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## WHO'S RAISING OUR CHILDREN?

Dr. Yitzchok Levine

Posted Dec 26 2003

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*(Please note: It is not the purpose of this article to criticize the actions of anyone. My intentions are to simply raise some issues that I think the Orthodox Jewish community should be aware of and should think about.)*

Many in the Orthodox community would like to think that their religious lifestyle is independent of the society around them. Indeed, much is made of the concept of not being influenced negatively by our environment. The real truth is that all observant Jews are affected in some manner by society at large, despite the fact that we may not want to admit this. Sometimes economic factors and even religious considerations undermine what have been time honored practices so that the norm leads us to do things that our ancestors would most certainly have been surprised at.

A particular example is the responsibility for raising children. The traditional Jewish model is one in which younger children, at least, are raised and nurtured primarily by their mothers. It is the Jewish mother who historically inculcated her young children with an early appreciation for Jewish values and practices and yiras shamayim. The importance of this task cannot be over-emphasized. Much of a child's individual personality, and many of his or her character traits, are molded at a young age. Indeed, this is an awesome responsibility given what is at stake.

Today, however, more and more women work outside the home, and we see that in many observant homes children are being taken care of not by their mothers, but by hired caretakers. In many of these homes it is not uncommon for pre-school children to spend a large part of their day in the care of irreligious Jewish or non-Jewish women. These caretakers, even with the best of intentions, simply cannot replace the Torah influence that a devoted, observant mother can have on her children.

And what of the actual influence these caretakers do have on the children they're responsible for? What sort of values does a non-observant or non-Jewish woman impart to the children in her care? They certainly cannot be Torah values. More often than not, they will expose their wards to values from which the parents would want to shield their offspring.

I am not arguing that every woman should stay home all the time and care for her pre-school children. While for some women this is fine, for others it is simply not a reality. Some women are just not at their best having to care day-in and day-out for young children - when these women have some outside outlet or interest, they find they are better mothers when they

return home.< BR>  
Another consideration that often forces mothers to work outside the home is the economic reality of raising a family, particularly a family blessed with many children. When one adds up the expenses of paying for tuition, clothing, camp, food, housing, etc. of, say, a family of seven, the sum is astounding even for those who live most frugally. In order to survive financially, many parents find it necessary for both of them to work. No matter how much the mother may want to stay home, she simply cannot. One salary, even a "good" salary, is just not enough to cover the basic expenses of the family.



Then there is the issue of kollel families. Today we are fortunate to have a number of idealistic young people who get married with the intention that the husband will learn for a number of years after marriage while the wife works to support the family. Spending a number of years immersed in intensive Torah study is certainly meritorious. But the question to be considered is, "What price do the children pay if staying in kollel means that non-observant or non-Jewish women are caring for them for a large part of the day?"

Such a question is often irrelevant in neighborhoods with a large number of kollel families where good day care by observant and dedicated women is fairly easy to obtain, since some of the wives of other kollel members often run small day care facilities in their homes.

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Let me relate a story that was told to me by a good friend of mine a number of years ago. I know that it will raise eyebrows, but I do think that it should be heard.

My friend related that one of his son's chavrusas, who was soon to be married, went to Rav Dr. Yosef Breuer, zt"l, for a bracha not long before his wedding. In the course of the conversation Rav Breuer asked the chosson what he planned to do after he was married. He responded that he was going to be learning in kollel. Rav Breuer then asked him how he planned to support his wife and himself and eventually the children they would hopefully have. He replied that his wife was going to work. In response to this Rav Breuer asked if the chosson had the kesuva with him that was going to be used at the chasana. When he received a negative reply, he asked the young man to return with it the next day.

The chosson left perplexed, but he did return the next day with the kesuva. Rav Breuer took a look at it and said, "Here it says that you are going to support your wife! I cannot give a bracha on a falshe zach!"

Now, no one is saying that a young man should not learn in kollel for some time after marriage. Also, since historically the wives of a number of gedolim worked and supported their husbands, it may well be that Rav Breuer's approach to this issue is unique or at least not shared by the majority of other gedolim. (Of course, more often than not the sort of work that these women of previous generations did was centered in the home, not outside of it.) Nonetheless, I do feel that the story is worth hearing and that its implications should at least be considered.

For mothers who have younger children and have to pursue activities outside of the home, there are a number of questions to be dealt with: How much time should she spend away from home? What is an appropriate balance between time allocated to activities outside of the home and time spent with the children? When she is away from home, who is an appropriate person to care for the children? Can an observant caretaker be found whose Torah values mesh with the family's? Does it really pay financially for the mother to work?

This last question is based on the fact that a woman working outside of her home incurs expenses such as child care, transportation, additional clothing that is appropriate for a business setting, etc. In some cases, if one does a careful cost comparison of the expenses associated with a mother working outside of her home and the net income she actually earns, it turns out that the actual disposable income brought adds up to only a few thousand dollars. In such cases parents must ask themselves, Is it really worth, say, three or four thousand dollars more a year for our children to be cared for by those who do not share our Torah values?

What might the community do to assist families with young children so that mothers can spend the majority of their time caring for their children? One approach would be for the community to set up agencies that assist parents in finding observant caretakers. Perhaps we need special stipends or interest-free loans earmarked for families which would help bridge the financial gap and hence facilitate a mother staying home most of the day. Should a campaign be started to encourage more women to stay at home with younger children? At present it seems that in some circles a mother staying at home to care for her pre-school children is the exception rather than the rule. Should there be a community effort to change this perception?

Chesed agencies could be formed that provide inexpensive, quality day care by observant women. Another possibility is the establishment of referral agencies that connect women who work part time, so that while one is working, the other is watching the children of both. For example, if Mrs. A works on Mondays and Wednesdays and Mrs. B works on Tuesdays and Thursdays, then Mrs. B would watch her own children and Mrs. A's children on Mondays and Wednesdays, and Mrs. A would do the same on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The agency would solicit and provide a list of women who could participate in such a partnership.

The issues raised above are complex, and there are no simple answers that will neatly resolve them. Each family must evaluate its situation and make a decision that is appropriate for all of its family members. Such decisions by definition will often be different for different families in different circumstances. It is, however, an issue that the Orthodox community must deal with today.

Who knows the long-term repercussions of having large numbers of pre-school children cared for by those who do not share our Torah values? Our children are our future. Shouldn't we do everything in our power to guarantee that the next generation is imbued as much as possible with Torah values and yiras shamayim?

An Orthodox Jewish family needs to be more than financially viable. It needs to be spiritually viable as well. It is only in this way that Torah-true Judaism can continue. It is the responsibility of all members of the observant community to make sure that this is the case for as many families as possible.

*Dr. Yitzchok Levine is a professor in the Department of Mathematical Sciences at Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, New Jersey.*

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**My opinion of the Shidduch Crisis**

Date 07:03, 03-17, 09

In my opinion "The Shidduch Crisis" is that there is an even balance of eligible boys to eligible girls, it is the fact that too many people are shallow and are looking for things that do not make a good marriage. Example, I have been setting people up, for chesed, for many years and have met many wonderful boys and girls. However, I have been getting disgusted when speaking with parents of these wonderful children. It appears, they should know better and ask questions that are pertinent to marriage and raising children. Instead they ask questions that are pertinent to themselves, such as looks, and impression or are they NYish? When they asked me if they were NYish I erroneously thought they were asking about middos as they already farherred me in depth about looks. No, I was mistaken, they now wanted to know if they had the "NY look"- IN ADDITION TO GOOD LOOKS. THIS IS THE CRISIS. GET SOME DEPTH. Could someone ask me about Chesed and Yiras Hashem.  
suri steinberger, NMB

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