise, Rav Dovid Feinstein explained in his Chumash shiur that the reason why a captive woman ends up being a despised wife is because she reminds her husband of his weakness. Instead of taking responsibility for his actions he turns his anger against his wife and then against his child [who understandably becomes rebellious as a result.][30]

Admonishment is only effective in the context of a positive relationship

For admonishment to prompt self-reflection rather than anger and resentment it needs to occur in the context of a warm and loving relationship. As I quoted above from Rav Yitzchok Kirzner regarding punishment, the recipient of the punishment can feel the motivations of the punisher. If the motivation is anger or revenge then it won't achieve its intended goal.

The Chofetz Chaim points out that when Yitzchok Avinu wanted to warn Yaakov not to take a wife from the daughters of Canaan, he was careful to first *bentch* him. "Take a look," says the Chofetz Chaim:

> Yaakov Avinu, is a person of lofty caliber. His father wants to guide him and tell him from where to choose a wife. What would we do? We would simply call in our child and command him. But this is not what Yitzchok did. He called in his son and blessed him! First and foremost he heaped blessings upon him. Yaakov was overwhelmed with emotion and filled with gratitude. Then, and only then did Yitzchok instruct him. And

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[28] "לא אמר לו מדוע עשית כזאת. המהר"ל מפרש: "לא אמר מדוע ככה עשית?: הרלב"ג כתב: "ולא עצבו אביו [מימיו] חינוך מלכותי (מלכים א' ה' ט): "ולא עצבו אביו מימיו" [29] [30] [illegible]

even that not in a harsh manner, but rather softly and gently.... How foolish are those parents who aren't of the caliber of Yitzchok Avinu, and their child isn't like Yaakov Avinu, yet they heavy-handedly command their child in harsh tone, and usually accomplish the opposite of their intentions.[31]

Overly harsh admonition induces paralyzing fear rather than improvement

The delicate balance crucial for effective admonishment is highlighted by Moshe Rabbeinu's efforts to console Klal Yisroel after they turned pale in reaction to hearing the curses enumerated in *Parshas Bechukosi.* Moshe reassures them: "Although you have caused much anger to Hashem, nevertheless He didn't destroy you." Asks Rav Leib Chasman, the *mashgiach* of Chevron: Wasn't the purpose of the curses to instill fear? Why would Moshe want to diminish the fear?

Rav Chasman explains that the purpose of the curses is to induce Klal Yisroel to appreciate the serious consequences of violating the Torah. If they become paralyzed with fear, these efforts will backfire. Therefore, he strove for a delicate balance of trepidation and reassurance.[32] Rav Dessler makes a similar point, that strong feelings of shame resulting from the awareness of violating one's internal standards can be a powerful incentive for *teshuva*. However, cautions Rav Dessler, it can also trigger a rebellious reaction "in an effort to quell the voice of the conscience by force."[33]

Rav Henoch Lebowitz, the late Rosh Hayeshiva of Yeshiva Chofetz Chaim makes this point specifically regarding admonishing:

> When we admonish someone, we need to first introduce our comments with words of encouragement so that the target of our admonishment not feel that the situation is hopeless. If he despairs, not only will our admonishment not be effective, it is likely to actually cause the admonished to increase his improper behavior.[34]

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31 **חפץ חיים עה"ת** [illegible]

32 [illegible] **רש"י** [illegible] **רבי ליב חסמן** [illegible]

33 **מכתב מאליהו** [illegible] :263 [illegible]

34 **ספר חידושי הלבב:** [illegible]

The far-reaching consequences of admonishment tainted by even a minute amount of personal, non-chinuch related feelings can be learned from an astonishing *chazal* that is also discussed by Rav Henoch Lebowitz. During the *Tisha B'Av Kinnos* we read the horrific story of how the *navi* Zechariah rebuked *Klal Yisrael* in the *bais hamikdash* only to have them stone him to death in the *bais hamikdash*! What is perhaps more shocking than this horrific deed is that *chazal* attribute part of the blame to Zechariah himself! *Chazal* tells us that he spoke down to the people with an attitude of superiority and this triggered their violent reaction! Rav Lebowitz asserts that since a person can't achieve the status of a *navi* unless he perfected his *middos,* we must assume that this feeling of superiority was very minimal, but because of his greatness, Zechariah is held to an exacting standard and therefore is held partly responsible for his own murder.[35]

It is instructive to contemplate the sensitivity of people to being rebuked. Zechariah rebuked *Klal Yisroel* - as he was instructed to do so by Hashem - with a miniscule degree of a superior attitude and this touched off a horrific reaction. Parents who rebuke harshly will often reject concerns of possible negative consequences with the reassurance: "My son knows I only want what's best for him!" Yet, surely no one suspected that Zechariah didn't want the best for *Klal Yisroel!* Yet that wasn't sufficient to diminish the harmful impact of his deficient rebuke. How much more must we - who are light years distant from the level of Zechariah - need to take appropriate precautions not to rebuke in a counterproductive manner.

Being *don l'kaf zechus* even while reprimanding

We will now discuss another aspect regarding the internal attitude required for effective reprimanding: that of being *don l'kaf zechus* even while reprimanding. It is important to emphasize that this attitude needs to be genuinely felt and not contrived as a psychological "trick."[36]

We undermine the effectiveness of a reprimand when we attribute malicious intent and/or general depravity to the offender rather than limiting our criticism to the specific issue or behavior under discussion. For one thing, over-generalizations are hardly ever accurate. Second, we can never prove a person's motivations so why even go there? I once read wise advice from an educator: to always assume the best possible motivation consistent with the facts.

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[35] **ספר חידושי הלב** (בראשית לז:ב): ... **ויעמד מעל** [illegible] **לעם** (שם). [illegible]

[36] **"עצות והדרכות"** [illegible]

There is no reason to assume that the imperative to be *don l'kaf zechus* (judging other's favorably) doesn't also apply to children and students.

Rav Dessler emphasizes that we should judge the **offense** while refraining from being judgmental of the **offender** by being *don l'kaf zechus*.[37] This distinction is unfortunately lost on many well-meaning people. They may have the admirable trait of avoiding being **judgmental** of others. However, they mistakenly assume that this means that they also need to avoid making **judgments**. This makes it difficult to declare even the most immoral act as "wrong" because this may offend those who indulge in that behavior. This, of course, undermines community standards. As a backlash, those who appropriately worry about deteriorating standards insist on condemning both the offense and the offender. How much better off we would be if we embraced Rav Dessler's concept of condemning the offense while judging the offender favorably (by considering possible mitigating circumstances, as elaborated on by Rav Lebowitz below).

Rav Henoch Lebowitz applies the imperative of being *don l'kaf zechus* to chinuch. The purpose of a reprimand is to improve and correct the one being reprimanded. It is therefore imperative to frame the reprimand in a manner that increases the likelihood that the person will be able to accept the message without becoming overly defensive. He brings evidence for this from a *mishnah* in Sotah that describes how *beis din* makes a supreme effort to get the *sotah* to confess, so as to preclude the need to erase Hashem's name for the *sotah* water. *Beis din* does this by providing the accused with possible mitigating factors that may lessen the gravity of her act. Perhaps it happened under the influence of alcohol, or that of bad friends, it is suggested to her. She is even told that there have been great people who have sinned and confessed. All this in order to make it easier for her to confess. Asks Rav Lebowitz, why are we minimizing the severity of her act? Shouldn't we rather emphasize the depravity of her behavior so that she should regret what she did? The answer, explains Rav Lebowitz, is that the more shame she feels the more difficult it would be for her to admit to what she did. It is precisely by reducing the level of shame that we make it possible for her to confess.

While the Mishnah is Sotah is focusing on the approach to use in order to encourage the *sotah* to confess, Rav Lebowitz extends this lesson to every *mechanech*. A *mechanech* needs to cultivate a type of relationship with his *talmidim* where they will be honest with him so that he can guide them on the proper path. In order to accomplish this he also needs to show them that he understands that many external factors can make a person more susceptible to sin, that many other fine people have also sinned in a similar manner and that he doesn't condemn him for slipping.[38]

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[37] **מכתב מאליהו** ל"ו' 318: ...

[38] **חידושי הלב** (מאמרים ח"ב עמ' ...): "...

It is noteworthy that the attitude Rav Lebowitz is recommending is roundly condemned by some parents and teachers as providing "excuses" for improper behavior. This is because they are acutely aware of the real danger of lowering standards by being too lenient, but are oblivious to the harm that harsh criticism can inflict on the goals of *chinuch*. As elaborated upon above, when harsh admonition undermines the admonished person's sense of self or his relationship with the admonisher, it defeats the very purpose of the admonition.

Rav Matisyahu Salomon focuses on the language of *chazal* - **כל** (**אדם**) **דן** - "And judge every person (literally: "the whole person") favorably." Looking at the challenging child as a whole person, explains the *mashgiach*, "allows us to view the child in a positive light, by remembering the pure, innocent child he once was and identifying the external factors that have brought him to this state."[39] It is also interesting to note that the obligation to judge favorably is learned from "**בצדק תשפוט**" i.e., the obligation to be just and not from an obligation to do *chesed*.[40]

Avoiding giving guidance

Rabbi Yissocher Frand relates an amazing *chinuch* insight from Rav Motel Katz, late Rosh HaYeshivah in Telshe Yeshiva, regarding the *parsha* of the *meraglim*:

> ñSometimes,ò Rav Motel writes, ñóEducatingô requires ónot educating.ôò Sometimes a parent or teacher must **not** react. Even though the situation really demands that something be said ï sometimes it is counter-productive to react. This idea is really from the Gemara: ñJust as it is a Mitzvah to say something (rebuke) which will be heard and accepted, so too it is a Mitzvah to not say something which will not be heard and acceptedò [Yevamos 65b].
>
> Rav Motel explained that this principle is illustrated in Parshas Shlach. The pasuk [verse] says, ñ*Shlach **lecha***ò ï send out **for yourself** [Bamidbar 13:2]. Rashi explains that Moshe was instructed to send out the spies ñfor your own sakeò. In effect Hashem was telling Moshe, ñI know that no good will come of this. Spies are not necessary; they will ruin things; they really should never be sent outé But if you want to send ï then you go ahead and send them to satisfy your needs.ò
>
> Rav Motel asks, if it was so clear that this was not the way to proceed and that the mission had all the markings of a disaster, then why didnôt Hashem say straight out ñDo not send the spies!ò? Forget the peopleôs clamoring and yelling that they **do** want spies;

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[39] *With Cords of Love*, pp. 240-241.

[40] (**בצדק תשפוט** - **רש"י:** [...])

if it was clear to Hashem that it was a bad idea then He should have forbidden them from sending out spies! He could have told the people, ñSorry. I am Hashem. I know better!ò

The answer, says Rav Motel, is that the people were not on the spiritual level where they were ready to hear that. It would not have helped. Moshe could have given the people that message from Hashem but they were not spiritually sophisticated enough to appreciate the message. They would have countered, ñWhat do you mean that we are not sending spies? Everyone knows that the way to conquer a country is by sending spies and gathering intelligence!ò[41] Under such circumstances, there was no other choice but to let them have their way. Objections would fall on deaf ears.

Anyone who has a child who is older than a toddler and certainly anyone who has adolescents or older children will understand this concept. Often, we as parents know what is good and what is right, but we know that our children will not listen to us. Sometimes, as difficult as this is for a parent, we must simply keep quiet. We can ... suggest ... but in the final analysis, our children have to make the decision themselves. It sometimes just does not help to say anything. This was the situation with the *meraglim*. The órightô thing to do would have been to tell the *Klal Yisroel* óNo Spiesô! But that approach would not have worked.[42]

Rabbi Frand then relates the story that prompted this *vort* from Rav Motel Katz:[43]

The incident that Rav Motel related (in his writings) occurred at the Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland (presumably sometime in the 1950s). The incident, which was an applied example of the above lesson, was as follows: "I was asked by the students of the Yeshiva to permit them to *daven* Ma'ariv early. They requested that the established schedule of

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[41] They are then likely to ascribe other motivations to Moshe's refusal to spend spies. Perhaps he doesn't care if they get killed attempting to conquer *Eretz Yisroel*.

[42] **(רבי חיים מרדכי קטץ):** (**רש"י:** [illegible]

[43] Rabbi Frand writes the following regarding this upcoming story: "Rabbi Abba Spero from Cleveland told me an incident involving Rav Motel Katz. When I told him that I could not believe that the incident occurred, he responded that he had documentary proof of the incident. He sent me a copy of the incident described by Rav Motel himself in his own collected writings. I received permission from the son of Rav Motel, Rav Yakov Velvel Katz, to publicly relate this incident..."

the Yeshiva be changed for the evening... so that they could listen on the radio to the Championship Prize Fight in New York to hear who wins." ... Rav Motel explained: "I knew full well that it was inappropriate to change the time of Ma'ariv and the Yeshiva's schedule for a Heavyweight Prize Fight between people who are trained to hurt and injure one another." But what did this great product of Lithuanian Yeshivas -- this product of Telshe in Europe -- decide to do? What did Rav Motel respond to the request to daven Ma'ariv early so they could listen to the fight on the radio? "I could not stop them and prohibit them from doing this. I knew that this was not the time to say no. Famous and respected people come from all over the country to be present at a Heavyweight Championship Fight, to get ringside seats. A thousand people come from all parts of the country! This prizefight was viewed by the masses as an event of major proportions! It is difficult to forbid it. I could not say no because they would not know where I was coming from and they would not understand my reasoning."

The majority of students in the Telshe yeshiva in the 1940s and 1950s came from public schools. They came to Telshe from small isolated communities. High level Torah study was just beginning to take root in America. They had not achieved the spiritual level whereby they could understand the idea that watching two people hitting each other in a boxing ring is a foolish pastime. To get up in the Yeshiva and castigate such activity as stupidity and nonsense would fall on deaf ears. Rav Motel could not consider what his teachers in Europe would think about changing the time of Ma'ariv to accommodate such an event, because he knew that his students were not at the level of his teachers' students. His students at that time were not ready to fully appreciate priorities based on Torah values.

That is Chinuch: Knowing when to say and when not to say -- knowing one's children and one's students and knowing the time and the mentality prevalent in the era in which one is teaching. That is Chinuch! In the great Yeshiva of Telshe, 'Chinuch' in that situation was to schedule Ma'ariv early so that the students could listen to a prizefight on the radio. I would not have believed this story if I had not seen it written by Rav Motel himself. This is a great tribute to the pedagogic wisdom of Rav Motel Katz, zt"l. It is a tremendous insight into the meaning of being an educator or a father or a Rebbi or a Rosh Yeshiva. Sometimes it is necessary to say "Yes." But sometimes it is just necessary to not say anything at all![44]

Not admonishing can be experienced as neglect

Parents and educators who are sensitive to the damage that admonishment can inflict may be tempted to avoid it altogether ï "to play it safe." This approach, however, causes its own damage. Rabbeinu Bachya emphasizes that children whose parents and teachers never reprimand them are likely to feel that their parents and teachers either don't care about them or gave up hope on them. This is besides depriving them of necessary and helpful guidance. At the same time Rabbeinu Bachya stresses the imperative to admonish with a soft touch. He compares proper admonishment to dripping water - "gentle and soft" - which, over time, can even penetrate

[44] www.torah.org/learning/ravfrand/5761/shlach.html

a stone. So too, small and consistent dosages of softly spoken *tochacha* can penetrate even a "stone heart."[45]

Finding the proper balance

The challenge of finding the proper balance isn't limited to deciding how strongly to admonish, when to admonish and when to look away. It is also a challenge in the broader context of when to discipline and when to be more lenient. Rav Yisroel Salanter illustrated this delicate balance with the following parable: A person is carrying a bird in his hands. If he loosens his hands too much the bird will escape. However, if in his zeal to guard the bird he holds it too tight he will suffocate it.[46]

This balance is especially challenging when dealing with "at risk" children. This issue was recently addressed in a conversation the author of the book *"With Cords of Love:Reaching the Struggling Teen"* cited above and an *Inyan* editor had with Rav Matisyahu Salomon.[47] The author, Rabbi Ezriel Tauber, has been working with teens for many years under the direction of the *Mashgiach*. The following are some excerpts from the conversation that relate to our discussion:

> **Inyan**: The *Mashgiach* makes a very clear point against unbounded permissiveness, but at the same time he says there is a place for looking the other way and not acknowledging or responding to everything that a child might be doing, even if it is against the Torah, *R"L*. It's a very fine line between when there is an obligation to give rebuke and went to look away. A parent must have *seichel* [intelligence] to know when to take which approach.
> **Mashgiach**: If a person doesn't have the *seichel*, then the *Ribono shel Olam* will give him the heart to feel when is the right time for which approach. *Tefillah* in this situation is criticalé
> **Author**: This is a big part of what the *Mashgiach* wants the show. You don't always have to say "yes." If you say "no," but show real love for the child when you do it, it could be even more effective than just giving in...
> **Mashgiach**: ... Even if a child does something he's not supposed to, you don't have to take *nekamah* [revenge]. Even if you have to respond or discipline, make sure the words that you say aren't a way of getting back at the childé It's very important for parents to learn that....

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45 **רבינו בחיי** ([illegible] **חושך שבטו שונא בנו ואוהבו שחרו מוסר"** ... [illegible] **ועם השקידה יעשה רושם בלב הנוכח,** [illegible] **יוכיחנו מעט מעט** [illegible] **כי דבור המוכיח רך** [illegible]

46 **"עצות והדרכות"** [illegible]

47 *Hamodia's Inyan Magazine* "Indestructible Cords." Vol. XIX No. 943, 1/11/17 - pp. 16-23.

Summary

There is a *mitzvah* of *tochacha* and without it we cannot guide our children and students. However, there are forms of *tochacha* that are prohibited, and there are forms that are ineffective. When being *mochiach* one must do so properly. This includes both manner and motivation. One must also bear in mind that losing the relationship through ineffective *tochacha* means losing the very basis of effective *tochacha*.