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Preventing OTD

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Preventing OTD [1]

One of the most painful issues that exist in our times is that of children who “leave the fold”. To our great sorrow, it is not uncommon. Although we cannot cover every possible situation in this chapter, we will try, with the help of Heaven, to reflect into the root of this issue.

Many children grow up with a certain social setting where there are general rules of behavior taught, and sometimes they even get individualized guidance, but when they encounter the tests of life – whether it is of the material world, or of the spiritual world – that is where they begin to fall, and sometimes, it is also where they end.

The root of the problem, in these cases, is that we have not succeeded in building the individual soul of this child.

In order to develop the soul of the child, the parent must have a bond with the child’s soul, and to be attuned to subtle, fine aspects of the child’s soul. The first thing a parent must know [to prevent losing the child from Yiddishkeit] is to learn about the child’s soul, and to do so continually. Understandably, this can only be done after the parent learns about his own soul. Learning about the child’s soul takes several years.

After learning about it – as well as in the midst of learning about it - the parents must learn how to connect to the soul of the child. This is not only done through giving him gifts which express love (which is also very important), but in addition, through recognizing and feeling the subtle threads that run through the child’s soul – to know about his particular nature in general, as well as his more individual aspects.

Besides for intellectually recognizing the child’s nature and attitudes, the parent needs to form a soul connection to the child. Sometimes, the parent must also know how to disconnect from the child, because if there is too much closeness between parent and child and there is never any disconnection, the results are damaging. A parent must feel his child, sense him, and breathe him. If the parent isn’t constantly feeling the child’s soul, he can lose him easily, as the years go on.

In most cases where a young boy or girl has left the fold of Yiddishkeit, it was because the parent and child did not have a deep, soul connection with each other. Many parents do not know how to develop such a bond with their children, and the truth is that it requires much individualized guidance. But one

thing everyone must know is that if the child does not have this soul connection with his parents, or with at least one of them, he is like an orphan in his parents' lifetime.

A soul connection with the child means that the parent can have heart-to-heart conversations with the child, speaking from his own soul to the child's. This does not mean that they have to talk about problems with each other. Instead, they should mainly be having deep reflections about life together, and of how to deal with life. If a child does not have such a relationship with his parent, he will usually not have the inner strength or the mental energy to deal with life and its many difficulties.

There is no need to wait until the problems come in order to deal with the issues. In the approach here, we are not trying to heal the problems – instead, we are laying forth the ideal path to begin with, to enable our child to have a healthy soul, to have the emotional and mental stamina to stay firm and be like a strongly built ship that can ride through the waves of life.

Understandably, this path will not mean guaranteed success. But we must do our part, and in addition, we must pray and cry to G-d about our children, that they should be healthy in their souls, that they be able to rise on the spiritual ladder of growth that ascends to G-d.

Many parents are busy. The father may be studying Torah all day, and the mother is busy with work and with shopping, making sure that the house has all its needs. But they must know, clearly, that it is impossible to raise a child in the right way unless we have constant soul conversations with him; sometimes the conversations can be shorter, and sometimes they are longer, but there must be heart-to-heart conversations.

Each day, a parent must try to sense and feel the child's soul, like when he comes home after his Torah learning session, and to again sense what's going on inside the child as he observes his child in the home. Obviously, this should not be done in a pressurized manner. The point is to create and nurture a soul connection with the child. For this reason, a parent must constantly have conversations with the child throughout the day – conversations that are *meaningful* – and the point is to feel what's going on at the moment in the child's soul.

This does not mean that you should become disturbed by his negative emotions, such as when he is sad or when he's going through a difficulty. Rather, just be attentive to his situation. Sometimes, you should let him deal with the problem on his own, and observe him from the sidelines. You may offer him a small piece of advice, and at other times, you may speak with him quickly about the issue he's going through, without making too much of it. Other times, you can let the problem dissolve with time, and in other instances, you may have a long conversation with him about it. It is impossible to give exact, clear guidelines for this. Each situation should be weighed with wisdom. But the common denominator between all situations is that the parent must have an awareness of most of the child's progress and how the child is handling issues.

If a child feels that his parent does not understand him, if he feels that his parent does not know anything about his soul and his general attitudes, he will not want to include his parents in his life. It is up to the wisdom of the parents to get down to the soul of their child, and to understand the subtleties, of his soul; and to learn how to connect to the child's soul "in the child's language", so that the child will feel that his parent truly understands him and wants the very best for him.

A child who grows up receiving fatherly warmth, and motherly warmth, and who also has a deep, soul connection with his parents, who are there with him throughout his life, and who direct him in how to deal with the various challenges of life – slowly, his soul will become developed, throughout the years. At a certain point, he will be able to reach a level of maturity where he will feel like he has the abilities and energies to deal with most of the challenges of life. He may also reach a deeper level where he

feels like Hashem is escorting him throughout life, and he will not be as dependent on his parents that much, consulting them only every so often.

It is upon us to understand that it is our responsibility to raise a child by building his soul already from a younger age. We need to bring a child to the point where not only is he doing what needs to be done, but that he can also deal with the difficulties of life, and that he can use his power to choose.

Most children who went off the *derech* were usually like their peers when it came to external action, but their souls were not built. When a difficulty came their way, they couldn't handle it, so they threw away their external behavior, and they are left emptied, both on an external level as well as on an internal level.

Parents must train a child already from a young age to be able to deal with small issues, and to teach them to decide on their own. Never should a parent decide for them. Teaching a child to make decisions enables a child to become responsible and to accept his own decisions, and slowly as time goes on, with assistance from Heaven, the child's soul becomes well-built. Initially, the parent needs to help the child decide, but the decision itself should still be allowed to come from the child.

These words are written from within the blood of a pained soul that feels the pain of the souls of Yisrael. May Hashem help that these words should only be of benefit to you. May Hashem merit all of you, without exception, to see a generation come from you that is upright and blessed, to bear children who are people of truth, whose souls have been built within them – along with an external layer to them that is truthful.

[1] (Editor's Note: In relation to this topic, in a segment from a later shiur, entitled *48 Ways_021_Less Talking*, the following was asked to the Rav):

QUESTION: "What do you tell someone who's not interested in growing and improving?"

ANSWER: "This is the question of all questions. I assume that you are not asking about yourself, but about someone in your own household. The only thing you can do is daven and cry to Hashem for that person".

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