

## Parenting with Perseverance

Delivered by Rabbi Aaron Krupnick on May 18, 2013

This Shabbos we are beginning a new series called "Parenting with Perseverance," and I think it is an important one. It doesn't matter whether your kids are grown or still at home, whether you have kids or not, the fact of the matter is we need the kids in our life to be better people and we can make that happen. You and I are influencing kids all the time and we have to be aware of the impact we have on children, and, through them, on the future of our families, our congregation, our community, and our society. As Jews we have a moral responsibility to raise up the next generation right because as Jews we have a moral responsibility to help make the world a better place. And even if you don't want to see your task as that "global and altruistic", look at it this way: Raising good kids is also self-serving because when it is done right it truly helps to bring out the best in you. We can sigh or joke about it all we want but I think when all is said and done, most of us would agree that we are better people for having raised kids.

I often find myself comparing the world I grew up in with the one my children live in today. We were speaking last week about how my parents had to go to the movies for entertainment, and I did that and also watched them on TV, but now my kids can watch movies on their laptops and even on their cell phones. If I told you 25 years ago that would be possible you would have laughed.

But, at the same time, as much as the world has changed, I don't think kids today have changed all that much. Listen to this quote: "Youth today loves luxury. (Sound like Cherry Hill?)..." They have bad manners, contempt for authority, no respect for older people, and talk nonsense when they should be working..." Sounds like kids you know today, right? This quote was from Socrates, twenty-five hundred years ago! He reminds us that kids have been driving adults crazy for a long time. There is nothing new. Kids today are still asking the fundamental questions that you and I asked. They are asking, "Who am I?" "Does anybody like me?" "Am I OK?"...

These are common questions that kids ask; they are questions of identity and meaning and purpose and they are the same questions we asked ourselves. And so the best way to understand kids is NOT to understand how DIFFERENT kids are today, but to have a good memory because they aren't that different than we were. If you can remember the feelings that you had when you were a child or a teenager understand that those feelings are very similar to the feelings that kids have today. So don't be upset if their concerns were once yours... So, for instance I could get made at or disappointed with the Hebrew High kids I teach because they are so into appearance and that labels are so important to them. I could remind them that it's what's on the inside that matters most... OR, I could remember when I was a kid and that stuff was very important to me. I remember when I moved to Cheltenham from Philly to a single family home. All the kids in my school had cool sneakers and I was wearing what we called "Bo-Bo's" from Grants Department Store. And I asked for them but my Mom was not going to pay \$35 for a pair of Pumas or Adidas. And so I went to the kid across the street - Howie - and I asked him what size he wore. And when I found out it was the same size (almost) as I wore I told him, "The

next time your parents are going to get you new Adidas, I'll buy the old pair off of you for \$5" Which was exactly what I did. How can I get mad at a kid today for wanting cool sneakers?

Appearance matters to kids; it did then and it does now. And of course, this is only one example, but a good memory of what it felt like to be a kid goes a long way to making you a good parent OR grandparent. (And let's not forget, grandparents can be some of the most influential people in kids lives today.) Having a good memory of what it meant to be a kid twenty or fifty years ago can make a really big difference in the lives of our children. It's really important that we remember, parents and grandparents, just how important we are in shaping the lives of our kids.

And here is where perseverance comes in... You know – you just know, that there will inevitably come a time when we parents don't seem as important to our kids as we used to be; when we seem utterly ridiculous to our kids, when we embarrass them. there is going to come that time when we don't seem to matter as much anymore. And then what happens...? Our feelings are hurt. We sulk.. We say, "Oh, OK, if you don't want to spend time with me..." But you know what, that's part of the process and when kids disengage YOU CAN'T disengage. They need you more than ever at that time. I don't care what you hear elsewhere, peers and media are not the most influential factors in kid's lives. They are not. Parents are the most influential force in kids lives – BY FAR! Parents, extended family like grandparents, and other key adults in their lives are the main influences. Media and peers are "influence by default." Peers and media are what fill the vacuum when parents aren't there for them. Kids need you to be there for them. They need you to be there to help them grow into responsible adults.

"Teach your children to choose the right path and when they are older they will remain on it" - that's what King Solomon said in the Book of Proverbs. So what do kids need from caring adults? Lots of stuff, and that'll be our focus the next few weeks. But I'm just going to start today with one thing. Kids need encouragement. No kid gets enough positive reinforcement. I've never met a kid who said, "You have GOT to STOP encouraging me!" I'm guessing that you are a lot like me and we like to hang around people who LIKE us. And, we don't like to hang around people who don't like us and who criticize us. And your kids are no different than you. So if you are constantly on her back you are actually conditioning your child to avoid you because she would rather be with someone who likes her. Affirmation actually helps you stay close to your kids because you are looking for things that are right and good in their lives. And I'm not talking about hitting a home run or getting an "A". I'm talking about the moral qualities that will make them into mensches. We need to encourage the positive moral traits we want to see repeated. This gives kids the approval they are looking for, and kids are looking for approval from you. And you know what? Kids never outgrow this! You don't outgrow appreciation for your parents love and approval.

Some of you may have been here a couple of years ago when I was honored for my 50th birthday. And that night I have a really short speech. (Out of character - I know...) But what I said was that all I have done, and all I have hoped to accomplish, has primarily been for one purpose - to make my Mom and Dad proud. My Dad has been gone nearly 20 years and I still crave his approval. I still need that from my Mom every day. You don't outgrow this. And we will talk more about this in our series, but for now I need you to think of ways in which you can bring out the best in your children, whether they are 5, or 15 or 55. With the right kind of encouragement you can change their whole approach to life. Think it through. Meditate on it, and then do it, especially in the challenging times, in the times you will need to persevere. That's precisely the time you need to remember that Gd has given you more strength as a parent than you know. Do what you know is right. Persevere, because, in the process, you won't only help to bring out the best in them, you'll bring out the best in yourself as well.