

Sparks

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To Teach or to Preach? *The meaning of true education*

What is a true educational experience? The Hebrew word for education—*chinuch*—gives us a clue. *Chinuch* is associated with the Hebrew word *chen*, which means “grace”. When you meet people with *chen*, you realize there is something very attractive about them. But *chen* is not the same as “pretty,” which is *yofi* in Hebrew.

To help you appreciate the difference between *chen* and *yofi*, imagine the following scenario. A friend wants to fix you up with a gorgeous-looking woman who is nothing less than a model, or so he tells you. You are excited. You anticipate love at first sight and wait for days till the date. Finally, the day arrives and you knock on her door. Someone opens the door. You’re a little shocked.

“Is your sister home?” you ask.

“I don’t have a sister. Who are you looking for?” she says.

“I’m looking for Debbie.”

“I’m Debbie.”

“Oh, oh ... I’m David’s brother. He couldn’t make it tonight.”

Women can imagine a similar scenario. Your blind date gets to your door and says, “Ah, Debbie?”

And you look at him and say, “What’s it to you?”

“Well, I’m supposed to meet with Debbie.”

“Oh ... Debbie ... oh, she had to go out. Something happened. She couldn’t make it.”

What would you do in that situation? (You know what you would do to your friend who fixed you up.) Of course, you know that it is not nice to say that you are someone else, so probably you wouldn’t lie. You decide to go out with the person for, say, ten minutes, not to hurt his/her feelings. After ten minutes, you figure you can say, “I’m sorry, I really feel sick. Something hit me. I gotta go home.”

However, imagine after ten minutes, you will look at the person and say to yourself, “You know what? I’ll give him another twenty minutes. I don’t want to hurt his feelings. This is not so bad.” After another twenty minutes, you might look at the person and say, “You know, she’s a great conversationalist,” and another hour goes by. It is possible that after some time a person who at first glance seems unattractive could actually become very attractive. If that is the case then you are actually seeing the person’s *chen*.

Have you ever met someone whose face looked so different from the way his or her face looked after you spent some time together?

We have all experienced a face that goes beyond the physical face—the kind of beauty that emerges through a direct relation with that person. After six weeks in a new class, you will look around and see how different people’s faces look. As time goes on and you develop relationships, faces transform. Some faces that looked unattractive will look very attractive, and some faces that looked very attractive might start to look unattractive. You may find a gorgeous Brad Pitt look-alike at your door and be ready to spend hours with him. But after five minutes of conversation he disgusts you; and suddenly his looks do not attract you.

What is happening is the difference between *chen* and *yofi*, and it emerges through a relationship. *Yofi* is an external beauty. A person could be a cover girl but could become physically unattractive to you after just a little time because on the inside she is really ugly and that becomes manifest on the outside.

Education or Indoctrination

You may be wondering what all of this has to do with *chinuch*—education. *Chinuch* means to draw out a person's inner beauty, a beauty that is a function of relationship. It translates into how well you relate to yourself, your friends, your community, the world, and the reality beyond all which we call G-d. Through the relationship and its harmony, an inner beauty will emerge.

The word education comes from the Latin word *educare*, which means to “draw out.” To educate, therefore, means to draw out something that fundamentally is already there. In the process of education, you actually become aware of yourself. You grow, you transform and become the real you. Rather than simply memorizing a bunch of information, you absorb ideas that draw out the inner you and bring you into the world of relationships. As you discover your own inner beauty of *chen*, you discover the *chen* of all people from the inter-relatedness we all share.

Indoctrination is the complete opposite. Indoctrination seeks to put something into you, while education tries to bring something out of you.

At the very early stages of education, we send our children to kindergarten, *gan* as it is called in Hebrew. Kindergarten comes from German and literally means a children's garden (*gan* also means garden). What kind of name is this for a children's school? A better name would be kinder-workshop or, better these days, a kinder-factory. But if education is likened to a garden, then the educator is really a spiritual gardener. A gardener interacts with a seed. If he has a pear seed, then he wants to identify it as a pear seed so that it will become a pear tree. If he has a carrot seed, he will want it to become a carrot. An educator's job is to create an environment that feeds you ideas that will nourish you in a manner in which you will grow and flourish. An educator only wants you to be who you are.

While an educator is like a gardener, an indoctrinator is like a carpenter. A carpenter imposes his vision on a raw material, while a gardener sets his vision according to his seed; whatever you are, he wants you to become.

To indoctrinate is to coerce. It involves imposing the teacher's values—aspirations, identity and character—on the student, so that the student will become like the teacher and reflect the teacher. In the process of indoctrination, a conflict is liable to arise between the teacher and the student because the teacher has a message he wants the student to accept, even at the expense of the student's unique identity and individuality. Because the teacher may be physically or mentally more powerful than the student, he is able to coerce the student to bend and submit to the teacher's position. There are teachers who are brilliant in their logic yet coercive in their brilliance, rather than concerned with whether the growth is coming from the student. Conversely, the educational process starts first with a genuine patient and caring relationship with the student.

To educate also is to communicate. Communication is not simply two people taking turns speaking. It can be one person listening and the other person speaking. What's the difference? The word communication is from the same source as the word community. In an indoctrination experience, the teacher is imposing himself or herself on the student. The object is to impose the teacher's views in such a way that they become the student's own view. However, in an educational experience, the object is to communicate truth. Therefore, the teacher's message will resonate from without and from within the student. The message the student hears is something that she would have heard from inside had she been open to it or had someone helped her to be open to it.

When you hear truth it resonates inside, not just outside. And there is something inside that tells you that you knew it all along. To indoctrinate is to *impose*, but to educate is to *expose* what is inside. The educator is simply sharing truth.

Let Go and Let G-d

When the Jewish people were in the desert, they complained about having no water. Moses, their leader, was a quite frustrated with dealing with this “the stiff-necked people.” At this, G-d said to Moses, “Take your staff ... and speak to the rock before their eyes, that it should give its waters.” (Numbers 20:8)

But Moses did not speak to the rock; instead, he got angry with the complaints of the Israelites and he hit the rock with his staff. The rock then produced water. The Torah then relates that G-d said to Moses, “Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of the Children of Israel, therefore you will not bring this congregation to the Land that I have given them.” (Numbers 20:12) And it happened that Moses did not enter the land. Moses’ mistake was that he hit the rock when he should have spoken to the rock. With this act, he did not fully sanctify G-d’s name and thus could not lead the people into the land of Israel.

How can we understand his mistake?

The famed Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook explains that when an educator is dealing with individuals, he must be able to teach and direct each of them in a way that helps them grow and contribute to the whole. Moses forgot about that in this moment when the complaints of the Israelites got the better of him. What happened to Moses, the greatest Jewish leader and educator, was that in that moment he forgot his role and became an indoctrinator.

By losing his temper and hitting the rock, Moses was drawn into a conflict between himself and the people. He put himself into a position of me against them. He betrayed a true educational mindset and angrily said: “Listen now, you rebels ...!” In such a set up, one must win and the other must submit. When Moses lost his temper and gave into a coercive conflict, he ended his career.

Until that point, Moses was a true educator. He was able to speak to the people and articulate the will of G-d. From Moses, the Jewish people heard G-d’s will from without and it resonated within them, inspiring them to declare, “We will do and we will listen.”

According to the famous 16th century Torah commentator the Maharal, when Moses lost his temper he showed that he did not believe enough in G-d. If Moses, the educator, had sufficient belief in G-d, he would not have become frustrated. A true educator does not become frustrated and lose his cool; and he does not need to get coercive--neither physically nor emotionally. He calmly shares knowledge with his students and then he lets go and lets G-d do the rest.

We learn how to teach from the good example of Moses—who comes down in history as *Moshe Rabbenu*, “Moses Our Teacher”—and we learn how not to teach from his one key mistake.

A true educator strives to communicate, and when you learn from such a person, you come to understand the knowledge that is being communicated to you from without and from within.

A true educator, in no way, will impose herself on you or cause you to lose yourself. Just the opposite, she will help you discover yourself; empower you to be who you truly are and express your inner self— your inner beauty.

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