

Explaining Sensitive Torah Concepts to Children

Gehenom

- Although children should be aware of the concepts of Divine punishment and *gehenom*, it is not wise¹ in today's day and age to use them as motivating factors².
- When discussing *gehenom* with children, always stress³ that the essence of *gehenom* is not about *Hashem* taking revenge⁴ on those who disobeyed His will, rather it is akin⁵ to a Divine washing machine⁶ where souls can be cleansed of spiritual stains⁷.
- Reiterate to them that true *teshuva*⁸ eliminates the stains of sin⁹, precluding the need for *gehenom*.
- It is also extremely important to underscore to children that personal suffering¹⁰ in this world, both physical and emotional¹¹, can be in lieu¹² of *gehenom* in the next world.



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1. Rav Hutner z"l.
 2. Rav Moshe Feinstein z"l in *Igros Moshe* (Y.D. 3, *siman* 71) dedicates a responsa to the topic of how we should motivate our children here in America to the adherence of *Torah* and *mitzvos*. It is amazing to note that nowhere in responsa does he mention *gehenom*. It is quite clear that he felt that in the present era *gehenom* should never be used as a motivating element in *chinuch*.
 3. If children don't realize this they can develop a subconscious animosity to *Hashem* for creating the concept of *gehenom*.
 4. See *Nefesh HaChaim* (*shaar* 1, *perek* 12) at length.
 5. Point out that *gehenom* was actually created for our benefit, since no one would want a visible stain on their spiritual clothes for all of eternity, see (דעת תבונות (ח"ב ס' נ"ב), מכתב מאליהו (ח"ג עמ' רמ"ו).
 6. Illustrate that if clothes had feelings they would also not enjoy being tumbled about in the washing machine, however if they are to be worn again they have to go through this process. The same dynamic is true regarding the soul and sin, see (תפארת ישראל (סנהדרין פ"י אות ב').
 7. Point out that *aveiros* are not just a violation of *Hashem's* will, they actually create and disperse a negative charge (or contamination) that affects the delicate balance of the cosmos (see *Tomer Devorah perek* 1, *noseh avon*) that ultimately has to be reversed or rectified one way or another, see (בית הלוי (בראשית יח, כ).
 8. See *Mesilas Yasharim* (*perek* 4) who posits that *teshuva* works retroactively. The effect of *teshuva* on past misdeeds can be explained to children as a permanent edit on a video clip.
 9. See *Tomer Devorah* (*perek* 1, *noseh avon*).
 10. Even drawing the wrong coin from one's pocket can be considered *yissurim*, see *Eruchin*.
 11. *Tzidkas HaTzadik* (57), see also *Rashi on Berachos 55b chalom rah*.
 12. *Kiddushin* (40b). The *Vilna Gaon* z"l would often say human suffering is an exchange for *gehenom*, see *Shaim Olam* (*chelek* 3) and *Yalkut Meishev Nefesh* (p. 128). Regarding the great benefits of *yissurim* see *Chachmo U'Mussar* (vol. 1 *siman* 193), see also *Krayna D'Igrata* (vol. 2, letter 28).

Mashiach

- Inform your children from an early age about the astounding and awe-inspiring concepts of *mashiach* and *techias hameisem*¹³.
- Tell them the reason that we desire the coming of *mashiach* so much is because we will be able to become much closer to *Hashem*¹⁴ than we are able to now¹⁵, and not because there will then be no *tzaros* and life will be physically easier¹⁶.
- Explain to them that coming closer to *Hashem* gives a person tremendous knowledge of *Torah*, and is a source of enormous spiritual pleasure to a person and his *neshomah*¹⁷.
- It is wise to demystify and make the era of *mashiach* more comprehensible to children by mentioning the *Rambam's* opinion¹⁸ that the coming of *mashiach* will take place as a natural progression and that the world as we know it will not change at all during that epoch¹⁹.
- Mention should also be made that the exact sequence of events²⁰ and all the details of *mashiach's* coming are totally unknown to anyone²¹ even to *Chaza*²².



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13. Besides the fact that these concepts are included in the 13 Principles of Faith of the *Rambam z"l*, they can be a great source of comfort to children when they are confronted with human mortality.
 14. See *Yeshaya (11:9)*.
 15. The *Rambam z"l* mentions the idea that our primary desire for *mashiach* is due to spiritual reasons (*Mishnah Torah, Melochim 12:4*). This approach will also resonate better with children who have not yet experienced any difficulty in life.
 16. Even though this is indeed true, see *Mishnah Torah (Melochim 12:5)*. The *Rambam z"l (Perush Mishnayos Sanhedren, perek 11)* says people will live much longer then because there will be so much less stress and tension.
 17. See *Mesilas Yesharim (perek 1)* where the idea of the supreme perfection and pleasure inherent in being close to *Hashem* is articulated beautifully.
 18. See *Mishnah Torah (Melochim 12:1)*.
 19. The *Chofetz Chaim z"l* once said that if *Klal Yisroel* is not *zoche*, all the miracles portended for the messianic era will be fulfilled by natural means. It is highly plausible that the unprecedented explosion of technological knowledge that humanity is currently witnessing is indeed a preparatory fulfillment of the predicted wonders.
 20. For example, the coming of *Eliyahu Hanavi* will take place prior to or after *mashiach*.
 21. Children will therefore not be disappointed when you are unable to answer all their questions on the subject.
 22. See the strong words of the *Rambam z"l (Mishnah Torah, Melochim 12:2)* to that effect.