

# The Next FRONTIER

## Arming our Children for a Nuclear Yetzer Hara

*More than a decade has passed since the subject of “at-risk” youth — children who were fleeing the fold — was brought to the fore. In a rare move, Jewish Observer devoted an entire issue to the topic, titled “Children on the Fringe ... and Beyond.” But educators now warn that the at-risk phenomenon is no longer the most difficult challenge parents and mechanchim face. Rather, a far more insidious and silent killer lurks just beneath the surface of frum society and threatens to break the chain of Jewish generations*



The backdrop: a typical shul on Shabbos.

A young man steps in, clad in jeans and a T-shirt, in stark contrast to the black hats and white shirts surrounding him. The “at-risk” label is summarily conjured in everyone’s minds, as their hearts fill with waves of pity for his parents.

At a nearby bench stands another *bochur*, conforming perfectly to the white-and-black dress code, his *peyos* curled behind his ears, swaying lightly as he davens. “Ah, *Yiddishe nachas*” is the thought that immediately springs to mind.

The “kids-at-risk” phenomenon, in which children rebel against their family’s *mesorah* in an external manner, has been in the headlines and headspace of the chareidi community for more than a decade. But astute *mechanchim* from around the globe warn that a far greater challenge is plaguing our youth today, one that hides beneath the surface: they are inundated with cases of seemingly mainstream boys and girls who exhibit no external signs of rejecting Yiddishkeit, but who are sorely lacking some basic elements of *emunah* and *yiras Shamayim* that were assumed a given not long ago.

There was once a truism that being immersed in Yiddishkeit would ordinarily prevent a person from doing *aveiros*, unless they were ensnared in the temporal glow of one of the “isms” that rocked the world. *Mechanchim* and mentors say that this no longer

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holds true. They consistently encounter boys and girls who don’t express any doubts in Hashem and His Torah or show any form of rebellion, but will secretly transgress grave *aveiros*. Some of these teens even grow animated during a *hashkafah shmuess*. Yet when it gets down to actually keeping the Torah, they exude a nonchalant attitude. Some of them will be *medakdeik* with some of the mitzvot, but display a stunning level of indifference when a mitzvah doesn’t suit their mind or will.

For instance, mentors relate that there are *bochurim* who would never carry on Shabbos, even when no one else would see, but will carry cell phones with the inane (and blatantly wrong) excuse that it’s “less than a *shiur*.” Girls who would never talk on a cell phone on Shabbos write off text messaging because “it’s not a real *melachah*.” Some won’t wait the necessary period between meat and dairy. Others don’t keep to an acceptable standard of *kashrus*, content that an item isn’t known to be *treif*. And so on.

“There have always been *apikorsim* and people who do *aveiros* or go off the *derech*,” clarifies Reb Chaim Glancz, who, as cofounder of Our Place in Brooklyn, has closely followed trends



Illustrative photo. Person depicted is unrelated to the subject of the article

among troubled teens for decades. “But the vast majority of children and adults in mainstream *frum* environments absorbed the bedrock basics of Yiddishkeit by osmosis. Today’s troubled youth generally are not *apikorsim* or children who want to rebel. Rather, to them, Yiddishkeit simply means *nothing*.”

After months of hearing *mechanchim* and mentors mention time and again, with utter desperation, that the deep level of disconnect they sense in their charges is the most devastating problem facing the *chinuch* world today, we met with leading *rabbanim* and experts in the field to unravel the root causes of the problem, contributing factors, and, most importantly, what we can do as parents to ensure that our children do grow up with the inner strength they need to grow into *ehrlische Yidden*.

**At-Risk, Undercover** Although the conventional off-the-*derech* phenomenon is far too complex to allow us to point to one specific cause for all children who leave the fold, experts have isolated several common causes: learning disabilities, social handicaps, unstable family environments, physical or emotional abuse, and overly harsh or overzealous *chinuch*. In short, when children associate Torah or Yiddishkeit with pain or negativity, they may eventually rebel against the fundamental principles of their upbringing.

Thankfully, the close scrutiny applied to the issue of children-at-risk has caused parents and *mechanchim* to become more

cognizant of these factors, and many have taken dramatic steps to minimize them. *Rebbeim* are generally better-trained to deal with their young charges. Professional intervention for learning disabilities, social handicaps, and family dysfunction is far more prevalent than it was previously. And parents and *mechanchim* have generally taken a softer, less-demanding approach to *chinuch*, with a significant reduction in the use of punishment, especially of a corporal nature.

Whether as a direct result of these changes or not, the numbers on kids-at-risk have stabilized. Every *neshamah* lost is priceless, but mentors and *mechanchim* who deal with off-the-*derech* children take some solace in the fact that the current at-risk rates are roughly where they have been for the past several years. Reb Chaim Glancz says that he and his colleagues may even have noticed a slight decrease in the percentage of children who rebel in an outward manner.

At the same time, however, *mechanchim* say that the number of mainstream children disconnected from Yiddishkeit is skyrocketing. Many cases go undetected for years, and statistics are virtually impossible to obtain, but *mechanchim* unanimously agree that it affects a sizable minority of *frum* children, far exceeding the rebellious at-risk rate.

“There have always been different levels of *ehrllichkeit* in *bochurim*,” says Rabbi Moshe Hillel Drew, a mentor who deals with hundreds of *bochurim* each year. “But only five or ten years ago, it was rare to find someone who considered himself

## Meet Our interviewees

Mishpacha would like to thank **Harav Aharon Feldman**, Rosh Yeshivah of Ner Yisrael of Baltimore and a member of Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah of America, for spending some time with us for the benefit of our readers.

In addition, we would like to thank the following *mechanchim* and mentors for their invaluable advice (In alphabetical order):

**Rabbi Moshe Hillel Drew** is a *chinuch* consultant and mentor with experience in several Lakewood *mesivtos*, and works closely with the Lakewood Mashgiach, Rav Mattisyahu Salomon, *shlita*, on various *chinuch* and technology related issues. Rabbi Drew founded the Technology Awareness Group (TAG) and cofounded the Brooklyn-based Gesher L'Yeshivos yeshivah placement organization.

**Reb Chaim Glancz** is one of the founders and directors of Our Place in Brooklyn, an organization that caters to teens who are outside mainstream *mosdos*. His wife, Mrs. Shifra Glancz, directs the organization’s girls division.

**Mrs. Rivka Goldberger** currently serves as *mechaneches* in Brooklyn’s Machon Bais Yaakov High School, following many years of *chinuch* experience in Brooklyn girls’ schools.

**Rabbi Daniel Mechanic**, the director of Project Chazon, presents comprehensive seminars on the basics of *emunah* and *bitachon* to yeshivah, Bais Yaakov, and day school students and teachers throughout the United States, Canada, and England. To date, 3,000 seminars have been presented to over 185,000 students in 345 schools. Project Chazon has *haskamos* from leading *gedolim* and *roshei yeshivah* in the United States, including Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Levin, Rosh Yeshivah of Telshe in Chicago, who sat in personally on Rabbi Mechanic’s presentation in his high school.

**Rabbi Dovid Sapirman** has spent many decades teaching boys and girls of various ages in several Toronto *mosdos*. Last year, along with Rabbi Pinchus Jung, he founded the “Ani Maamin Foundation,” which has been endorsed by Rav Shmuel Kamenetsky and Rav Shlomo Miller, *shlita*, among other *gedolim*.

**Rabbi Chaim Aaron Weinberg** is the veteran *menahel* of Yeshivah Ateret Torah in Brooklyn. Rabbi Weinberg also serves as the *menahel ruchni* in Camp Rayim and is the chairman of the Ichud Mosdos HaChinuch of Brooklyn.



to be a *yeshivah bochur*, not a rebel, being *mechallel Shabbos* or skipping wearing *tefillin*. Unfortunately, today it is far more common.”

And because these children maintain an external façade of being *frum*, parents can often be painfully unaware of what is going on in their children’s inner world. This leads to odd — and sometimes chilling — results, such as the case of a *bochur* who had quietly become a *mechallel Shabbos*, but when his mentor suggested that he switch to a more suitable yeshivah (where the mentor thought he could perhaps be brought back to Yiddishkeit), the boy’s father told the mentor that the other yeshivah would be inappropriate for his son because there were smokers in that yeshivah....

**Cause and Effect** What has changed? Why did previous generations raised on a similar diet of Torah and mitzvos not have the issues that children today have? As with the at-risk cases, no single cause can be attributed to all children who emerge from a perfectly *frum* environment with weak *emunah* and *yiras Shamayim*. But the fact that it has only become a widespread problem in recent years, and has continually risen during that period, seems to connote that recent developments play a role in that surge.

Interestingly, many educators cite the fallout from the at-risk phenomenon as a partial cause for the spiritual malaise now seen in children. Many parents lack the confidence to place necessary limitations on their children, for fear that being overly harsh will chase their children off the *derech*. They will look aside as children take shortcuts in areas that should not be negotiable.

Rav Chaim Friedlander, *ztz”l*, *mashgiach* of Ponevezh and author of the *mussar* and *hashkafah* classic *Sifsei Chaim*, writes that varying levels of reward and punishment are necessary tools in teaching children to identify and choose between right and wrong, and to help them gauge the greatness or severity of specific deeds (*Mesillos Chayim B’Chinuch – Mesimos B’Chinuch HaTorani*).

Some parents realize the importance of consequences, but will focus only on positive reinforcement and shy away from punishment. But if children don’t feel the sting of a negative consequence, even when appropriately administered and for the gravest misdeeds, they cannot appreciate the severity of their deeds and gain the power to overcome temptation. “Many parents today believe that in order to demand *anything* from their children, they must negotiate a reward system tailored to the child’s desires,” remarks Rabbi Drew. “While rewards are necessary and great, children must learn that there are certain things that they *must* do, reward or not. As beautiful and positive as keeping Torah and mitzvos is, it’s not always convenient, but it’s always mandatory.”

Mrs. Rivka Goldberger, a *mechaneches* at Machon Bais Yaakov High School, believes parents’ fear of laying down firm rules stems from a misconception. “The healthiest, most well-adjusted children, both in *gashmiyus* and *ruchniyus*, are the ones who come from happy homes where children’s individual needs and sensitivities are validated and

respected, but where rules are fair and enforced. When children know that their parents love and understand them, they don’t resent the fact that they mean what they say when they set guidelines. On the contrary, children truly crave discipline, structure, and limitations, as long as they are not deprived of their needs.”

“The notion that constantly giving in to children’s demands and abandoning reasonable expectations equals love and warmth is misguided,” echoes Reb Chaim Glancz. “My experience has shown that communities with varying levels of *frumkeit* have a very similar ratio of at-risk teens. It’s not the general level of *frumkeit* that you expect from your children that matters, but rather *how* it is given over, and whether the individual child is capable of meeting your expectations, whatever they are.”

“I constantly see parents who panic when their children threaten to ‘go off the *derech*’ if their demands aren’t met,” adds Rabbi Drew. “These parents’ lack of confidence drives their children’s attempt to manipulate them. I’ve found that when the parents’ demands are fair and there is an overall healthy parent-child relationship, there is no reason to panic.”

He illustrates with a recent case of a *bochur* who threatened to run away from home if his father didn’t capitulate to some of his demands. The panicked father — who led a healthy



**“A *bochur* needs to be inspired, and usually this is by someone older than he who has a deep commitment to Torah”**  
— Harav Aharon Feldman, *shlita*

home environment — was advised by expert *mechanchim* to disregard his son’s threats and remain firm. The boy eventually carried through on his threat and requested that his father drive him and his suitcases to a bus stop. About half an hour after a wrenching farewell, the father’s phone rang. “Tatty,” his son begged, “Please come pick me up and pretend that nothing ever happened.”

**Closing Doors, Opening Hearts** Change in parental attitude may explain children’s audacity to test waters that were previously known to be off-limits, but *mechanchim* point to several other forces in motion that cause a decline in *emunah* and *yiras Shamayim*. The consensus seems to be that the top culprit is the invasion of secular values into our society. The old Yiddish adage that “*Vi es Christallt zich, yiddilt zich*” (roughly translated, “secular tendencies are replicated in the Jewish world”) is back to haunt us. Some of contemporary secular youth’s woes have visibly crept into the chareidi world. For instance, secular music and entertainment, inappropriate language and intergender fraternizing, and consumption of alcohol and other substances, are now found in circles where they were virtually nonexistent a decade or two ago.

“In previous years, even the secular world abided by certain boundaries of morality, authority, and discipline,” says Rabbi Dovid Sapirman, a Toronto *mechanech* and cofounder of the Ani Maamin Foundation. “Today, they are nonexistent. And every inappropriate billboard and secular entertainment show shouts to our children: ‘*Leis din v’leis dayan*’ — live life as you please! You cannot even visit a pharmacy today without being exposed to the moral corruption. This has unfortunately cost us heavily in the areas of *emunah* and *yiras Shamayim*.”

Until recently, *frum* homes were able to keep the harmful effects of the secular world’s steep moral decline at bay. But the level of depravity of secular “culture” sinking ever-lower has been compounded by the slick vehicles now used to infiltrate our insular world.



The dream of every parent. Young men delighting in the sweetness of Torah

Illustrative photo. People depicted are unrelated to the subject of the article



“It was accepted in chareidi society that an *ehrliche Yid* keeps television and secular entertainment away from his home and children,” laments Rabbi Drew, who founded the Technology Awareness Group. “With the proliferation of the Internet, sophisticated cell phones, DVDs, and iPods, one can still live an outwardly *ehrliche* lifestyle and have the most deplorable material in his pocket or stashed in his drawer or on his home computer. Children can easily hide what they’re doing from their parents. The elements of pride and shame that used to protect us from material unacceptable in our society have practically disappeared. Even many children and adults who do manage to keep away from downright objectionable material have been forced to lower their standards of *eidelkeit* and *shmiras einayim*, and have thereby become captives of a damaging culture.”

The effects are particularly pronounced when children — or adults — become privy to extremely inappropriate images. A long-time mentor relates: “Almost without exception, when a *bochur* will tell me or another mentor that he inexplicably has ‘no *cheishek*’ for Torah and Yiddishkeit, we’ll later discover that he has become addicted to inappropriate images.

“In the past, people who committed *aveiros* didn’t necessarily lose their entire *cheishek* for Yiddishkeit. Due to the very nature of these *nisyonos*, however, one who falls prey to them can lose his entire interest in Yiddishkeit. I’ve seen fine, stable *bochurim*, who have finished *masechtos* in *Shas* and have encountered the wrong material, even for a short period of time, crying like babies at how their Yiddishkeit now hangs on a thread. The age at which children can access such material is incredibly young. The speed is also mind-boggling. In my days, it would take months of ‘bumming out’ and

## Not Just for Kids

According to many *rabbanim* and *mechanchim*, one valuable tool to help bring about an emotional connection to Yiddishkeit is the eloquent explanation of the Torah’s underlying concepts, which embeds belief in Hashem and His greatness in children’s ‘bloodstreams.’ But what are parents to do if they don’t have the tools to transmit that passion?

Along with teaching *emunah* in schools, Rabbi Dovid Sapirman of the Ani Maamin Foundation also travels internationally to address adults and *mechanchim* on topics of *emunah* and *yiras Shamayim*. He says that some of what he has heard in recent years has shocked him. “I’ve encountered some upstanding adults within the most beautiful *frum* communities who question the basics of *emunah*. Some of them admit to keeping nothing when in private. The common questions include such fundamentals as, ‘How do I know that Hashem created the world?’, ‘How do I know that the Torah we have is from Har Sinai?’, ‘Why must I listen to ‘Torah shebe’al peh?’ Unfortunately, I’m hearing such questions more and more as each day passes. They come from all types of *frum kehillos* around the world. ‘*Sadna d’ara chad hu*,’ the entire world is the same.”

As a result, Rabbi Sapirman concludes that due to various factors, not the least of which are society’s negative influence and the cynicism of our generation, the power of “*emunah peshutah*” has been diminished.

Rabbi Sapirman has compiled a series of *shiurim* on topics ranging from *b’rias haolam*, *ma’amad Har Sinai* and *Torah shebe’al peh*, to *tzaddik v’ra lo* and the Holocaust. He encourages venues where competent *rabbanim* and *mechanchim* respond to *emunah* questions from the audience, and where questioners feel free to share their thoughts. He says, “I’ve seen this method work time and time again. Countless people have told me about how their Yiddishkeit has been completely transformed once their nagging doubts were removed.”

Ani Maamin also holds training seminars for *mechanchim* on how to deal with *emunah* issues and is in the process of setting up a hotline where people can ask *emunah* questions anonymously.

hard work for a *bochur* to gather what a child can now access in five minutes.”

Raising children in homes saturated with Torah-true values and insulated to the magnetic forces from outside have long been cited as the key to inculcating them with genuine *yiras Shamayim* and strong feelings for Yiddishkeit.

A story is told of a Yid who said to Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky, *ztz”l*, that he was moving to the Torah community of Lakewood, New Jersey, and expressed confidence in the Torah environment in which he would raise his children. “A *pasuk*, referring to Yerushalayim, states, *Ki chizak berichei shaarayich, beirach banayich bekirbeich* (For you have strengthened the locks of your door, your children have been blessed within you),” replied Rav Yaakov. “Even in the holiest city, children will only be blessed with *ehrllichkeit* if the doors of their home are closed to the outside.”

In today’s times, several decades after Rav Yaakov made that statement, the need for insulated havens has become all that much greater. The first rule of medicine is *primum non nocere*, do no harm. The *primum non nocere* of *chinuch*, explains Rav Aharon Feldman, *shlita*, *rosh yeshivah* of Yeshivas Ner Yisrael of Baltimore, is to keep children away from society’s harmful influence. “Without protection from the Internet, movies, and iPods, it is extremely difficult for children to learn and be inspired by Torah. Concentration becomes impossible because of the images floating in their minds. I have noted that even principals in secular schools have voice similar complaints, for the same reasons, and have banned iPods from their classrooms.”

And while this is certainly true for the spiritually toxic images readily available in an open environment, even becoming overly engrossed in image-based innocuous material causes children to avoid study and in-depth focus on printed material — a fact proven by secular scientists. In an essay titled *The Importance of Deep Reading* (published in *Educational Leadership*, Issue 66, May 2009), Tufts University professors Maryanne Wolf and Mirit Barzillai explain that heavy exposure to digital-age technology and entertainment makes it difficult to switch to the relatively intense task of deep reading.

It also causes a drop in self-discipline, which actually forced the US Army to do an overhaul of its basic training program for the first time in thirty years (NPR, March 2010).

“We are seeing a decline across the board in America,” commented Lieutenant-General Mark Hertling, deputy commanding general for Initial Military Training, when explaining the need for the overhaul. “We certainly have a generation that is not as disciplined when they enter the military.”

Since deep reading and strong self-discipline are two of the basic elements in *Yiddische chinuch*, it should come as no surprise that children exposed to image-based media are struggling.

Unfortunately, however, as the necessity of keeping children away from secular society’s thrills has risen, the challenge of insulating our families has become more difficult than ever. An ever-evolving array of dazzling excitement dangles constantly before their eyes. This means, stress *mechanchim*, that we need to offer children *safe* outlets to satiate their need for thrill and keep them from pursuing harmful forms of entertainment.

Drawing upon his extensive experience, Rabbi Drew finds that parents who have the most success are those who are “firm and fun”: on one hand, providing enjoyable trips and activities to their children to show them that being *ehrllich* won’t prevent

them from having a blast, but at the same time, explaining why prohibited activities are deemed inappropriate by their parents.

“Transmit the standards by which you wish to raise our children clearly, and teach them how you prioritize your goals. I find that children who understand what is forbidden and what’s a *minhag*, cultural ‘*gefil*,’ or a way to keep them away from more negative material, are able to adhere to it much better.”

Perhaps even more crucial is to provide a home environment that is loving, peaceful, and enjoyable so that children wish to remain in their homes and not search for other outlets. “Parents must give their children lots of time, both in quality and quantity,” says Rabbi Chaim Aaron Weinberg, *menahel* of Yeshivah Ateret Torah. “Children should feel connected to and understood by their parents, and should feel comfortable confiding in them. Otherwise, in today’s society, they’ll easily find an outside social circle to find refuge in.”

This principle is even more important when it comes to the challenges of teenage girls — who, although somewhat less susceptible to skirting the Torah’s boundaries than boys are, still seem to be showing increasing trouble in that area.



**“These children haven’t been turned off from Yiddishkeit. They just haven’t been turned on”**  
— Rabbi Chaim Aaron Weinberg

“For girls especially, perhaps the most important point is that they feel emotionally secure in their homes and schools,” says Mrs. Shifra Glancz of Our Place girls division. “This allows them to believe in themselves and to shine in their own way. Generally speaking, if that’s accomplished, they won’t seek to deviate from the lifestyle they’re raised with.”

Even so, girls will commonly struggle with *tzniyus* and *eidelkeit*, both internal and external — concepts that are anathema to the secular society that is infiltrating our circles. Mrs. Goldberger says that it is not enough to present *tzniyus* as a set of rules. Girls must understand the fundamental concepts of *tzniyus* and the respect that it garners for them as individuals.

“We can’t focus only on what the girls ‘must not’ do. We must teach them how beautiful and respectable *tzniyus* is, that our honorable dress is respected by many goyim, too. Yes, there are some clear halachos regarding *tzniyus*, but these halachos are only there to help clarify a much broader ‘spirit.’”

**“In Their Bloodstream”** A Jew’s life is divided between *sur meira* (turn away from evil) and *aseh tov* (do good). The *sur meira* in today’s world means preventing the influence of secular society from infiltrating our lives. But it is not enough to prevent children from being ensnared. Rav Feldman cites Chazal’s teaching, “*Im paga becha menuval zeh, moshcheihu l’beis medrash* — If you encounter the *yetzer hara*, pull him into *beis medrash*” (*Kiddushin* 30b). “Even if we keep negative influences away from children, we still will not ensure that they have *yiras Shamayim*. For this we must give them a *geshmak* in learning Torah. Once a *bochur* becomes involved in *limud haTorah* with

Harav Aharon Feldman: “Once a *bochur* becomes involved in *limud haTorah* with a *geshmak*, he will find himself drawn to all of Yiddishkeit, which means he has *yiras Shamayim*”



a *geshmak*, he will find himself drawn to all of Yiddishkeit, which means he has *yiras Shamayim*.”

Indeed, *mechanchim* observe that in today’s world, despite parents’ best efforts to insulate their children from negative material, the *yetzer hara*’s forces will always be within reach of children, and we must do more to prepare them for the inevitable battle.

Rabbi Daniel Mechanic was recently contacted by relatives of a boy from a good, *yeshivishe* family that does all it can to insulate their home, including protecting all computers in their home with the best security. One night, their nineteen-year-old son, a quality *ben Torah* about to go off to Eretz Yisrael, took out an iPod, and accidentally chanced upon horrible websites from a neighbor’s unsecured wireless modem. Before long, he was addicted, and was *mechallel Shabbos* due to this addiction. The boy is a mess, he has lost his identity as a *ben Torah*, and the parents are devastated.

In the past, children who grew up in a happy and healthy environment generally remained on their parents’ path, as they saw no need to rebel. Today, children who harbor no bitterness — and may even try to hide their challenges in order to avoid hurting their parents and *mechanchim* — may still be facing serious internal struggles to accept Yiddishkeit.

“These children haven’t been turned off from Yiddishkeit,” explains Rabbi Weinberg. “They just haven’t been turned on.”



**“If the reason kids are *frum* is because that’s the way they were raised, *mitzvas anashim milumada*, and it’s simply a convenient lifestyle, then it’s worth throwing away in order to get back at their parents, or to make a statement, or to express their independence”**

**— Rabbi Daniel Mechanic**

“The *yetzer hara* used to wage its wars using conventional weapons,” says Rabbi Mechanic, “but now he fights with nuclear and biological weapons. The exciting lure of the streets, the sophisticated *kefirah* readily available all around, is incredibly powerful. We must arm our children with the unquestionable and unshakable realization that we possess a *Toras emes*, a Torah given to us by Hashem; and a *Toras chayim*, a living Torah that provides us with blueprints for the most enjoyable life possible. Otherwise, they will be profoundly vulnerable during this life-long battle with the *yetzer hara*.

“We must decisively demolish the emotional, spiritual, and intellectual competition that the outside world will inevitably offer them.”

The power of *simchah shel mitzvah* has proven its potency at a time when certain *nisyonos* were greater than those our children face today. In the earlier part of the twentieth century, being *frum* in America often meant being in danger of starvation, as *shomer Shabbos* rarely found reliable employment. Rav Moshe Feinstein, *ztz”l*, famously commented that Yidden who accepted their challenging *shmiras Shabbos* with *simchah* saw their children follow the path they blazed, but those who kvetched that it was “*shver*” (difficult) to be *shomer Shabbos* often saw their children choose a different path. With today’s *nisyonos*, too, if children internalize the beauty and truth of Torah and Yiddishkeit, the secular world’s depravity seems alien, not enticing.

*Mechanchim* stress that if parents make Torah, *tefillah*, Shabbos, Yom Tov, and all other aspects of Yiddishkeit full of warmth and zeal, it can serve as a powerful counterforce to the glow of the outside world. Children who grow up seeing their parents and *rebbeim* excited about Torah and davening, and participate in lively and enjoyable Shabbos *seudos*, will be attracted to Yiddishkeit. Torah and mitzvos won’t seem to them to be a mere rule book, but an all-encompassing guide to a fulfilling life.

Rabbi Sapirman tells a partial success story to illustrate the power of solid, positive *chinuch*: A *rosh yeshivah* accepted a *bochur* who had gone off the *derech* and wished to return into his mainstream yeshivah. He immediately noticed that the *bochur*, who was struggling with the most basic mitzvos, davened with an intense, genuine fervor. Surprised

at the devotion that was totally out of sync with the rest of the boy’s behavior, he questioned the boy about it. “When I was a young child,” explained the *bochur*, “My *rebbe* taught us the *biur* (explanation) of *tefillah*, and it gave me a *geshmak* in davening. Davening is in my bloodstream, and it will never leave.”

“It is our job to infuse the basic foundations of Yiddishkeit into our children’s ‘bloodstreams,’” surmises Rabbi Sapirman. “Then they will, *b’ezras Hashem*, be able to withstand the toughest challenges.”

But he warns that this is primarily preventative medicine: “We must get it into their bloodstream well before doubts and temptations confront them in full force, because at that point it gets a lot harder.”

**Intellectual Injection** As much as we must work to make Yiddishkeit come alive in an emotional sphere, Rabbi Mechanic and Rabbi Sapirman believe that explaining the tenets of Yiddishkeit on an intellectual level will go a long way towards countering the “chill out” and “do as I see fit” attitude.

“I once asked Rabbi Moshe Schapira, *shlita*, why some kids are going off the *derech*,” relates Rabbi Mechanic. “His response was, ‘*Hamotzi meichaveiro alav hareiyah*’ (a Talmudic concept relating to monetary *halachah*) — if you want to remove from them what they perceive to be an easy, enjoyable life, you must bring proof for why they should be following the Torah lifestyle.”

“I have personally asked more than 150,000 students in close to 350 yeshivah and Bais Yaakov high schools: ‘Why are we *frum*?’ The overwhelming majority of them had tremendous difficulty articulating a correct and coherent answer. If the reason kids are *frum* is because that’s the way they were raised, *mitzvas anashim milumada*, and it’s simply a convenient lifestyle, then it is easily expendable when they experience pain and get very angry; it’s worth throwing away in order to get back at their parents, or to make a statement, or to express their independence.

“They must have a deep recognition of the truth and beauty of Yiddishkeit. Then they will value the Torah so much that, no matter what happens in their lives, they will never consider throwing it away.”

“Of course, even if you have *emunah*, you can still lack *yiras Shamayim*,” echoes Rabbi Sapirman. “Tanach is full of believers who committed grave *aveiros*. But you cannot have genuine *yiras Shamayim* if you lack *emunah*. Once you internalize the reality of Hashem’s Ultimate Authority, every concept of Yiddishkeit becomes easier to adhere to. Even the Torah’s ‘*chukim*,’ for which we have no explanation, take on a significant meaning.”

**“Feh” – Not Only for Insects** Despite all the doom and gloom associated with today’s *chinuch* challenges, there are silver linings to the clouds: the many young boys and girls out there today who *are* at admirable levels of *yiras Shamayim* and *middos tovos*, despite the fierce winds they face.

What’s their secret to success?

Rav Aharon Feldman, who has spent decades in *chinuch* in Eretz Yisrael and in America, finds a common denominator among the success stories. “A *bochur* needs to be inspired, and usually this is by someone older than he who has a deep commitment to Torah. Those who were *zocheh* to a model of this sort will usually end up with *yiras Shamayim*.”

Beyond all the contemporary angles on *chinuch* in our times, then, it mostly boils down to basic, age-old principles. Genuine *yiras Shamayim* is most effectively transmitted by role modeling. Children who love and respect parents or *mechanchim* who have genuine *emunah* and *yiras Shamayim* will typically absorb it by default.

But *mechanchim* warn that children have sensitive antennae, and can determine what their parents' true values are. Rabbi Yechiel Yaakovson, a foremost *mechanech* in Eretz Yisrael, tells the tale of a wealthy American Yid who made it clear to his children that they were welcome to sit and learn all their lives, and he would support them generously. To his dismay, one-by-one, they all joined him in the business. He was friends with Rabbi Yaakovson, and he asked him whether he could explain why he hadn't managed to raise any long-term learners.

Rav Yaakovson reminded the wealthy man of a story he had witnessed when visiting the man's home many years earlier. During a Shabbos *seudah*, one of his young children got angry at him and flipped a light switch, desecrating Shabbos in "revenge." His father just shrugged his shoulders and said, "You're not punishing me, you're punishing yourself." Half an hour later, another child knocked over a crystal vase, the father jumped out of his seat and berated the culprit.

picks up a sense of revulsion. Several such lessons in infancy are enough to make insects repulsive and nauseating for the rest of one's life. This technique can and should be applied to everything that is considered morally reprehensible."

**The Ultimate Weapon** *Mechanchim* point to one more dreadful influence that has infiltrated our communal psyche: the utter lack of reverence for authority that has taken over secular society. *Yiras Shamayim* is built by practicing on humans, as Rav Yochanan ben Zakkai told his students on his deathbed, "*Tehei morah Shamayim k'moreh basar vadam* — your fear of Heaven should be like your fear of humans."

The pervasive atmosphere of disrespect for authority and the attitude of "rules are meant to be broken" makes *chinuch* towards *yiras Shamayim* more difficult to inculcate, but not impossible.

Rabbi Weinberg points to role modeling as an important factor in this area as well. "If children see us having *derech eretz* and submitting to the authority of the Torah and *gedolei Yisrael*, they are bound to pick up that *middah*."

"We must clearly explain the importance of and concepts behind listening to Chazal and *rabbanim* — and keeping *minhagim* and other sensitivities — to our children," says Rabbi Sapirman. "If we do so, there is less chance that they'll blatantly disregard these specifics."

All discussion and analysis of successful *chinuch* aside, the most significant factor will always be *siyata d'Shmaya*. Nowadays, in particular, even optimal parenting and school education can be overturned by external challenges. Rabbi Sapirman says, "The Chofetz Chaim used to say, 'When there are strong winds blowing, the apple can fall far from the tree.'"

About half an hour after a wrenching farewell, the father's phone rang. "Tatty," his son begged, "Please come pick me up and pretend that nothing ever happened"

Ultimately then, with all our *hishtadlus* to raise children with *emunah* and *yiras Shamayim*, we must still resort to our best weapon: *tefillah*.

It is said that one Motzaei Shabbos, as hundreds or perhaps thousands of chassidim were passing by the Satmarer Rav, *ztz"l*, to say "*Ah gitte vuch*," the line suddenly stopped moving as one person bent forward and said something to the Rebbe. "*Oif dem beit ihr a brucheh?*" the Rebbe wondered aloud. "*Oif dem darf men nas machen a Tehillim 'l*." (You are asking for a blessing for that? For that you must make a Tehillim wet [with tears]). When asked what it was that engendered that response, the man said that he has asked the Rebbe for a brachah that his children should be *yirei Shamayim*.

And so, as we do all we can to raise our children to follow in our footsteps, let us not forget our ultimate weapon: "*mach nas a Tehillim 'l*." ■

Rabbi Daniel Mechanic: "Children must know that we have a Toras emes and Toras chayim"

Illustrative photo. Person depicted is unrelated to the subject of the article

"Your children determined from the levels of intensity in your reactions what you truly value," explained Rav Yaakovson. "They realized that a crystal vase is worth much more to you than Hashem's mitzvos."

Furthermore, a husband and wife must be sure to show a united front on issues pertaining to Yiddishkeit. "Many focus on the lack of *shalom bayis* causing children not to emulate their parents values," says Reb Chaim Glancz. "That's true, but there is a less-obvious form of parental discord that can be equally harmful. If children see their parents disagreeing over certain values in Yiddishkeit, they'll have a hard time respecting what they're told. Clarity, honesty, and consistency are paramount to children; they make the values they are taught seem real. Hypocrisy and disingenuousness are killers."

And *mechanchim* stress that it in the tempting world we live in, role modeling in a positive sense is not enough. Children must also pick up a sense of revulsion for the lure of the streets from parents. In their book *Positive Parenting* (ArtScroll/Mesorah), Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, MD, and Ursula Schwartz, PhD, write: "If you observe tiny children, they do not hesitate to pick up insects and put them in their mouths. When (a) mother sees a child do this, she shakes the child's hand to dislodge the insect and says, '*Feh, fui*,' with such a vehemence that the child