



YOUR INNER CHILD

PARENTING STARTS, SURPRISINGLY, NOT WITH ONE'S CHILDREN. EVERY ADULT HAS A CHILD WITHIN...

BY TAMAR TABACK

YOUR INNER CHILD IS THE FIRST recipient of your parenting initiatives. Rabbi Volbe, a renowned Torah scholar and an expert in the field of education, put it quite simply. All chinuch (education) begins inside. Our striving to create and actualise ourselves only happens through deft crafting and moulding of our innermost drives and longings. It is impossible to achieve any semblance of greatness

while ignoring our full selves; rather, it is through utilising the full gamut of emotions that we can become the people Hashem wants us to be.

There are a number of instances in the Torah where G-d addresses certain individuals with a doubled name. Avraham, Avraham. Yaakov, Yaakov. Moshe, Moshe. This double usage represents the moment when the potential Avraham and the real Avraham suddenly overlapped, when they

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became their true selves through personal victory. In this vein, each Jew must strive for this parity; he is a shining jewel waiting to be unearthed, if only he self-educates correctly.

How do we self-educate? What (or rather who) is the inner child which on the one hand we so desperately need to know in order to energise our lives, and who on the other hand so desperately needs to be parented, shaped and harnessed? And how do we create a healthy relationship between our adult and child selves that will allow for our full actualisation as our lives unfold?

Your inner child is the part of you that loves to be, and takes great pleasure in just being alive. He needs no specific achievements or recognition from the outside world, for he does not define himself externally, but rather knows himself from the inside. He surprises you with the strength of his feelings, feelings that at times lend a wonderful fullness to your life, but at other times are feelings

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you'd rather not have. In fact, your inner child has experienced everything that you have experienced until this point in your life, remembering all that has transpired not intellectually, but in the very cells of your body. His approach to life is thus experiential, and only he holds the key to your emotions. Since emotions don't know about the past or future, your inner child only cares about the present, and

sometimes doesn't like or understand the choices you make. It takes great skill to explain to him that although it appears that gratification is being postponed, in truth the long-term goals the two of you can attain together will be much greater than whatever short-term pleasure he is relinquishing today.

Your inner child holds unbounded energy for life. He is naturally in a state of joy, freedom and creativity and injects colour to your life in a form so rich your intellect couldn't begin to explain. Only when your inner child is embraced, can you become the joyous person you intrinsically are, and from that place truly begin to perform whatever your life's work may be. As the Torah hints in its paramount instruction for harmonious relationships; “love your fellow as you love yourself”. All relationships, whether it is with your children (or spouse, friend or neighbour), actually begin here. Our relationships with our kids are an expansion of our >

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inner-parenting. As our sages pithily teach us, “The first offspring of the righteous are their own deeds.”

An easy way to visualise your inner parent and child is to understand philosophically where adults and children differ, ie, in what way they enrich each other’s lives. Children bring their parents so much in the way of joy, and parents reciprocate with guidance, direction and love.

A powerful way to grasp the difference between an adult and a child is through a cryptic but well known Torah teaching. The Midrash teaches that a child younger than bar or bat mitzvah only possesses a yetzer hara (evil inclination), and that he receives his yetzer hatov (good inclination) upon reaching Jewish adulthood. This is difficult to understand. How can the Torah consider children who seem to contain so much inherent goodness to be intrinsically evil? The answer is obviously not that they are regarded as evil, but that they simply lack the presence of a developed da’as, (intellect) to temper their fiery emotions and strong physical impulses. While adults are a composite of mind, heart, and body, and are able to apply their sechel to guide and direct their powerful, lower urges, children are totally locked into the moment as if there is no tomorrow. Their parents and mentors become their

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surrogate yetzer tov, giving the children a chance to be free while slowly teaching them how to eventually become the master of their own actualisation.

Put succinctly, our mind is the home of our inner parent, but our hearts and bodies contain our inner children. The mind can’t dictate to the heart, but rather must educate it with its permission, for the heart must lend its vitality to the instructions of the mind and thereby become an equal party.

So, how do you educate your inner child? What are the principals that stand true for all effective chinuch?

Firstly, the child must feel heard. Validate him so that he knows he is loved unconditionally. When he is speaking to you, don’t have predetermined ideas of what he will say, for sometimes the truth can only be arrived at together, and can turn out to be what you don’t expect.

Be a good parent. Honour your word, so he will trust you, and your relation-

ship will grow. Educate him in a way that he will understand you and come on board, by explaining how your choices will be good for him in the long run. Make him feel that he is your priority, because everything you ever achieve will only be with him.

Hold his (figurative) hand, be gentle to him when he is vulnerable, and strong for him when he looks to you for leadership.

When you need to criticise him (constructively, of course), save his face, and acknowledge you understand the circumstances that made him act inappropriately. Reassure him that things can change for the better, because now you have each other (you have learned so much from your experiences and can

thus show him the way). This gives you a way of making sense out of a confusing world, buffering the hostility that is out there.

Look at your children. Where are they prone to struggle more? Is there strain in your relationship with them, and if so, where? Before you begin fixing them, look inside to your own inner child. Sometimes your actual child (or children) can tell you something about him. Work with your inner child first, understanding him, and treating him as a loving parent. This may just automatically change the way you relate to the child (or children) entrusted in your care.

And whether you are nineteen or ninety, remember that life is ultimately a pleasurable and rewarding parenting experience, the pleasure of parenting you. ■

* The principles here apply to students as well.

* All references to the inner child as ‘him’ can be interchanged with ‘her’.

The thrust of this article was shaped by the unique approach to self-development as described in the book series “Inner Torah”, by Rebbitzin Miriam Milhauser Castle.