The Complexity and Feasibility of Fostering Midot and Derekh Erets in our Children

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On more than one occasion, I heard Rav Mordechai Gifter *zt"l* tell the following story.

Rav Eliyahu Eliezer Grodnanski, the son-in-law of Rav Yisroel Salanter engaged his daughter to a young man, Chaim Ozer Grodzensky. Since the Kallah's grandfather, Reb Yisroel, had not traveled to attend the *vort* [a learned speech made by the bridegroom], Rav Eliyahu Eliezer wrote his father-in-law, informing him of his granddaughter's engagement, and enclosed the *divrei Torah* that the *Hattan* [groom] had delivered at the *vort*. Reb Yisroel wrote back, "Mazal Tov. I received your letter, and from the *divrei Torah* that you enclosed I can see that the *Hattan* is indeed a *talmid hakham* [wise scholar]. However the biblical verse says, *"Et biti natati L'**Ish** hazeh...ve'al ha**Ish** lo katavta li meuma!"* ("I gave my daughter to this **man**, but you wrote me nothing about the **man**, i.e. the *mentch*.)[1]

When we speak of the *midot* and *derekh erets* of a person, that is, the character traits of the person as expressed in his or her actual behavior, we speak of the man/*mentch* himself. Thus, when we speak of imbuing children with good *midot*

and *derekh erets*, we are speaking of the creation of the total *mentch* that he or she can become. This quest cannot be accomplished by measures that address only a part of that whole. We must address the whole person.

Over the years, I have heard, read, and participated in many debates on the most important variables are that affect *midot* and *derekh erets*, as well as in attempts to implement programs to instill these qualities in our children. In these conversations, some have argued for our schools to teach *midot* more, that is, to *tell* children what proper moral behavior is. Others have argued that the teaching of *midot* can only come from the home, by example. Some have advocated the intense study of mussar (ethics), while others have created *midot* programs in which children are not merely told what moral behavior is; they are taught about *midot,* in organized lessons, complete with worksheets and homework assignments. Still others have instituted school-based *hessed* programs, with academic credit awarded for the participation in set number of hours of *hessed,* or volunteer community service.

All of these programs base themselves on underlying theories (generally not explicitly articulated) about what it is that will produce good *midot* in our children. Those who believe that good moral and ethical character stems from proper moral *thinking* teach *midot* via the subject matter of halakha and mussar, i.e., learning to think about right and wrong. Those who believe that good moral and ethical character stems from learning how to *behave*properly focus on providing children with good models for behavior and/or with institutionally based rules for behavior with the implementation of consequences and discipline for infractions of the *midot* and *derekh erets* rules. Then there are those who believe that children will learn to do good only by actually doing good; not by learning *about* doing good. They advocate enticing or demanding that children actively engage in *hessed* programs. These approaches address the cognitions, and the behaviors of our children, and to a lesser extent, and only indirectly, their affect.[2] Most educators feel that these programs are ineffective or not effective enough. In a previous article I described some of the failings in our system when it comes to *midot*.[3] Educators and parent advocates of *midot* programs, judging a program to be ineffective or not as effective as they would like it to be, have a tendency to do what seems prudent—abandon what doesn't work and begin something new that may. And so, we hop from one program to another, one effort to another, teaching mussar one year, focusing on disciplining children for infractions of *midot* in another, using a "thinking about *midot* program" the next, and then, finally, calling parents in and laying the responsibility at their feet. Not enough nuanced thought is given to figuring out what about these programs does work,

what should be salvaged, and how the programs should be combined with other approaches.

The field of Psychology suffered from a similar malaise back in the 1960s and 1970s. For every study that showed some variable to have an effect, there was another study showing it to have no effect, or even an opposite effect, until, with a paradigm-changing insight, Urie Bronfenbrenner helped redirect research in the field. Bronfenbrenner compared the growth of the individual and the study of that growth and development to the growth of a plant and the study of that plant's growth and development. We all understand intuitively that it makes little sense to argue about whether it is mainly the quality of the seed, the amount of water, the sunlight available, the air temperature, or the proximity and kind of other plants and animals, that affects a plant's growth. Nor can we say simply that it is the combination of these that determines development, for in reality, the absence of any individual factor or variable can often be compensated by the increase of another. It is the combined interaction of all of these factors that actually determines, or more correctly, influences, the plant's growth and development. Thus, in studying plant life we look at the entire ecological system, and study it as such, as an interconnected and interrelated system of factors and variables that affect each other, and the organisms within it, which in turn affect the system itself. So too, it is futile in children's development to seek *the* cause or determiner of a particular behavior or set of behaviors, and to then construct a program around that factor. Instead, an ecological approach is necessary, a study of the combined effects of many interrelated factors, each contributing to, or distracting from, the healthy development of a particular trait.

Researchers in Psychology who study the development of behavioral characteristics in children are no longer likely to try to isolate any one factor and search for its sole effects on the characteristic of interest. Rather, in the case of negative outcomes such as "juvenile delinquency," they attempt to identify those factors that, when present, are hypothesized to protect a child from becoming a juvenile delinquent, as well as those factors that tend to place a child at risk for developing delinquent behaviors. Then, all of these factors are studied systematically to discover how they interact and affect each other—and most importantly how they affect the outcome, i.e. the development of juvenile delinquency. Similarly, in studying the development of a positive constellation of behaviors, researchers attempt to identify those factors that serve to enhance or facilitate the development of the positive trait, as well as those factors that serve to inhibit or hinder the development of that positive trait, and how all of these factors interact and affect each other.

If we wish to understand the development of *midot* and *derekh erets* we must adopt this approach. We must understand that there is no one method, factor, or place (such as school, home, synagogue, or neighborhood, mussar learning, role models, active *hessed* programs, and so forth) that, can by itself, assure the development of *midot* and *derekh erets* in our children. Nor should we blame and burden any one factor for a child's failure to develop proper *midot* and *derekh erets*. The job is bigger than that. We must become aware of all relevant factors and how they interact—and keep them in mind when we educate our children.

In studying the development of *midot,* I would first identify the relevant *enhancing* factors, factors that make it more likely that good midot will develop in our children. I would then identify the *detracting* factors, that is, factors whose presence makes it less likely that good *midot* will develop. I would then try to become aware of how all of these factors, enhancing and detracting, interact with each other.

Some of the pertinent factors come to us by way of our biology or genetic endowment, and though we cannot change them, awareness can help guide us in our approach to the individual child, enhancing the effect of their positive natural traits and mitigating the effect of their difficult natural traits. Other factors come to us by way of our social environment, our experiences, our role models, our values, and our beliefs.

All of these domains and factors interact with each other constantly and in a dynamic fashion. Thus a positive factor, such as having a good role model, may offset the effect of a negative factor, such as not having been given rules. Or, it may even enhance and multiply the effects of another positive factor. For example having a sense of values will multiply the effect of having developed good habits of behavior that are in synchrony with one's values and allow for their generalization to an increasingly broader range of situations.

In the following pages I will try to elaborate on some of these relevant factors. I will try to make some suggestions about ways parents, teachers, and members of the community at large can enhance the development of *midot* and *derekh erets* in our children. I fully realize that my musings will be seen by some as unrealistic "dreams." However, dream we must. Hazal (*Berakhot* 14a) tell us, "One who goes seven days without a dream, is called bad." The Vilna Gaon understands this "dreaming" to refer to having higher thoughts or aspirations. We must aspire to do better.

Laying the Groundwork: The Social Environment

Three main factors help lay the groundwork for the development of *midot*:

1. **Respecting and valuing others.** One must feel the value of and gain a sense of respect for*all* human beings, including one's self, regardless of race, gender, or religious affiliation**.**

2. **Having role models.** One must have positive role models who embody *midot* and *derekh erets*.

3. **Being affiliated.** One must feel a sense of belonging, at first to a family constellation, and later to a school, synagogue, community, and people—and eventually to the greater community of *humankind*.

Imbuing children with *midot* and *derekh erets* begins at home. The home must set down a foundation and create a framework in which this will happen. The first step in such an endeavor requires creating a home environment that teaches children to value and respect everyone created *beTselem Elokim*—including one's self. This feeling comes to an infant or child who feels valued by and cared for by his or her parents. Such a child gains a sense of self-respect and later on will not want to sully it. Reb Tsadok haKohen of Lublin writes (*Sefer Tsidkat haTsadik* No. 154): "Just like a person needs to believe in Hashem, so too he needs to believe in himself," that is to say, a person should believe in the *kohot haNefesh* (strengths and abilities) granted to him or her by God*.* A person needs to believe that God created him or her with a purpose in mind; that he or she is capable of fulfilling that purpose and should not squander those *kohot haNefesh*. As the Meiri writes in *Pirkei Avot* (Perek 5, Mishna 1), "A person's humility should not reach so low a level that his humility brings him not to be concerned with himself when he behaves in a lowly manner and with disgusting character."

From this sense of self-respect follows a respect for all human beings, all of whom were created by God with a purpose and were endowed by God with the requisite *kohot haNefesh* to fulfill their particular task and purpose on this world. Hazal (*Mishna Sanhedrin* 37a, and *Baraita*, ibid. 38a) tell us that Adam was created alone in order that later generations not be able to tell each other "*My father was of a more elevated status than yours.*" It is only when *we*, the parents, truly believe, in the deepest recesses of our hearts, in the inherent value of all human beings and in their right to basic respect, that we can hope to instill true *midot* in our children. This attitude and belief comes to children, with their proverbial

“mother’s milk,” through their experiences at home in their most formative years. To use the language of developmental psychologists, early experiences equip children with “Internal Models of Experience,” sets of lenses that will color how they will look at human beings—and how they interpret their actions, strengths, and shortcomings. It is these early experiences that will determine whether they live up to the value expressed in the *tefilah* of the Rebbe Elimelech of Lizensk *zt”l*, “*May it be your will that we see that which is elevated in our friends rather than their shortcomings*.” The first step in imbuing our children with *midot*, then, is the creation of an atmosphere of respect, a respect for all human beings, for proper, polite, and caring behavior—and a disrespect and even disgust with coarse and uncouth behavior.

The above happens only through parents who serve as role models and instructors for the aforementioned attitudes, and the behaviors to other human beings that naturally result from them. Values and attitudes are fed to children in their earliest years not by preaching, but rather, by the words and deeds of their parents: by how the parents treat each other; by how they treat the *meshulah* at the door, and by how they treat the cleaning help in their homes. As Hazal tell us (*Succah* 56b), “The speech of a child heard in the street is either his mother’s or his father’s.”

Parents also instruct by their responses to the suffering of others, by the stories they tell their children, and by the books they encourage their children to read. When I was about fifteen years old, my mother, a Holocaust survivor, handed me Alan Paton’s *Cry the Beloved Country*, a novel about apartheid in South Africa saying, “Read this, you’ll learn. Not only Jews suffered.”

Along with the sense of respect for human beings, one of the most basic and important things that children get from their parents is the sense of belonging, the feeling of being affiliated with a group, such as the family unit, and valued by it. This is an extremely important component of moral behavior. Belonging is a basic human need,[4] and it underlies our feelings for others, our motivation to maintain ties, and our sense of guilt when we fail to live up to the moral norms and expectations of the group.[5] The family is the first unit or group to which an individual belongs. From a child’s experience in the family unit and from his or her attachment to it, the child develops his or her internal model of belonging to other broader groups, those of the school, the synagogue, the community, K’lal Yisrael, and eventually, to the community of humankind.[6]

Children will learn good *midot* from their parents, but these attitudes need strengthening. This needs to happen in school. Rabbeim and teachers, in action

and in deed, serve as role models for respecting others or for denigrating them. When they teach pride in Torah values by pointing to the beauty of Torah, they raise their children to loftier heights. However, when they try to instill pride in our heritage primarily by denigrating all others, they lower their student's sights. When they treat all children with care and with respect for their persons, regardless of family background, of physical appearance, and of ability level, they instill in their students a sense of respect for others. When they create favorites, inadvertently or by design, or encourage the creation of cliques that define themselves to a great degree by the exclusion of others, they destroy their students' respect for others. Teachers always need to be careful in how they speak to and about others, even about those whose actions need to be criticized and denigrated. The Hazon Ish (*Sefer Emunah U'bitahon, Perek* 4, No. 16) writes that when a rebbe admonishes a student using harsh and coarse language—whatever benefit this may seem to have on the student's hesitance to repeat his transgression in the future—the immediate negative result is that the student learns to use coarse language, as he will mimic his rebbe. The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rebbe Yosef Yitzhak Schneerson *zt"l (Kuntrus haHinukh veHahadrakha)* writes similarly, that a "rebbe or madrikh (counselor) who speaks about one of the greater human defects and refers to them with contemptuous labels—which are actually truly fitting for them"—will nevertheless find that the benefits of his intended message are outweighed by the loss of a student seeing his teacher using coarse language.

It is not sufficient to tell children a story about how Reb Yaakov Kaminetzky *zt"l* stopped a conversation to stand and watch with silent respect until a non-Jewish funeral passed, because, as he explained to his companion, "He, too, was created *beTselem Elokim*." It is not enough to tell stories. We must *emulate* the actions of the heroes of those stories. At the very least, we should be careful not to destroy the message of a story by the way we actually speak to or about others, or by how we treat them. When children observe that the *kavod* due to the *tselem Elokim* that God endowed people with can be abrogated by mere mortals when they so choose, they will conclude that they too can choose when to grant someone the *kavod* that comes with *tselem Elokim* and when to refuse a person that *kavod*. Much depends on what they see us do.

[H1] Engaging Affect and Emotions

The following are three vital points in engaging the emotions of children:

- **Empathy and sympathy.** One must develop an understanding for the life condition and pain of other human beings.

- **Intuition.** One needs to develop intuitive reactions, positive and negative, to proper and improper *midot*, up to and including a sense of disgust for insensitive, rude, crude, and cruel behaviors.

- **Sensitivity**. One should develop the ability to anticipate how a person may feel in a given situation, and how one's actions may be interpreted (or misinterpreted) by another person. One needs to learn how to adjust one's actions to head off any discomfort to others.

For *midot* and *derekh erets* to endure over a lifetime, across a wide and varied array of situations, they must be understood intellectually, and therefore taught and discussed. However, at a more basic level, our children need to *feel* them; they must engage them emotionally. A very basic ingredient in the development of *midot* and *derekh erets* is developing one's feelings—especially one's feelings for others. It requires learning to empathize with others, to feel their need, their pain. At the most primitive level, this is limited to feeling immediate pain, as in feeling the pain of someone we have just seen bang his finger with a hammer. Later, we develop our ability to understand and feel another person's less visible hurts, such as hunger or embarrassment. Eventually we graduate to understanding another's total life condition. We come to empathize with how a poor person feels when he cannot feed his family, or how one feels when he is different from the majority in his group, be it by dint of ethnic background, of socio-economic level, of being a newcomer or stranger, or by dint of one's appearance, if it is perceived somehow as "different." Parents can elicit these feelings from their children as natural opportunities arise. A parent can talk to a child about how he or she thinks a playmate felt when she hurt herself on the playground, or when she was not invited to a birthday party. Or, a parent can read stories to his or her child about people and their difficulties and invite the child to imagine and discuss the feelings of the people in the stories. These feelings need to be awakened in children to the extent possible at home, and then strengthened through the wider educational opportunities available through the school curriculum.[7] Our learning should address emotion. In literature, in history, and in many other areas, children would gain from discussions of the feelings of the people involved. We teach Humash, which is replete with feelings and complex and difficult interpersonal relationships. But, I'm afraid that in many

of our schools we focus on the facts and avoid discussion of the emotions involved. Perhaps daunted and awed by the task of explaining the emotions of the Patriarchs, Matriarchs, and other biblical figures to the young children learning Humash, we avoid it completely, a loss to our children and to their understanding of emotions and of *midot.*Taking children to visit the elderly who live alone or in nursing homes, having children involved in bringing them gifts or, more importantly their company, goes a long way in bringing a smile to the face of the lonely, and a sense of joy to children as they learn how much they can do for others. Such experiences begun at home and expanded on in school create indelible “memories” in children. In the future, situations even vaguely reminiscent of the feelings aroused by these early experiences will serve as markers to awaken their feelings as well as the appropriate called-for responses. These early experiences equip our children with a moral intuition, a set of internalized feelings and gut reactions to situations and behaviors,[8] something I call the “yuck factor” or the “yummy factor,” as the case may be.

Research suggests that many—perhaps most—of our moral judgments are based not on logic, but rather on intuitive reactions. We recoil emotionally from that which our early experiences have taught us to be “yucky” and we are attracted emotionally to that which our early experiences have taught us to be “yummy.” Thus, for example, a person who is the product of an Orthodox Jewish upbringing will recoil at the thought of eating a cold piece of meat on a plate that had pork on it ten years ago (even though it would be halakhically permissible). Similarly, he will pull back in fright from just touching something *muktsa* on Shabbat (even though the prohibition is in moving the object rather than touching it). These intuitive reactions were embedded in the child through early experiences with the concepts of pork and of *muktsa*. He learned that they were “yucky” and recoiled from them. Unfortunately, the upbringing most children receive makes it less likely that they will recoil in the same way from instances of hurting another person, from *lashon haRa*, from *hutspa*, and the like. And herein lies one of the failures of our ability to transmit *midot* and *derekh erets* to our young. This needs to be changed. It will change only through the conscious planning of experiences for young children that will implant negative feelings for behaviors that exemplify bad *midot* and positive feelings for behaviors that exemplify good *midot*. Our children need to have experiences in which they come to feel and empathize with the pain of others, to have experiences in which they see their parents reacting with as much horror to their hurting another child’s feelings as they would to their turning on a light on Shabbat.[9]

Children who learn to empathize with others and gain a moral intuition also develop sensitivity to how others feel or may come to feel in given situations. This sensitivity eventually enables them to monitor their own behavior and its effect on others, to anticipate how others may interpret their behavior, and to adjust their behavior to preclude any misinterpretation and/or resultant hurt. This is a sign of an accomplished *ba'al midot*, one who contemplates one's behavior with care always taken to avoid offending others, even inadvertently.

[H1] Teaching and Learning

The following are issues that are central to teaching and learning *midot* and *derekh erets*:

- **Beliefs.** One must have a belief system that proscribes negative behaviors, and wish to remain consistent with that belief system.

- **Values.** One should strive to gain knowledge and understanding of ethical and moral values (through mussar and other sources).

- **Rules.** One must have a knowledge and understanding of ethical and moral rules (such as halakha) and of societal or institutional rules governing proper behavior.

- **Connections.** One should connect one's behavior back to one's learning and one's values.

Although early experiences and the actions of role models are important in instilling in children a feeling for morality, they cannot suffice. We cannot allow children to grow up relying only on feelings and on intuitive instincts acquired at an early age by which to judge moral situations. Many situations require reasoned and nuanced judgments of right and wrong. Intuitive reactions to such nuanced situations will just not do.[10] Thus, our children must learn to reason intellectually about morality. They must be equipped with an understanding of the beliefs and values upon which our moral principles rest and the mitzvoth of Torah that follow from these beliefs and values and ultimately govern our behaviors.

In *Parashat Ki Tavo*, every Jewish farmer is commanded to bring his first fruits to the *Bet haMikdash* and to make a confessional declaration (*viduy*). Among other statements, the farmer is commanded to declare:

"*I have eliminated the holy things from the house, and I have also given it to the Levite, to the convert, to the orphan, and to the widow, according to the entire commandment that you commanded me; I have not transgressed any of Your commandments****, and I have not forgotten."*** (Deut. 26:13)

On the last words, "and I have not forgotten," Hazal remark, (cited by Rashi), "I did not forget to bless you …when separating the tithes." To explain the deeper meaning of this addition of Hazal, the Sefat Emet (*Parashat Devarim*) remarks:

And I have not forgotten: This means that I did not forget while doing the mitzvah by turning it into a perfunctory habitual act. ***For there are those who do a mitzvah and forget and do not know what they are doing.***

Unfortunately, human nature being what it is, it is quite possible to perform the most noble tasks in a perfunctory manner and to forget why we do them. It seems to me to be no coincidence that the Torah teaches us this lesson of not forgetting about the hallowed and holy nature of the mitzvoth we do, specifically as it speaks of giving "to the Levite, to the convert, to the orphan, and to the widow*."* It is precisely in performing these acts that we may be most prone to forget the *kedusha*, or holiness, involved in them, and come to view them as mundane and even discretionary. Therefore, it is here that Torah tells us not to forget the holiness of these acts.

A vital aspect of any *midot* program is to teach our children that *mitzvot bein adam leHaveiro*—commandments governing our dealings with other human beings are God's commandments no less than *mitzvot bein adam laMakom* —commandments governing our relationship with God. Children need to hear this from their parents at home, from the teachers and rabbeim in school, and from their synagogue rabbis. They need not only to hear this, they need to see the rules governing "mitzvoth between human beings" taught, modeled, adhered to, and in the case of transgressions in these areas, reacted to as intensely as to their transgressions in "mitzvoth between humans and God." To do this properly, it is important to teach the underlying values of these mitzvoth and how these values emanate from God's word.[11] With further growth, the child in yeshiva will learn the intricacies of these mizvoth. In learning Gemara, *Shulhan Arukh*, and works of mussar, our children will learn how far-reaching and how complex these mitzvoth and their ramifications are, and how seriously they are meant. This, in context with everything else I am outlining here will give our youth a deeply sophisticated appreciation and loyalty to the *mitzvot bein adam leHaveiro.*

But our students need to learn the *mitzvot bein adam leHaveiro* for more down-to-earth, practical reasons as well. As in other areas of Torah, children need to know what Torah requires of them in these areas. There are many halakhot to learn. To pick just one off-the-beaten-path area, there are halakhot governing how one should behave when eating with others. For example, “One may not look into the face of one who is eating or at his portion, so as not to embarrass him” (*Shulhan Arukh Orah Hayyim* 70, 4). Or, “One should not bite into a piece of bread and place it on the table [for it may disgust others at the table” (Ibid., No. 10, and *Be’er Heitev* there). If we are to fulfill the halakhot we must learn them.

[H1] Focus on Behavior

To guide behavior, we must consider at the following:

- **Habits.** We need to develop habits for proper, civilized behavior, for good *midot* and *derekh erets*.
- **Controls.** We should institute a high level of controls at home and in school against behavior lacking in *midot* and *derekh erets*.
- **Self-control:** We aim to develop of the capacity for self-control**.**

To train and guide our children in the ways of *mitzvot bein adam leHaveiro*, of *derekh erets* and *midot,* it is important to create and institute some rules in the home and in our schools to safeguard and to promote these ways. Thus, in the home, basic (even if seemingly old-fashioned) rules of respectful behavior toward one’s elders should be stated and adhered to. This might entail having even the youngest child get used to waiting his or her turn in getting *kiddush* wine or *hallah* at the Shabbat table. The youngster will at first naturally protest, but if calmed by his mother and told “soon, soon, everybody in turn,” he or she will get used to it, accept it, and eventually even understand it. The child will thus learn a lesson in *derekh erets* for those older than him or herself. More importantly, the child will learn a lesson in self-control and delayed gratification, probably one of the most important prerequisites for moral behavior.[12] Rules in the house about avoiding fights, about sharing, about helping out with the housekeeping are more than important, they are essential. Parents should demonstrate polite behavior, explain the rationale for such behavior, and tell their children that they expect them to emulate such behavior. Thus, they should learn to hold doors open for others, not to push or cut in front of others in a line, to give their seats up to

those older than them or to people with disabilities, and to rise in respect of their teachers, rabbis, other dignitaries, or the aged. Children need to learn through doing, to show respect to others, that they may not abuse others, that they are not entitled to everything they receive. Instead, they should feel thankful for what they receive. They need to appreciate that others (including their mothers) are not there to serve them, and that they should not expect others to clean up after them.[13] These lessons need to be taught gradually and at age-appropriate levels, but they should not be delayed or forgotten.

Additionally, families must deal with this subset of behaviors and with infractions in these areas as they would with any behavior: with expressed approval and positive reinforcement for adherence to these rules. And, for infractions, families must react with understanding, with explanations for why what the child did was wrong, with guidance as to how the child might correct that wrong, and with negative consequences, if necessary.

Schools also need to foster polite and kind behavior in their students toward their elders and their peers. Schools should be watchful for the negative effects of bullying and cliques. A school that is oblivious to such phenomena creates much immediate damage to the victims of such exclusion and discrimination—but also much long-term damage to the perpetrators of bullying and excluding others. These students will grow up with a lack of *midot* and *derekh erets*, sorry human beings with only a shell of their Jewishness connected to the Torah they are learning. Schools have even broader reasons for smothering negative behavior. Schools are communities. They develop cultures. When a culture of aggression, of cliquishness and of exclusion is permitted to develop in one generation of a school's students, it tends to be transmitted to the next generation of incoming students and becomes harder to eradicate with each incoming freshman class that is welcomed by a negative culture. It is the responsibility of the school administration and its faculty to create a welcoming *midot*-friendly culture. This they can do by their example, but also by how they react or fail to react to infractions of *midot* and *derekh erets*. If they react with greater strength to an infraction of a school rule than they do to a child being taunted by another they are sending a clear and potent negative message. If a school is to foster a culture of *midot* and *derekh erets* it must institute and implement clear guidelines for positive behavior and clear controls against negative behavior. These will set the tone. The controls instituted by the school for proper behavior, if properly taught, and fairly and consistently implemented, will eventually be adopted by their students and become the bedrock of their self-control in these areas.

[H1] Naturally Endowed Traits: Temperament and Intelligence

Parents and teachers need to be aware of individual differences among children and take these differences into account. Children with difficult temperaments may have greater difficulties with self-control and with delayed gratification. However, they can learn with greater consistency, with more patience, and with greater degrees of understanding. We dare not declare them to be incorrigible just because they require more from us. Children with difficult temperaments or different learning abilities may need more patience and more explanation, but in the end, they can understand.

Hazal in the Mekhilta (*Shemot* 19:3) tell us that Moshe Rabbeinu was told to convey the commandments to the Israelite women with an *amira raka,* a "soft tone" (in contrast to the harsher tone that was to be used with the men). This "soft tone" did not however turn the commandments into suggestions or requests. The fact that women are obligated in mitzvot and are subject to the same strictures and punishments for transgressing them as men are, demonstrates that they are still commandments. What then does a "soft tone" mean? The Malbim (*Vayikra* 1:3) explains that a "soft tone" means speaking with more elaboration and explanation. Some of our children require this. All are entitled to it. But again, with all of them, our rules for proper behavior must remain just that, firm rules.

[H1] Summary and Conclusion

Children need to be brought up at home in a cradle of respect and value for the *tselem Elokim* in all human beings. They need to be surrounded by positive role models and provided with experiences in which to learn empathy and develop sensitivity to other people's feelings. Subsequently, in school, and continually at home, they need to be taught to understand, love, respect, and follow God's law, both where it governs mitzvoth between humans and God and where it governs interactions between human beings. Such children will develop *midot* and *derekh erets*. A lesser program might seem easier, but it will hardly do the job.