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Angel for Shabbat, Parashat Re'eh

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel

Some years ago, I was walking down the street and saw a teenage boy smoking a cigarette. He looked like a clean-cut young man who should have known that smoking was unhealthy. Usually I would just keep walking and grumble under my breath, but this time I actually stopped the boy. "I know it's none of my business but you shouldn't be smoking. It's a dangerous habit. You think you look cool but when you're fighting cancer 30 years from now do you think any of your classmates will come to visit you or even care if you live or die?"

I expected him to say something nasty or just walk away from me. But instead, he put out the cigarette and said "Thank you for caring. You're right." I complimented him and praised him, and that was the end of the episode.

Offering disciplinary advice, if done properly, is a sign of caring. It is not meant to demean a person but to help him/her live a better life.

This came to mind when I recently read something by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. "Some years ago, while making a television programme about *teshuvah* - repentance - I visited a rehabilitation centre for young addicts. I asked the head of the centre how they gave these young people the strength to change. I will never forget her answer: 'We are probably the first people they have met who care for them unconditionally. And we are the first people in their lives who cared enough to say 'No.' "No" is the hardest word to hear, but it is also often the most important - and the sign that someone cares.**"**

In this week's Parasha, we are told: "You are children of the Lord your God" (Devarim 14:1). The passage reminds us that God is our Parent and wants the best for us. A wise parent guides children on what to do…and what not to do. A loving parent doesn't overly coddle or spoil children but teaches them to do what

is right and avoid what is wrong.

This Parasha is filled with many commandments, positive things to perform and negative things to avoid. Since these commandments derive from the All-Wise Parent, God, they are meant to enhance our lives, strengthen us, allow us to reach our human potentials. The commandments are a sign, in a sense, that God cares!

Too often, people fail at life because no one tells them No. They dress foolishly, act foolishly, eat foolishly, spend foolishly, hate foolishly, waste time foolishly, etc. …and no one corrects them properly. They become steeped in negative patterns and come to resent anyone who criticizes them.

The Torah reminds us: if you live an upright life, you will be blessed. If you choose unwisely, curses inevitably will follow. The commandments are given as a sign of love and caring; they provide a path to a meaningful, constructive and moral life. The “Thou shalt not”s are as important as the “Thou shalt”s. "No" sometimes means "Yes, I care about you."