

Jonah Organization



Rights or Ills

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The following essay is an excerpted and translated version of a sicha given by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, z"tl, during Purim 5746 (1986).

Note: The religious aspect of this problem was elaborated in a different Sicha.

Developing a Healthy Personality, Through Education

True education is not merely the transmission of facts and the imparting of information. The fundamental role of education, and one of its earliest and most important goals, is to mold a healthy, productive individual and to safeguard a person against his own potential negative tendencies and offensive traits. This is especially true of early childhood education.

On his own, a person is not objective in evaluating his own characteristics. A person's inclination, and his own innate, materialistic nature and self-love, often will "bribe" the individual into a distorted view of his negative traits. Proper education is therefore required to help an individual cultivate and carefully focus his/her introspective analysis.

The earliest narrative related in Scripture tells the story of the "Tree of Knowledge," which was "desirable to the eyes" and, therefore, was also assumed to be "good to eat." (Bereishis 3:6) As a result of the overpowering temptation, G-d's warning was disregarded and death came to mankind. In other words, tempting pleasures can often "blind" one's better judgment.

Solomon, the wisest of men, taught us:

He that spares his rod hates his son: but he that loves him chastises him early.
(Mishle 13:23)

This means that effective education and childhood training must incorporate a strong approach to form the positive personality of the individual, and to rid the child of "unsavory" dispositions. Laxity in this area would represent hatred for our children, and experience has shown that those children who were not properly and strictly brought up, but were raised with a liberal, "free" upbringing, came back to their parents later with serious complaints. Eventually they blame their "rod-sparing" parents and teachers for their personal behavior and unmodified, negative inclinations and traits.

In our era we know this a posteriori -- from our own experience.

This fundamental role of education is not only pertinent in modifying the acquired characteristics and habits which a child picks up by "*nurture*," but also in relation to the inborn predisposition which come to the child by his "*nature*." Here, too, the child must be educated, and his natural conduct must be modified with a strong and positive involvement on the part of the parents and of the educators. For, if they "spare the rod," waiting for the child to mature on his own and *independently* learn to overcome his inclinations, in the interim the child will cause harm to himself and sometimes also to his surroundings. The firm education "rod" is the best favor for the child.

This vital principle of education is *axiomatic*. People are born with *diverse* natures, and education is always necessary to set the person properly on his/her feet. This applies to the training of good traits as well as the modification of bad traits. Good tendencies in children must also be nurtured, directed and cultivated through proper education and training, for if not, the uneducated intellect can run amok and go against its own *good* nature. His actual conduct will not match his good tendencies.

When a child has character traits that are abnormal and undesirable, it is certainly the responsibility of the parents and teachers -- those who love and really care for the child -- to train the child and modify his/her attributes. It is also self-evident that the behavior modification must be followed through, despite the objections and arguments of the child that this trait is: (a) part of his "nature," or (b) that he is willing to suffer the consequences, or (c) that there will be no negative results of his actions. The necessary

forcefulness must obviously be applied to be successful.

All this holds true in the normal course of growing up -- evaluating and distinguishing the good and bad traits, and guiding the growth and maturity of the child.

There are times, however, when a child is born with a genetic deviation or deficiency, for example some emotional or mental disorders which have symptoms such as "tearing out their own hair," "biting nails," "knocking their head against a wall," or some other self-destructive traits.

It goes without saying that one who loves and cares for this child will do all he/she can to correct this aberrant behavior and seek a training plan, a learning module, or an educational framework to cure this deviation. When the child grows up and is cured, he will surely feel a sense of gratitude to the ones who had "not spared the rod" of education and had pulled all the stops to correct his deficiencies.

These universal principles of education as applied to children may also be adapted when we speak of rehabilitating adults. They, too, can be educated to modify their harmful traits and they, too, will be *eternally grateful* for such vitally important *help*.

Every person has the ability to choose "life." For some it is easier and for others it is harder, but without doubt, if one so wills, he can overcome those traits that are offensive or self-destructive.

Educators, therapists, and counselors should keep in mind that the possibility exists to eventually correct the problems, even though the troubled client might vehemently claim (which might actually be quite true) that his deviations are inborn and part of his nature. They can be helped; and experience has shown that in the end they will express their eternal gratitude for the firm direction and support they received from family, counselors and friends.

Maimonides teaches:

Free will is bestowed on every human being. If one desires to turn towards the good way and be righteous he has the power to do so. If one wishes to turn towards the evil way and be wicked, he is at liberty to do so. (Laws of Repentance 5:1)

Consequently this true, free will, described by Maimonides, is decisively all-powerful. Yet, in the laws relating to Moral Disposition and Ethical Conduct, Maimonides admits that:

Every human being is characterized by numerous moral dispositions...exceedingly divergent. One man is choleric, always hot tempered; another sedate, never angry...one is a sensualist whose lusts are never gratified; another is so pure that he does not even long for the few things that our physical nature needs...stingy, generous, cruel, merciful, and so forth. (Laws of Ethical Conduct 1:1)

Maimonides adds:

Of all the various dispositions, some belong to one from the beginning of his existence and correspond to his physical constitution. (Ibid:2)

In other words, some people are *born* with the nature of stinginess etc., and others are born with different natures! Does everyone really have free will to freely choose right from wrong even if it seems to be against his/her nature?! The commentaries on Maimonides explain that Maimonides means to say that although one may truly have an *inclination* and leaning *by his very nature*, and although he may show a propensity for certain conduct, none of these factors can "*force*" him to act in a particular way. He still has an absolutely free will!

The ideal way to control and overcome the offensive predisposition is to be trained, while still a child, by the strong and firm controlling hand of the loving parent and educator. But it is never late for this educational *process to begin*; a human being can always learn, improve and progress.

II

Recognize the Ills and Bring the Cure

At this point let us turn our attention to a phenomenon affecting some of our society, the problem of individuals who express an inclination towards a particular form of physical relationship in which the libidinal gratification is sought with members of one's own gender.

In the democratic society in which we live the question of how to deal with this deviation has been plaguing some citizens as well as some communal or political leaders.

The first criterion that must be invoked in finding a solution to this problem is not to call for an airing of political arguments and then to call for a consensus, but, to evaluate whether this practice is *helpful or destructive*, and to act accordingly, to correct and remedy the negative.

Empirical truth has shown us that this form of abnormal relationships has been totally negative.

1) In a normal relationship the results that follow bring forth children and create a new generation, which goes on to bring future generations, to the end of time. The abnormal trait brings no positive results and no offspring.

2) This trait is self-debilitating, it causes a dissipation of the strength of the individuals involved; it is purely selfish and no one else receives anything from it.

3) Another very important reality; the individuals who practice this form of relationship are filled with the self-abnegating feeling of being strange and queer; they feel that they are doing an abnormal act. Both in the case of men who have these relations, and in the case of women, they know that this tendency is not normal. They look at the world around them and they know that their practice is abnormal.

Except for a very few "orders" where this deviation is practiced, the *whole world conducts* itself in a *normal way*. Besides, both parties involved in this said relationship know that it was only the *normal form of family relationship* that brought them into the world!

4) Also important: Those who feel that this form of conduct is permissible and they continue to practice this deviation, will in the end see that it brings to excessive, abnormal weakness, and to the most horrible diseases and maladies, as we are presently *beginning* to discover.

When one knows the truth, that this trait is destructive, and is honest enough to acknowledge this fact, one will realize that it is no different from a child who is born with the tendency to tear out his hair, or bang his head against the wall. But there is a very tragic difference in that this trait when practiced is very much more devastating because it *destroys*, destroys the body and the soul.

There are those who argue that an act that brings pleasure and gratification is, or even *must* be good. This rationalization is analogical to taking a deathly poison and coating it with sugar. Along comes someone and says, "I see *sugar*, there is no poison in this sugar pill." To prove his words, he tastes it and swears it is sweet! Someone else may come along and say, "I don't care if there is poison in the sugar, so long as I can enjoy the momentary pleasure of the sweetness, albeit in an abnormal fashion, I don't care what the consequences will be!"

Certainly, *they themselves will* eventually very strongly complain against those who misled them, and also against those who saw what was going on and did not do *all* that was possible for them to do, to prevent it from happening.

It makes no real difference what causes an individual to presently choose this form of relationship. Even one who was born with this inclination, and was not educated in his youth to correct it (no matter who is to blame) and is now an adult, must also be motivated to educate him/herself, now; for it is still just as destructive, it is still just as abnormal, etc.

An important point to stress is that there is *no insult intended* and *no derogatory attitude* is suggested; it is a case of *healing* a malady. When a person is ill and someone volunteers to help him get well, there is no

disrespect involved, not at all!

At the same time, we must keep in mind that the vehement and vociferous arguments presented by a patient, that he is really well and that his condition is a healthy instinct -- or as least not destructive, do not change the severity of the "ailment." In fact, this attitude on the part of this individual indicates how serious his malady really is for this person, how deeply it has penetrated into his body and psyche, and how perilous for him it really is. And so, special action must be undertaken to heal the person and save his life. And again, there is no insult at all, no disrespect involved, only a true desire to really help.

If he claims that he was born with this nature, this is indeed all the more reason to reassure him that no disparagement was meant, for it is no different from the case of one who was born with the tendency to bang his head against the wall. Do we shame that unfortunate one?! Nevertheless, everything must be done to remedy the situation.

And dubbing the deviation with some Greek term or, calling it an "alternative lifestyle" will not in the least influence the seriousness of the problem.

The question must be answered: Does this type of relationship contribute to human civilization? Does it, at least, benefit the individual? *Is it truly satisfying* after the act? Or, does it only provide momentary gratification? And furthermore -- this point should be carefully pursued: Are all his/her protestations about the "great pleasure" and "satisfaction" derived from this relationship really true? Or, has he/she just been saying this for so long that now he/she is not willing, or is ashamed, to admit that he/she is wrong!

In G-d's world of goodness and justice, when one comes to purify and be purified, he is assisted from Above. Despite the misguided way of the past, everyone has the capacity to change. People who open their eyes and realize their error, will at the end *voluntarily* accept the truth.

All civilized society accepts the said tendency as a perversion, and although in the past there were pagan tribes and "orders" which included these practices in their idolatrous rituals, history has shown that their memory is lost and their customs have vanished!

A special responsibility lies on the parents, educators and counselors to educate those afflicted with this problem, their duty is not to "spare the rod," and at the same time, to take a *loving*, and *caring* attitude by extending a helping hand.

III

Government Must See the Truth: Not Human "Rights" but Human Ills

Recently, this whole matter has become a cause celebre in our city, and certain well-meaning people have pursued the issue from a misplaced point of view.

A bill was introduced (and passed) to protect the "rights" of people who profess these "deviant lifestyles." This bill of "rights" seems to assume (wrongly) that this particular trait truly represents and reflects the essential *existence* and *real being* of these people. Hence, their "human rights" must be protected! However, even simple human logic, recognizes, that this form of relationship is *abnormal* and should be rectified. This is not a question of "rights" it is a question of *healing ill*s.

It is self-evident that in such a matter we should not hold political debates, but judge the matter on the basis of its impact on the physical, moral and psychological health of individuals and of the society: Is it detrimental or not?!

It is clear that the approach of society and government must be to offer a helping hand to those who are afflicted with this problem, but certainly not to aggravate it.

The key to this issue is: We are not dealing with the inalienable American, or human, right of freedom of choice; we are not dealing with the innate and sacred, democratic right of free will; we are dealing with an issue of *abnormality*. In simple language: a sickness! And just because the patient proclaims that he is normal does not make the malady any less dangerous.

In this case a bill which proclaims that the "rights" of these people must be protected and supported, should be seen for what it really is: It is taking away their right to be really protected (also -- from themselves); it is *depriving* these people of the vitally needed help! In simple physical terms it will bring even more suffering and pain to them, to their loved ones and to all society. Certainly all must be done to assure that this will not occur.

In every society where the norms of justice and righteousness are followed, if someone climbs up on a bridge and intends to commit suicide by jumping into the river, the alarm is sounded and the police, fire fighters, and "negotiation teams" are called in; and they use every means at their disposal to stop the person from killing himself.

As time goes by and the person who threatened suicide calms down, he is very thankful, to say the least, to all those who have taken away his "right" to commit suicide.

This subject is really an elementary one, and all nationalities and peoples can find common ground here, and cooperate to correct the misguided attitude.

The goal is to work for the correction of this bill, and the sooner the *better*.

The truth will prevail and the word of G-d will stand forever.



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