

Explaining Sensitive Torah Concepts to Children

Jews and Non-Jews

- Always remind children that all people¹, including non-Jews² of every race and ethnicity, need to be treated with utmost dignity³ because they possess a *tzelem*⁴ *Elokim*⁵.
- While all of humanity possesses the quality of *tzelem Elokim*⁶, *Yidden* have the distinct status of being *banim l'Makom*⁷. This is a source of great pride and joy for all *Yidden*.
- This deep pride should never result in us belittling others⁸, rather it should serve to strengthen our adherence to our additional obligations and responsibilities.
- Being *banim l'Makom* means we possess loftier *neshamos* that have greater capacity and more opportunity to impact the world⁹ and be closer to *Hashem*¹⁰.
- Teach children that *Klal Yisroel* is not an exclusive “club”, as anyone who desires to join can do so provided they accept upon themselves all of *Torah* and *mitzvos*¹¹.
- Since we are all *banim l'Makom*, we treat all *Yidden* as close relatives, always responsible for taking care of one another¹².
- Point out that although we treat non-Jews with cordial respect, the *Torah* provides us with many *halochos* that serve to prevent us from becoming too friendly with them¹³, because we need to protect our uniqueness as the *Am HaNivchar*.



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1. *Avos* (perek 3, mishna 14) *Chaviv adam shenivrah b'tzelem*.
 2. In the past (particularly in Europe), when we were constantly oppressed by non-Jewish governments and the majority of non-Jews that we came in contact with were uncouth and often times outright negative, the attitude towards non-Jews was often one of subtle ill-will. In today's day and age it is not wise to convey this attitude to our children, since there are many decent non-Jews out there (including the government) who deserve basic dignity in our interactions with them. Furthermore, if we don't train our children to regard them with basic respect this can lead to great *chilul Hashem* in their future dealings in business and the like.
 3. See *Mishnas Rav Aharon* (vol. 1 p. 157) for an elaboration of this point.
 4. The term *tzelem Elokim* can be explained to children as “*Hashem* like qualities”. They include: 1) the ability to make moral choices or free will (see *Sforno* and *Malbim* on *Beraishis* 1:26), 2) the capacity for emulating *Hashem*'s compassionate traits (see *Tomer Devorah* perek 1), and 3) a superior intellect (see *Rambam Yesodai HaTorah* 4:8).
 5. The term *tzelem Elokim* is very elevating and sublime and should be often used by parents in reference to people.
 6. Non-Jews are also rewarded for their positive actions in the next world, see *Rambam* (*Melochim* 8:11) and *Teferes Yisroel* (*Avos* 3:14).
 7. *Avos* (perek 3, mishna 14) *Chavivin Yisroel shnikrah banim l'Mokom*, see *Rabeinu Yonah* there.
 8. Chazal tell us to make an effort to greet everyone we meet, even gentiles. See also “With Hearts Full of Love” by Rav Matisyahu Solomon *Shlita*.
 9. See *Nefesh Hachaim* (*shaar* 1) at length on this topic.
 10. Explain to children that because our *neshamos* are loftier they are therefore more sensitive spiritually and therefore we have unique *halochos* governing many aspects of our lives, such as *kashrus* and other similar laws.
 11. In other words they undergo the *Gairus* process.
 12. See *Rambam* (*Matnos Anyim* 10:2) that for this reason it says *kol Yisroel achim*.
 13. Such as *pas akum*, *chalov akum*, *yayin nesech*, etc.

Non-Frum Jews

- When talking to young children about non-*frum* Jews, especially relatives, clarify that they are not non-Jews although they might look like them¹⁴.
- Articulate to them that we feel sorry for them that they were not exposed in their youth like we were to the greatness and beauty of *Torah* and *mitzvos*¹⁵.
- Reiterate to your children that all *bein adam l'chaveiro* obligations¹⁶ apply to non-*frum* Jews who have had a secular upbringing (even if they don't believe in Hashem¹⁷), just like they do to *frum* Jews.
- Explain to them the idea that anyone who was not educated early on in a *frum* environment is considered to be a bona fide *tinok shnishbeh*.
- Remind them that even when non-*frum* Jews are introduced to *Torah* they don't immediately lose their *tinok shnishbeh* status¹⁸.
- When children witness *frum* from birth teenagers who who dropped out of *yeshiva* and became irreligious, always tell your children how much they should be pitied that they, for whatever reason, are not able to keep the *Torah*.
- Reveal to them that such teenagers also might have the status of a *tinok shnishbeh*¹⁹.
- Although we are obligated to have *ahavas Yisroel* towards non-*frum* jews, one must be very careful and weary about allowing children to develop meaningful relationships with secular children²⁰, particularly cousins²¹.



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14. Teach them that what makes someone a Jew is the fact he was born a Jew, not the fact that he keeps the *mitzvos*.
15. Many children will raise the question: "why can't they be told about the *Torah* now?" The response to that question should be that *Torah* is the type of thing that if you don't know about it in your youth it is extremely difficult to learn about and adjust to later in life.
16. Such as *chesed*, *lashon harah*, *onas devorim* and *ahavas Yisroel* in general.
17. The consensus of many *poskim* is that the concept of *tinok shnishbeh* applies not only to general sinners but even to heretics who don't believe in the 13 principles of faith (see *Chazon Ish* Y.D. 2:28, *Igros Moshe Even Haezer* vol. 1, 82:11, and *Teshuvos V'Hanhagos* vol. 2 *siman* 460 and vol. 3 *siman* 480).
18. The *Torah* lifestyle is so far removed from the world view of a secular person that even when he hears about it he can't really relate to it, and therefore he still retains his *tinok shnishbeh* status.
19. Heard from Rav Shmuel Furst *Shlita* of Chicago. He explained that in all probability such youngsters never received or internalized properly the basic tenets of *Yiddishkeit*. In today's society, where the secular lifestyle reigns supreme and can be so seductive, someone who never understood and absorbed the basics of *Yiddishkeit* is tantamount to a *tinok shnishbeh*.
20. Such relationships can have an extremely negative effect on impressionable young children for numerous reasons.
21. Someone who has secular relatives who live in close proximity, must seek guidance as how to distance the children from their children without them being terribly insulted.