

Jewish Family Values Today

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The rejection of patriarchy and the conflict between traditional Jewish values and humanist psychology require a creative reconstruction of Jewish values so they can serve as a clearer guide for family relationships. This article creatively applies Jewish values to the issue of child discipline, about which there is pervasive confusion over what parental authority is legitimate and how to exercise it.

The Challenge of Applying Jewish Values Today

Jewish family education can be most effective if it not only teaches skills for ceremonial occasions, but also teaches *how Jewish values can help families deal with the life issues they face today in America.*¹

How can Jewish educators best apply Jewish values to the problems that parents and youths face today? Educators have two basic resources: our sacred literature and modern psychology. The simplest way to use these two resources would be:

1. Identify the gaps between the traditional statements of Jewish values, on one hand and issues facing families today, on the other;
2. Use modern psychology to fill the gaps.

There are two reasons this simple approach does not work. First, traditional Jewish values and the values of modern 'humanist' psychology are sometimes in conflict on important issues. The two as a result sometimes give conflicting advice. Second, non-Orthodox Jews have by and large rejected *patriarchy*—the principle that the father should rule his wife and family. This change calls for a deep rethinking of how Jewish values apply to human relations.

In this essay I will focus on the issue of child discipline, in particular the discipline of teens. The problem of discipline both reveals the difficulties in combining tradition and modern psychology, and illustrates how Jewish values can indeed enrich and improve the lives of all family members. I will first examine the problems for child discipline posed by 'humanist' psychology and by the rejection of patriarchy. Next I will explain how we can

creatively apply Jewish values to solve these problems, and finally I will describe a step-by-step process for parents and teens to put the values into practice.

The Issue of Child Discipline

Jewish tradition is clear that a prime responsibility of parents is to reprove and correct their children for any moral wrong-doing. First of all we have a general responsibility to reprove wrongdoing: *You shall surely reprove your neighbor.* (Lev. 19:27). The responsibility to reprove and correct children in particular is a central theme of the book of Proverbs: *A wise son—it is through the discipline of his father; A scoffer—he has never heard reproof.* (Prov. 13:1)

In Talmudic times, the sages softened the severity of the Biblical punishments. They effectively defined out of existence the "stubborn and rebellious son" of Deuteronomy, for whom the death penalty was prescribed. And where Proverbs says, *He that spares the rod hates his son* (Prov. 13:24), one Talmudic sage says, *If you strike a child, strike him only with a shoelace* (Bava Batra, 21a.). However, while punishments were softened, the obligation to reprove was just as emphatic: *All love that has no reproof with it is not true love.* (Gen. R. 54:3). Reproving a child is a key part of teaching him or her to be a morally upright person.

If we turn to modern psychology, we find quite a different picture. Thomas Gordon, in his influential *P.E.T.: Parent Effectiveness Training*, regards parents' moral judgments of a child's behavior as an obstacle to good parenting. He is critical of parents with "very strong and rigid notions about how others 'should' behave, what behavior is 'right' and 'wrong'..." (p. 17) Gordon in my view misuses the example of people who wrongly push their own personal preferences upon others under the guise of morality; he takes these as typical in order to cast aspersions on moral judgment generally. He indicates that parents should speak to children only of what is "acceptable" and "unac-

ceptable” to them in their child’s behavior. “Unacceptable” is not a term of moral judgment, but of personal preference; it avoids reference to moral standards applicable to all people, standards such as the Ten Commandments. Gordon’s approach also systematically avoids reproof of children.

Gordon’s “Credo for My Relationships with Youth”, addressed to a youth, sums up his philosophy:

“... *When your behavior interferes with my meeting my own needs, thus causing me to feel unaccepting of you, I will share my problem with you and tell you as openly and honestly as I can exactly how I am feeling, trusting that you respect my needs enough to listen and then try to modify your behavior. At those times when either of us cannot modify his behavior to meet the needs of the other and find that we have a conflict-of-needs in our relationship, let us commit ourselves to resolve each such conflict without ever resorting to the use of either my power or yours to win at the expense of the other losing. ... In this way your needs will be met, but so will mine—no one will lose, both will win.*” (p. 305)

The rule to avoid expressing moral judgment is derived from the outlook of Gordon’s mentor, Carl Rogers. The ‘therapeutic ethic’ of Rogers and other “humanist” psychologists continues to have enormous influence in America. It shares with Judaism a high priority on kindness and compassion in human relations—and this has made it very attractive to Jews. However, other aspects of this ethic are in conflict with Jewish values. Some of the troublesome tenets of the therapeutic ethic, are as follows:

1. **Benign Humanism.** *Humans are basically good.* According to the Talmudic sages people are born with powerful tendencies to both good and bad—*yetzer hara* and *yetzer hatov*. Through study of Torah, as well as good example from and discipline by parents and teachers, youths can learn self-control, and guide their actions predominantly by their good tendencies.

2. **The Wisdom of the Self.** *We have within us a wise ‘true self’ which is a sure guide to good decisions on human relations.* Again, the self is not so simple. Our natural compassion, loving kindness and

desire for justice and truth are good guides to life, our equally natural lust, greed, anger and pride are not. Our knowledge of the consequences of our actions is always partial and fallible, and we should add to our first impressions a careful deliberation of the merits of the options before important decisions.

3. **Rejection of Reason in Personal Life.** The romantic version of belief in wisdom of the self goes together with a suspicion of reason in personal life. The Talmudic version of rationalism—which is different from that of the European Age of Reason—involves a belief in: *scholarly learning* (in Torah) as morally uplifting; *rational argument* as a path to the truth (a process exemplified by the Babylonian Talmud); *deliberation* as important to wise decisions; *self-control* as essential to carrying out the considered decisions.

4. **A top priority on personal autonomy and equality.** Commitments to marriage, family and community, all of which are central in Jewish tradition, involve a compromise in personal autonomy. Some relationships, such as between parents and children are recognized both in Jewish tradition and civil law as unequal, with greater responsibility and authority going to parents.

5. **Avoidance of moral judgment:** *Moral judgment of other people’s beliefs and actions hurts human relationships, and should be avoided.* While Jewish tradition emphasizes the vital importance of understanding all the facts and deliberating carefully before judgment, it nevertheless requires us to make moral judgments. The commandment to rebuke requires that we make moral judgments about other’s actions, as does the injunction to avoid companionship with a bad person (Avot 1:7). The systematic avoidance of judgment is tantamount to moral relativism.

The therapeutic ethic often goes unrecognized as a philosophy of life because those who advocate it strongly urge people to be non-judgmental. Advocating a powerful philosophy of life is not consistent with urging people to be non-judgmental, but just this combination is the hallmark of the therapeutic ethic. This ethic has had a profound affect on many American Jews, parents as well as children. In order to build effective Jewish family

life education, we should recognize the therapeutic ethic for what it is: a powerful philosophy of life, and one not fully consistent with Jewish values.

Problems Posed by the Rejection of Patriarchy

In Jewish education we could resolve the conflict by sticking to traditional Talmudic guidelines, and rejecting modern psychology wherever a conflict arises. The problem with this approach is that Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist Judaism largely or wholly reject the patriarchy that is an important part of the Biblical and Talmudic outlook.

The depth of the challenge posed by rejecting patriarchy is, I feel, not fully recognized, either by Jews or Americans at large. It is true that many issues of religious worship—men and women praying together, women Rabbis—have been addressed. And the Talmudic strictures on women—such as on women owning property—are rejected. However, the effects of the changes on *relationships* has not been addressed.

In the patriarchal system, the wife is supposed to obey the husband, and children obey the parents. In this system the husbands no doubt sometimes made bad decisions that could have been avoided by more collaboration with wives and children. And if the husband suffered from poor judgment or bad character, the wife and children would suffer without much recourse. The patriarchal system contains these evils, but it does make relatively straightforward the decisions involving husband and wife, parents and children. These family roles were largely defined by tradition, including the Talmud and codes, and the power of the husband to decide was sanctioned and backed. While wives and children no doubt often got around the husband and father by various means, their actions were against a background of overt acceptance of his authority.

The abandonment of patriarchy has broadened the responsibility for decisions, and this change has had a two-fold stress on family relationships. The first stress is that people *have to decide on their own roles*. The need for new decisions is most obvious in the case of marriage. The ideal of equality means

that husbands and wives have to decide as a couple how to divide responsibilities and power. Whose career should come first? How should housework be divided? How should child care responsibilities be shared?

Such new decisions about roles are also called for in the parent-child relationship. The duration of children's dependence on their parents has been extended from the mid-teen years—when traditionally girls were married and boys apprenticed in a trade or sent to a yeshiva—to an additional five or more years. These are now important high school and college years during which the child learns knowledge and skills to be a productive adult in today's society. Part of these skills are not academic, but rather skills in taking on and carrying out challenging responsibilities, and in making and carrying out personal decisions. Thus parents today generally feel it is important to the child's life education gradually to give the teen increased responsibility and freedom, as he or she matures. This means parent and teen go through a delicate 'separation waltz'. Ideally, the parents gradually step back, and the teen gradually assumes more responsibility. Often one or both doesn't happen: the teen is irresponsible, the parent is too controlling or too permissive. The result is a prolonged, painful conflict that turns the "hearts of the children" from the parents, the hearts of the parents from the children.

During the teen years, then, there is a continually changing relationship between parents and children, with a change in responsibilities and power. Both parents and children have to continually redefine their relationship. This process is not only inherently difficult, but made more complex by uncertainty over the proper authority of parents. Beginning with the abandonment of arranged marriage, parents have seen their proper role as less controlling of older children, especially. But what authority should they legitimately exert, and where and when should they step back?

The second stress caused by the rejection of patriarchy is the stress of the decision-making process itself. In a sharply unequal relationship, one side—the husband, the parent—can make a decision himself and dictate it to others. More

equal relationships call for more collaboration in making decisions. Collaborative decisions are potentially far better, but *collaboration is often quite difficult emotionally*. When people have a vital personal stake in the outcome, problem-solving discussions can easily decay into quarrels, sullen withdrawals, emotional warfare and even violence.

Increased equality and freedom to fashion our own roles have thus put powerful new challenges to marriage and family life.

Strengthening the Foundations

The new challenges created by the rejection of patriarchy, and the conflicts between “humanist” psychology and Jewish tradition both call for a creative reconstruction of our traditional values so that they give Jewish families firmer and clearer guidance in their relationships.

In good relationships both parties try to *balance* serving their own interest, and serving the other person’s interest. The ideal of balance between the self and others is, I believe, firmly grounded in Jewish tradition. The most notable example is Hillel’s famous three questions:

“If I am not for myself, who is for me?”

“And when I am for myself, what am I?”

“And if not now, when?”

If we take these as rhetorical questions, as is usually done, the first question implies that it is legitimate to seek one’s own happiness and fulfillment. The second, balancing question implies that I should not neglect my obligations to others, as this would make me unworthy. The third question implies that I should not delay action.

Hillel, I believe, also intended his questions for use—questions to be posed and answered each time a person confronts a life decision. When we take the questions this way, we get a fuller appreciation of Hillel’s philosophy. The second question—*When I am for myself, what am I?*²—is particularly interesting: it asks me to examine my *role* in my relationships: “What are my responsibilities to others, and how can I fulfill these while serving myself also?” The first question—*If I am not for myself, who is for me?*—raises a strategic issue: “Who is on my side, who are my allies?” The last question—*If not now, when?*—tells me to

weigh the key strategic issue of timing: “When should I act to be most effective?” Sometimes a person should act immediately, but sometimes waiting and patience is required.

Hillel’s first two questions represent, I believe, a true synthesis of the Biblical and Hellenistic traditions in ethics. Hillel combines the Greek idea (of the Stoics, among others) that the individual pursuit of happiness is a legitimate basis for action, and the Biblical notion of responsibility to the community and to God. Hillel’s approach is distinctive in that it doesn’t completely follow the Greeks—Hillel doesn’t say that if you start with your self-interest and look at the world correctly, you will automatically act uprightly. Instead he says that you should look at both sides, self interest and duty to others, and find a course of action that serves both.

Hillel’s balanced view of human relations is particularly important to reconstructing Jewish values today in America, because in American tradition we have two, conflicting *unbalanced* views of human relations:

1. The Christian tradition, which equates goodness and selfless devotion to others;

2. The “Looking Out for #1” philosophy, or ‘competitive individualism’, which says to concern yourself with advancing your own interests, limited only by non-interference with the rights of others to do the same.

The two conflicting philosophies give contradictory advice on practically every issue involving human relationships, leaving Americans very confused when it comes to sorting out their roles. In other words, parents are unclear about their authority as parents, and children are unclear about what they owe to as parents. Husbands and wives are unclear about how to divide responsibility and authority.

The ideal of balancing self and others is a valuable foundation to a strong set of values, but it is only a beginning. How do we achieve this balance in relationships, and specifically what should be the guidelines in the parent-child relationship?

Justice in Relationships

The fundamental guide to balancing self and others is *justice*. Good relationships are founded on mutual advantage, sustained by justice, and made glorious by love. What is missing in American philosophies of relationships is the second element, justice. The therapeutic ethic, in particular, emphasizes loving kindness, but leaves out justice. It is true, of course, that American values strongly emphasize both social justice and criminal justice. However, the Biblical ideal of ‘*tzedek*’, translated both as “justice” and “righteousness” is broader than this. For example, a person who is ‘*tzedek*’ honors and reveres his mother and father even though these commandments are not fully spelled out in legal terms.

The biblical concept of ‘*tzedek*’ includes what I will call ‘role justice’. In informal relationships, such as the marriage and parent-child relationships, the crucial issue is how responsibilities, power and reward are divided—and not detailed rules about how they are to be carried out. For example, in spelling out what the commandment to revere your mother and father (Lev. 19:3), the Talmud (Kid. 31b) says: “‘Revere’ means that the son is not to stand in his father’s place, nor to sit in his place.” This evocative phrase clearly indicates that the son is to respect his father’s authority over him, but it does not spell out in legal detail the extent of the father’s authority, nor specify a punishment for not being respectful enough. The Talmud (Kid. 29a.) also says that a father has a responsibility to teach his son a trade. Again, there is no detailed law on how to do this, nor penalties associated with the father’s failure to do so.

The strength of informal relationships lies in their very flexibility. In an informal relationship, the freedom to adapt the relationship to individual personalities, differing individual strengths and weaknesses, and changing circumstances, enhances the power of the relationship to serve both parties. Normally civil law, with penalties, enters an informal relationship only when the relationship is broken. The money indicated in the traditional *ketubah*, for example, only becomes operational in the case of divorce. In relationships with children civil law today enters in such potential break-up

cases as when there is a dispute over custody, the child has been abused, or the child has become delinquent and out of control of the parents.

Role justice is, of course, not the only moral ideal in family relationships. Parents’ attitudes to their children should be loving-kindness, *chesed*, and compassion, *rachamim*, just as children’s attitudes are to be honor, *kavod*, and reverence, *irah*, for their parents. The parent-child relationship should, then, be led by positive feelings and actions, while in the case of conflicts interests are balanced by the scale of justice.

Parental Authority

The Talmudic approach to informal, family relationships—specifying guidelines and moral principles—is still viable and desirable today. However, the guidelines themselves need some important changes, because of changes in modern society. These changes concern both what are the most effective child-rearing practices, and what is the fair and just way for parents to treat children, and children to treat parents.

Let us focus on the issue of what is *just* and fair in the parent-child relationship. The key issue here how parents should fairly exercise *parental authority*. Parents feel that some kind of parental authority is legitimate, yet neither they nor their children have a clear model of authority. Instead they have two contradictory models: the traditional, patriarchal model of laying down the law with stern corporal punishment, and the soft, egalitarian model of the ‘humanist’ psychologists.

The most influential child psychologists, namely Thomas Gordon and Rudolph Dreikurs, have advocated systems of discipline based on equal power of parent and child, systems in which parental authority should never be exerted. Their techniques and philosophies have become the basis of the parent education programs, such as S.T.E.P., which are taught by Jewish organizations as well as by schools and many others.

In Gordon’s system, *parental authority* is replaced by *effective communication*. The following series of communication techniques is supposed to solve problems without authority:

1. The parent delivers ‘I’ messages—non-

judgmental statements of the parent's own feelings;

2. The parent does "active listening" to draw out the child's feelings;

3. The parent clarifies who 'owns' a problem—who feels the problem, the parent, the child or both;

4. The parent negotiates a solution acceptable to both.

Dreikurs position is somewhat more complex, as he does advocate a kind of appropriate punishments, which he calls 'natural and logical consequences'. A 'natural consequence' is for example, letting a child who refuses to eat go hungry until the next meal time. A 'logical consequence' is, for example having a toddler who has thrown food help clean it up. In both types of consequences, the punishment teaches socially constructive behavior, and the reason behind it, rather than simply inflicting pain by, for example, spanking. These 'consequences' are to be negotiated in an egalitarian family council. The democratic consensus is thus the authority in the family, so that for Dreikurs *democracy* replaces *parental authority*.

In regards to justice in the family, the upshot of these philosophies is that 'fair equals equal', and thus *it is not legitimate for parents to tell their children what to do*. If the parent simply tells the child what to do, he is being unkind and oppressive, and is sinning against democracy. Whatever the issue, from the child hanging up his coat or to not lying, the parental responsibility is to be such a clever psychologist and negotiator that he can get the child to do what is best without ever telling him to do so.

The egalitarian ideals of these leading child care experts, together with the traditional patriarchal model, have succeeded in thoroughly confusing American parents and children. In giving seminars on the issue of peace in the family, the most striking thing I have seen is a pervasive confusion over what parental authority is legitimate, and how to exercise it. The serious issue is not that parents follow the egalitarian model, which they do not. It is rather that the real nature of the parent-child relationship is fogged over, so that neither the parent nor the child can carry out their real responsibilities as well as they could.

The parent-child relationship is not equal in civil law, in nature or in Jewish law and tradition: parents have a special responsibility to care for and educate their children, and children have a special responsibility to honor and defer to their parents. Until they are enfeebled by age or illness, the children do not have the obligation to care for their parents, nor do parents have the obligation to defer to their children's wishes. The relationship is not equal and symmetrical.

The key issue, then, concerning parental authority is: What is *just* in an *unequal* relationship? One useful standard for judging what is just in an unequal relationship is that the inequalities should be justified by a benefit to the larger society. For example, in the case of employer and employee, society gives the employer the power to hire and fire at will—subject to further agreements with employees and their unions. A boss, of course, cannot be fired by an employee, so that there is a clear inequality of power. Giving employers the authority to hire and fire is supposed to result in greater productivity of business and industry, so that society as a whole benefits. Once this inequality is accepted, what is just in the employee-employer relationship follows from the function of the relationship in society at large and the *roles* of the individuals in carrying out that function. For example, the employee should give an honest day's work, and the employer should pay the worker fully and on time. The employer should also give the worker decent working conditions.

In general, *role justice* in an unequal relationship means a fair division of responsibilities, power, and rewards, with each person fulfilling his responsibilities in his role, and not taking advantage of his position to harm the other person or get a disproportionate portion of rewards.

A second useful principle for determining the scope of a person's legitimate power in a role is that it is unfair to give a person *responsibility* without the *authority* to carry out the responsibility. Thus a person should have the power in a relationship to fulfill his or her responsibility, but that power should be also limited by the needs of the role, as well as by general standards of morality.

The close connection between responsibility and

authority is a key point in understanding what is a legitimate exercise of parental authority. American law holds parents responsible for feeding and clothing children, keeping them from harm, getting them to school and keeping them law-abiding. Jewish law and tradition goes beyond this, saying that parents should teach their sons Torah, correct them when they are morally wrong, and see that their sons learn a profession. In general, and including girls equally, we may say that today Judaism enjoins us to do our best to raise our children to be kind and morally upright adult Jews, capable of earning their own living.

Since both American society and Jewish tradition places heavy responsibilities upon parents, it follows that parents must have the authority to carry out these responsibilities. In particular it gives them the authority to set limits on children's actions, and chastise and punish children, in so far as this is necessary to their health and moral upbringing. And it gives parents authority to send their children to school and enforce study time necessary to their becoming productive citizens.

The proper scope and limits of parental authority depends on what is necessary to rear morally upright and productive adults. For example, a mother who allows a babe-in-arms to strike her in anger without any reprimand and punishment—such as putting the child down on the floor—is failing to teach the child self-restraint, and failing to teach that violence does not succeed. Similarly, a father who does not reprove a child for lying fails to teach him basic morality, and its importance in sustaining trust in a relationship. In these cases, using parental authority is necessary to fulfill the responsibility of a parent. On the other hand, striking a teen-aged child has been shown to be ineffective or harmful; it simply engenders hatred, has no morally corrective effect, and may well make the child worse. Thus here a parent is overstepping the bounds of proper authority. (Mild spanking of toddlers can be defended as effective and not cruel. However, since there are other equally effective punishments, I agree with those psychologists who say that a total avoidance of corporal punishment is the best course of action.)

In sum, parental authority to set and enforce

limits and to require chores and homework time is legitimate, provided it is humane and beneficial to the child.

Encouraging and Disciplining Children

How should parental authority be applied today in a way that is consistent with Jewish values, and is most helpful to children? Let me focus on two key issues in parent-child relations today: how parents should exert their authority, and how to renegotiate the teen-parent relationship during the teen years.

The typical mistake of middle class parents today, in the words of school psychologist Jerome Bruner, is to be “too indulgent and too critical” of their children. Middle class parents are too indulgent in not setting clear limits and enforcing them, in not giving children increasing responsibilities and holding the children to their fulfillment. At the same time they are too critical. When children are go beyond the intuitively felt limits, or disappoint parental expectations in their responsibilities, parents berate and belittle their children for their failures. This kind of criticism angers, discourages, and undermines the self-confidence of the child—and does not correct or improve the child.

The problem, then, is how to give *appropriate* encouragement, and *appropriate* reproof and punishment. The negative side is particularly difficult. According to the Talmud, Rabbi Akiva said “I wonder whether there is anyone in this generation who knows how to give reproof” (Quoted in The Book of Legends, *Sefer Ha-Aggadah*, p. 694-5.)

The key to more appropriate encouragement and reproof is to separate three different types of problem between parent and child: *moral* issues, *relationship* issues, and *development* or learning issues. The accompanying chart on “family problem-solving” separates the three types of problem, and indicates the appropriate approach.

Moral lapses, such as lying or breaking promises, call for reproof, and appropriate punishment, whereas issues of *development*, competence and learning call for the softer approach of the psychologists: asking open-ended questions, ‘active listening’ and so on. Children, even teens do not

have the knowledge and skills of adults, and berating them for their shortcomings just hinders their learning. To use an example from a younger age, to express disappointment over spilt milk is natural, but to harshly condemn it is wrong.

Problem-Solving Discussions

The final type of family problem involves *relationship* issues, such as limits on children set by parents, and the responsibilities of children to the parents. The issues include curfews, housework responsibilities, and so on. On issues involving the parent-child relationship, changes in our society mean that there is a need for fundamental change from the patriarchal model. The traditional, patriarchal view is given in the Talmud, which says that a son should not contradict his father. (Kid. 31b.) Today it is typical that Jewish parents and children hotly debate relationship issues, so that the interaction of parent and child resembles more a Talmudic debate among students, than a student's deference to the words of a Master.

Should children, especially teen-agers, be active participants in renegotiating their relationship with parents? The answer, I believe, is "yes", for two reasons. First, in our society, teens have a much longer period of dependence on their parents: instead of girls being married and boys apprenticed or sent away to study at age 15 or 16, they remain dependent sometimes into twenties. As children mature through the teen years, they normally gain greater experience and ability to judge for themselves. Second, the ability to negotiate changing roles relationships has, as we have seen earlier, become an essential skill in our society. In a modern egalitarian marriage, both the boy and girl will have to define and adjust their roles over time, and will have to negotiate differences over these. Similarly, at work their negotiation with their bosses and subordinates over their work program will also be important. Thus teaching skill in negotiating the terms of relationships is an important part of the child's preparation for modern work and marriage.

How is such negotiation consistent with parental authority, and what is the best way to carry it out? On relationships issues, negotiation should be

the first resort, but if the teenage child is not mature enough to carry through the negotiation, then the parent should use his authority to set limits. (This follows the suggestion of psychologist Don Fleming.) The ultimate responsibility for setting limits and the child's responsibilities remains with the parent, but good problem-solving negotiation will produce superior results for both parent and child, as well as giving invaluable training to the child.

In problems involving relationship issues, there are often moral and developmental issues mixed in. For example, where a child fails to keep a curfew, as well as the issues of what the curfew should be, and who should determine it, there may be a moral issue, such as breaking a promise, and developmental issues, such as knowing how to organize time. and carry out the task well. Homework and house chores are also typical areas where mixed issues are involved. Because they are mixed, it is very important to first listen to the child's account and sort out what is going on before saying anything critical. Once the facts are clear, then the parent can deal with the moral and developmental, and relationship aspects each in its appropriate way.

How should the problem-solving negotiation be carried out? Roger Fisher & William Ury's method of *principle based* negotiation is in beautiful harmony with the traditional Jewish values of justice and compassion in relationships. (See the book *Getting to Yes*.) One of basic ideas of their approach to negotiation is that the best way to have an agreement that both sides can live with, is to the appeal to a principle—such as principles of fairness—to resolve differences over the best solution. If both sides agree on the principle, then neither is imposing on the other. Instead, both are following an agreed-upon standard.

The appeal to principle is particularly important as children mature, because then parents sustain their moral authority after the child has grown out of the natural greater dependence and obedience of small children. In other words, both parents and children are following the ideal of a good family life according to Jewish tradition. Both are being guided by a greater ideal of making the home a

Teen-Parent Problem Solving

Type of Issue: Appropriate Method

Relationship Problem-solving discussion.

Issues: *Parents & teens:* Use a step by step ‘principled’ negotiation process—the ‘*Shalom Bayit Discussion*’. If this fails, parents have the responsibility to decide (Don Fleming). Faultfinding should be postponed as long as possible in the process. It is often avoidable. Any ‘consequences’ such as restitution or punishments should, ideally, be made clear in advance. (Dreikurs) *Note: Some issues of children’s health, safety, and morals are not negotiable.*

Conflicts over roles, parentally set limits, or teen responsibilities

Moral Rebuke.

Issues: *Parents:* If the facts are not clear, clarify them first. If the facts are clear, give reprimand with reference to the ethical principle violated (Leviticus, Proverbs). Explain harm to relationships of unethical action. Request an apology, or initiate negotiation. Apply ‘consequence’ such as teen giving restitution or compensation. Reprimand should be for actions, and not involve attack on character. *Note: In teens, gross violations of ethics indicate other serious problems that parents should identify and address.*

Violation of moral principle or agreement or clearly implied trust, especially where one side is being taken advantage of

Teens: Do not rebuke parent; advise of error with reference to moral principle (Talmud).

Developmental Teach, Learn

Issues: *Teens:* Say the mistake was an honest one, and say you want to learn; ask for help.

Failure to carry through tasks because of unintentional mistakes, failures, problems

Parents: a.) Be silent b.) Act as a sounding board. c.) Offer help, or suggest where to find it. ‘Coach,’ but only if this is welcomed. Do not immediately give advice; solve the problem, or carry out the task for teen. Use ‘active listening’ (Carl Rogers, Thomas Gordon), to help him or her to think through solution, find the better way. On homework issues, involve teachers, school if possible. Negotiate limits on work, play schedule.

mikdash m'at, a miniature sanctuary suffused by the justice, loving kindness and holiness.

To apply Fisher and Ury's method to personal relationships, I have extended it in the following chart on "The Shalom Bayit Discussion". First, I look upon negotiation as one aspect of cooperative problem-solving (as first described by Norman Maier). When two people go through such a process, they often can find a solution that doesn't require the kind of compromise we associate with the word 'negotiation'. Second, Fisher & Ury leave out the step of sorting out responsibilities in roles, which is essential to solving relationship problems. Making this step explicit helps to focus on what are the most important issues.

Conclusion

Jewish tradition values justice and kindness in all relationships, and gives specific responsibilities to parents and children. The responsibilities of parents include disciplining children so that they know right from wrong, teaching them Jewish tradition, and seeing that they learn a vocation. The specific responsibilities of children include honoring and revering their parents. As we have seen, applying these values today to our non-patriarchal society requires us to rethink the roles of parents and children, so that we can determine how parents can, within their new roles, act justly towards their children and children act justly toward their parents.

We have seen that in order to act appropriately parents and children need to distinguish three types of problem: relationship problems, moral problems, and problems of development or learning. For relationship problems, principled negotiation should be the first resort for both teenagers and their parents. If negotiation breaks down, then parents still have the obligation to set limits, and children are still obliged to revere their parents, and obey the limits. For violation of a moral precept, parents should reprove the child privately without attacking their character, and should punish them appropriately. For developmental issues, where children fail to carry through a task properly because of lack of skill or knowledge,

parents should not castigate them, but should gently guide them in the learning process, using techniques such as 'active listening', developed by child psychologists.

How can Jewish educators and social workers teach their students and clients to apply Jewish values in their lives today, and to appreciate the power of these values to make their lives better? The ideas in this essay on how Jewish values apply to contemporary roles of parent and child are a first step.³ However, to be implemented there is a second step of designing effective teaching methods and materials. In the context of religious schools and other educational programs, I have, with the collaboration of Rabbi Mark H. Levine, been developing and piloting a program of seminars to teach parents and teens Jewish family values, and the skill in applying them today. Pedagogically, we have emphasized experiential learning, and have involved both parents and teens in the same program. The purpose of this approach is to begin a process in which both parent and teen have the experience of applying the values to case studies, and then to the actual problems they face. The concepts and skills thus can be implemented reinforced within the family, so that they become a permanent asset, rather than simply an idea the teens have been exposed to. There is obviously also the potential of parent education programs based on the same principles.

In the context of social work and individual therapy, I believe that values can be effectively incorporated into the contemporary *cognitive* approaches to therapy. Such leaders in therapy as Albert Ellis and Aaron T. Beck have emphasized the distorted perceptions of events of individuals under stress—mistakes such as thinking in black and white, over-personalizing and so on. I believe that distortions in moral judgments are amongst the first things to occur, in which people inappropriately or excessively blame others or themselves. These misjudgments can block further problem-solving and effective action, and they can lead to actions which are not kind or just, or are irresponsible. This is obviously a subject in itself, and goes beyond the scope of this paper. The important thing, I believe, is that Jewish social workers and

The Shalom Bayit Discussion

Prayer

May it be your will, O Lord our God, and God of our ancestors, that we have the humility to listen to one another, the lovingkindness to seek mutually helpful solutions, and the sense of justice to make fair compromises. We ask for your blessing upon our home, that it may ever be a refuge of love and of peace. Amen.

1. Start ‘Soft’.

State the problem in a way that invites cooperation.

1. If the other person is upset or busy, set another time to discuss the issue.
2. Begin positively, by saying how you value the other person and the relationship.
3. State the positive situation you want to bring about, and identify what you feel is the main obstacle to be overcome. *Do not* start with blaming or verbally attacking the other person.

Hints: If possible, formulate the issue as a *common* problem that you face together: “We don’t want to quarrel about X in the future...” If it is mainly something you yourself want, say so openly, and ask for help or cooperation. To avoid blame or attack, describe the obstacle objectively. “The phones have been tied up more often recently.” Or use an ‘I message’, describing how you feel, rather than putting your view as a fact. “I am upset when I see ..., because I feel that...”

2. Seek Understanding.

Try to understand the problem, including the other person’s point of view.

1. If you feel you have contributed to the problem, admit it, apologize and offer restitution; if the other party has started harshly, restate the problem in a less judgmental way.
2. Explain your goals and values, including moral values, that are relevant to the situation, and ask for the other person’s goals and values. What common values do we want to live by in this situation? What do I want? What do you want? Do some goals come into conflict with one another?
3. Ask for the other person’s understanding of the obstacles.

Hints: As you discuss, take turns listening to each other’s point of view, and give feedback to show you understand the other person. At this initial stage *do not* yet evaluate what the other person says; only show you understand.

3. Explore Options.

Develop new plans of action, including compromises, and evaluate them.

1. ‘Brainstorm’ at least two new options for solving the problem. Brainstorming means not yet evaluating or criticizing proposed solutions.
2. Renew responsibilities: Who needs to be responsible for what, to succeed in carrying out each option for action?
3. Evaluate and choose: If all good solutions involve compromise, what compromise is fair and just in this relationship? What values and principles apply? Standards and practices that other people follow in this kind of situation? Only in this last step do you argue the merits of the options. Here issues of previous fault may come up, but most often such discussion it is not necessary.

others providing therapy recognize that Jewish values are not the same as the values of 'humanist' therapy, and that Jewish values can help their clients to build better relationships.

In sum, making Jewish values relevant to the decisions people make today is, thus, a vital task that calls for collaborative efforts among Jewish educators and social workers.

¹See *Today's Challenge: Training Family Life Educators*, Rabbis Jacob I. Halpern and Mark H. Levine, in this *Journal*, 70, 1 (Fall 1993), pp 51-6.

²The common translation of the second question as 'if I am only for myself ...' is not accurate, and is misleading. It makes the question merely rhetorical, and lends itself only to the interpretation of a simple call for humility.

³I have been developing and teaching a similar reconstruction for values in marriage and work.