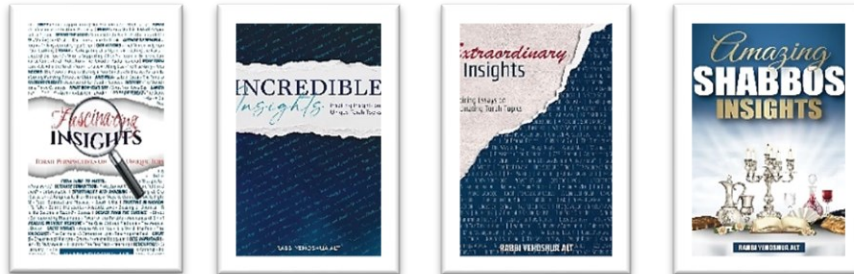


Fascinating INSIGHTS

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Unfolding Uniqueness

There are those who say that the development of the child/student is stunted because he is trained to follow a path just like everyone else rather than to develop his own individuality.¹ One may even do this with his own children in that they want their children to be a certain way.

However, if we want a child/student to fulfill their maximum potential we need to let them develop with their capabilities and the way Hashem made them.² We need to follow Shlomo Hamelech's advice, הנהג לנער על פי דרכו, train the youth according to his way.³ This follows the expression, "Kids are not meant to be molded, they are meant to be unfolded." Many gedolim are the outcome of such education. Indeed, Moshe davened that the leader that should be appointed is one who can tolerate each one לפי דעתו, according to his personality.⁴



Rabbi Raphael and Gella Hirsch, parents of Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch

Now, listen to these astounding words of R' Shmshon Rafael Hirsch:⁵ "The sharp contrast between Yaakov and Esav was caused not only by their natural tendencies but also by mistakes in their upbringing.⁶ While they were little, no one paid attention to the differences in their natures; they were given the same upbringing and same education. The cardinal principle of education of הנהג לנער על פי דרכו, train the youth according to his way, was overlooked. Each child should be guided in accordance with the path intended especially for him, the path that suits the qualities and tendencies latent in the depths of his personality, and thus he should be educated, both as a

¹ See Devarim 6:5, Rashi.

² A sign read, "Hashem gave you a fingerprint that no one else has, so you can leave an imprint that no one else can."

³ Mishlei 22:6.

⁴ Bamidbar 27:16. There is an expression, "Everybody is a genius, but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid."

⁵ In his commentary to Breishis 25:27.

⁶ See Breishis Rabba 63:10.

man and as a Jew. To attempt to educate a Yaakov and an Esav together in the same classroom, in the same routines and in the same manner, to raise both of them for a life of study and contemplation, will inevitably mean to ruin one of the two. A Yaakov will draw from the well of wisdom with ever-increasing interest and desire, while an Esav will hardly be able to wait for the day when he can throw away the old books and, together with them, a great life-mission, of which he was taught in a one-sided manner, totally unappealing to his nature. Had this been done and Esav educated differently, world history would look different! Esav was an expert hunter; he knew the art of self-control: set a trap and then wait patiently for the opportune moment. His upbringing, which was so contrary to his nature, only repressed his true self and forced him to develop patience, the ability to wait for the opportune moment. These were skills that made him an אִישׁ שדה, a man of the field. Precisely because he had been forced to remain glued to the school bench, he now rejected everything and was entirely a man of the field.”

R' Yitzchak Hutner wouldn't speak to two boys at the same time because what he wants to say to one, he doesn't want to say to the other. He said that his job is to connect to each individual and see how each one works. A person can't speak to two worlds at the same time. No person is like another. This idea is hinted at by the fact that initially only one man was created.⁷



A family that embodied the חנוך לנער על פי דרכו approach had each of their children choose a different path in the Torah world. One became a Chabad chassid while another remained Litvish. Another became a Stolliner Chassid and is a Rosh Kollel of a Stolliner Kollel while a different one received semicha from R' Pam and became a principal of a Yeshiva.

R' Yaakov Kamenetzky was once asked by his grandson, R' Yitzchak Shurin, what he should keep in mind when starting a Yeshiva. He answered, “Don't make Sodom beds.” R' Yaakov explained a Sodom bed refers to the cruel practice of demanding that everyone be of uniform size and cutting off legs or stretching the individual who didn't conform to the one accepted height.



Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky zatzal with Yb"l Rav Shmuel Kamenetzky shlitza

Just as we can't expect everyone to be a lawyer because not everybody is cut out for it, so too, we can't expect everyone to follow the same path in spirituality. There is a saying, “You were born an original. Don't die as a copy.”

The pasuk states⁸ ולמען תספר באזני בנך, so that you may relate in the ears of your son. The word בנך is singular indicating that we need to speak to each child as an individual, the way they are. This is why it says והגדת לבנך in the singular.⁹

This is analogous to a puzzle of many pieces. No two pieces are alike and go in the same place.

The Alter of Kelm never had more than 30 students in his Yeshiva as he would say he raises shepherds not sheep. Each of the Avos became who they were because they each expressed a different trait, Avraham with Chesed, Yitzchak with Din and Yaakov with Emes.¹⁰

The root of this is because each of us is a letter in the Sefer Torah as there are 600,000 letters and 600,000 root Neshamos. Just as each letter is placed differently in the Torah so too is each person with his qualities, talents and capabilities. We, therefore, each have that which is unique to us and need to be educated accordingly.

Unconditional Honor

The Meshech Chochma¹¹ tells us that even if our father or mother abandoned us and didn't raise us, we must still honor them. Honoring parents was commanded in the desert, where we received the מן from heaven, water from the well, meat from the שליו, and also had our clothing pressed by the ענני כבוד, clouds of glory.¹² So even if our parents weren't involved with us, we still must honor them. Similarly, even if our parents didn't teach us the proper path, we must still honor them, since when this mitzva was given, the people heard it from Hashem and didn't need direction from their parents... So honoring our parents is not contingent on them doing anything for us.

In explaining why the reward for honoring parents is אריכות ימים, lengthened days,¹³ R' Bachaye¹⁴ writes from R' Saadya Gaon that this is because at times children take care of their parents when they are older, and it can be a burden on the children. One shouldn't feel that it is so time-consuming because he gets this time back due to אריכות ימים.

A hint to this is found by Esav—the one who excelled in honoring his parents,¹⁵ ויבא לאביו, Esav brought delicacies to his father,¹⁶ is a palindrome, since when read backwards it also spells ויבא לאביו. What you give in honoring parents, you get back.

Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R' Mordechai Friedlander ztz"l for close to five years. He received semicha from R' Zalman Nechemia Goldberg ztz"l. Rabbi Alt has written on numerous topics for various websites and publications and is the author of four books including the recently released Amazing Shabbos Insights. His writings, some of which have been translated into Yiddish, Hebrew, German and French, inspire people across the spectrum of Jewish observance to live with the vibrancy and beauty of Torah. He lives with his wife and family in Kiryat Yearim (where the Aron was for 20 years [Shmuel 1, 27:1]) where he studies, writes and teaches. The author is passionate about teaching Jews of all levels of observance.

⁷ See Sanhedrin 37a.

⁸ Shemos 10:2.

⁹ Similarly, in the Haggada we say ... ואחד תם ואחד because we need to view each one as an individual (really it could have just written the four sons without the word אחד).

¹⁰ Incidentally, this is hinted at in אחד as it forms an acronym of אמת, חסד, אהבה — the traits of the Avos.

¹¹ Devarim 5:16.

¹² Devarim 8:4, Rashi.

¹³ Parenthetically, it has been asked that the real measure for measure for honoring parents is that one should receive honor, since he gave honor. Why is the reward אריכות ימים? Through one getting אריכות ימים, he

becomes old, and it says שיבה תקום, in the presence of an old person shall you rise (Vayikra 19:32). Accordingly, in the end, he really does get honor.

¹⁴ To Shemos 20:12.

¹⁵ See Breishis Rabba 65:16 and Devarim Rabba 1:15. R' Chaim Kanievsky was asked about not having a haskama (letter of approbation) on his sefarim from his father-in-law, R' Elyashiv. He replied that once he did get a haskama from him for his sefarim but he didn't get one from his father, the Steipler. Since he felt it may be a slight in his kibud av, he didn't print the haskama from R' Elyashiv (Divrei Siach, p. 9).

¹⁶ Breishis 27:31.