

# Mishpatim

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**C***himuch* is everything. Life is an educated guess, and the more educated you are, the less you have to guess what to do. It is certainly harder to get out of bed in the morning with any kind of bounce in your step if you are uncertain about the meaning of what you plan to do that day. The last thing a person wants to do is get to the end of life and question how they spent it.

The urgency for good *chmich*—education—is made even clearer when you consider what we’re selling: 613 *mitzvos*. We’re basically telling every child that they can either have what is behind Door #1, a secular life that includes limited moral responsibility and a lot of fun and excitement, or what’s behind Door #2, 613 commandments, a Torah education that is never supposed to end, and reward for which will be in a world they can’t yet see.

In the beginning of a *frum* child’s life it is not so hard. The expectations are still relatively few, isolation from the outside world is more controllable, and familial and peer pressure still has impact. But as the child grows up and becomes increasingly more independent and exposed to the outside world, the challenges begin. *Seichel* has still yet to play a central role in their decision-making process, even after becoming a “*Bar Da’as*” at *Bar Mitzvah*.

I go to *shul* very early in the morning, including on *Shabbos*. I often see groups of young men and women who did not make it through. I don’t know at what age they succumbed to the temptations of Door #1, or if anything about Door #2 ever appealed to them. But the choice they have made is clear and set them on a path in the opposite direction of Torah and *mitzvos*.

Tragic? Of course. This world will end one day and be replaced by the next one, the World to Come, in whatever form it takes. Where a person ends up in that world depends entirely upon where they ended up in this world, spiritually speaking. It is an eternal world, which means we’ll have to live with the consequences of our deci-

sions for a very long time. In this temporal world of ours, consequences come and go all the time.

The good news is that our “final resting place” in Eternity will not be the result of only *one* lifetime, but the result of *all* of our lifetimes. As mentioned in last week’s *parsha*, reincarnation is very much a Jewish thing, and the *Zohar* discusses it in detail on this week’s *parsha*. No one is here for the first time and it is more than likely they have been here several times already, which might explain some of that extra fatigue we sometimes feel (not really).

So a person might have been a *tzaddik* a few times already in previous lifetimes, and not being one in their current life doesn’t wipe that away. Besides, for all we know, God set them up to become this way now to complete a *mitzvah* while not very religious because of the additional challenge it creates. When we return, it is usually to fix up sins from previous *gilgulim*, or to perform others that we never fulfilled.

Does knowing this change what a parent feels when they see their child, *God forbid*, turn their back on a life of Torah and *mitzvos*. . . and the World to Come? Not at all. Does it lessen responsibility to make sure our children are getting quality *chinuch*? How can it? As *Rasbi* explains on the first few verses of the *parsha*, we have a separate obligation to provide “good” *chinuch*.

Last *Shabbos* while waiting for members of my *chaburah* to arrive, I read some of Feldheim’s book on the life of the legendary Rabbi Aharon Kotler, *zt”l*. Among the many amazing things I saw and learned, one was about the need for honest communication. But the rabbi’s explanation of honest communication to a *shadchan* was not what I expected.

They were talking about the *shidduch* of a twenty-eight year-old man with a twenty-seven year-old woman. After hearing that the man had rejected the *shidduch*, Rabbi Kotler asked, “How old did you say the woman was?” to which the *shadchan* answered, “Twenty-seven.” The *rav* then said, “But she is not!” “But she is!” the *shadchan* defended. “I know it for a fact!” Rabbi Kotler then explained, “When you tell a twenty-eight year-old man that a woman is twenty-seven years old, he hears thirty years old. You should have told him a younger age. The accuracy of communication also depends upon what the listener hears!”

Likewise, the accuracy of education is not only about the information being taught. It is mostly about, at least in the early years, what is being heard by the student. If love of learning Torah and the *performance* of *mitzvos* doesn’t come over with the message, the children instead hear the opposite. And when that happens, can we really expect them to pass up the very appealing fruit of the “Tree of Knowledge of Good

and Evil” for the hidden fruit of the Tree of Life (Torah)?

This is why the word for education—*chinuch*—is similar to the word *chanukah*—dedication, the root of both being the word *chayn*. Everybody will dedicate themselves to something that inspires them to get out of bed each morning. A child is far less impressed by knowledge than they are by a parent’s or teacher’s passion for a life of Torah and *mitzvos*.

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