
A PERSONAL NOTE FROM RABBI FEIGENBAUM FOR PARENTS, MECHANCHIM, AND MECHANCHOS

Teens—see page 240 for YOUR personal note!

“Are you sure my kid/student should be reading this? I grew up fine without all this stuff!”

Me too! I went to school in the '50s and '60s, and I don't remember asking any of these questions! In addition, as you are well aware, today there are a plethora of books on the overall topic of *emunah*—how to approach it, if to approach it, intellectual analysis, appeals to the emotions, self-awareness, new-age and old-age, and so on! In addition, there are many books and *sefarim* that deal with very specific issues of Torah *hashkafah*, and many of these works are heavily footnoted, showing a level of erudition of Rishonim and Acharonim that surpasses my knowledge base. So what are this siddur and appendix doing?

I am basing myself on my unique area of expertise—the frum teenager. In order to *pasken* any issue properly, one needs to be an expert in the reality of the issue. And as far as the reality of teenagers goes, I have merited over the past forty years to have many DMCs (deep and meaningful conversations) with your mainstream “good” frum yeshiva *bachurim*/Bais Yaakov girls from all over North America, England, and Israel. Many of these DMCs have been in person and many have been by email. And I'm not talking about those who might be termed “messed-up” or “off-the-derech” hanging out on street corners. Those kids are doing fine! They are being honest with where they are holding, and we have invested financial and human resources to create programs to educate them, validate them, embrace them, and thus get them back. I am talking instead about the “good” kids—the “don't ask, don't tell,” or the “walk the walk, talk the talk” kids. Those are the ones who are either acting out somewhat (or a lot), but under the radar, or who are not acting out but are simply unexcited—either way, they are full of questions. In every community, in every “style” of education, no matter how sheltered and *heimishe* or large and metropolitan, no matter “in town” or “out of town”—they are all the same! They're all asking the same questions and all share the same nagging concerns. And that is fine!

As Harav Wolbe, *zt”l*, would say, “There is no such thing as an *apikorsus* question—only *apikorsus* answers.” The only difference is

that the good kids are street-smart enough to keep those questions to themselves in order not to become a “case.”

Harav Aharon Feldman, *shlita*, Rosh Yeshivas Ner Israel of Baltimore, summed it up very succinctly at a Torah Umesorah convention when he said, “We are raising a generation of young people who are very observant, but not very religious.”

The opening essay (“But I Don’t Do Davening”) and the following answers to the questions were written for teens—not adults! Adults are working with different assumptions, have a very different knowledge base, have different life experiences (for better or for worse), and adults and teens use different words to mean different things (we do not speak the same language!). Simply put, adults and teens read things with different glasses. If the following makes sense to you and helps, great! If not, then get one of the many books written for adults. And if this will generate more questions in your son or daughter or students—then *ashreichem*! You will have a wonderful opportunity to fulfill “*v’shinantam l’vanecha*” in a meaningful way!

Much *hatzlachah*!

A PERSONAL NOTE FROM RABBI FEIGENBAUM FOR TEENS

I assume you read the introduction for the adults! Before getting to the answers, I want to make three very important points about questions. As I said above, questions are fine. As Harav Wolbe, *zt”l*, would say, “There is no such thing as an *apikorsus* question—only *apikorsus* answers.” But (there always is a “but”)...

1. As much as we all wish our daily experience of Torah and mitzvos to be understandable, uplifting, meaningful, and exciting, the truth is that for most people, at times in our lives, it is not! Still, the bedrock of our *emunah* is that Hashem spoke at Har Sinai and chose us for a mission (which is borne out by our miraculous existence until today, which makes no sense—much to the consternation of the rest of the world!), and therefore, simply put, we must get with the program and do the best we can! And that is the first *brachah* of our daily *Birchos HaTorah*, which is specifically “*la’asok b’divre Sorah*”—you just have to do it! You have questions? Fine. Good! Understanding and connecting more is great. The second *brachah* is “*v’haarev na*”—that Torah should be sweet and understandable; that is our goal! However, it can take years and years to ask all the questions and get the answers. Until that happens, we must start with *la’asok*—to get with the

program and just do it as well as we can. As we said inside the siddur: “*Seichel tov*”—A good understanding of Torah is given, “*l’chol oseihem*”—to those who practice it! So you should certainly ask questions, but keep “doing Torah” while you figure things out.

2. Your questions must be honest questions and not excuses. Meaning, you need to be honest with yourself. Are you involved in inappropriate stuff and you need an excuse so that you don’t feel guilty? (“Hey, it’s OK to do x, y, z because this stuff doesn’t make sense anyways!”) Is that why you are asking your questions? If that is your motivation, then don’t waste your time. People who do that read this section with the goal of not liking the answers in order to say to themselves, “See, I read the book, I’m still not convinced, so now I can go and mess up my life.” I once spoke to a young lady who told me, “I’m working on making sure that Yiddishkeit is not true, because if it is, I am doomed to a life of gloom and doom!” I felt bad that her experience of Torah and mitzvos was so negative, but she wasn’t asking questions, so I couldn’t give her answers! So try to be honest and aim high. If you’re like most teens I’ve met—honest, growing, sincere young people with *neshamos* thirsting for some clarity—then hopefully this will help a bit.
3. These are all complex topics. Entire books have been written on each of these questions. My goal here is to give some basic sense of how to approach these topics and give enough clarity that these questions will not get in the way of your davening. But there is much more to these topics than what is written here. If these answers raise even more questions, great! Go find books on the subject, ask your *rebbeim* and *morahs*, or email me at rabbifeigenbaum@gmail.com, and I will try to clarify things.

Thanks for listening, and may you have much success in your growth to becoming a quality, contributing, and confident *ben Torah/bas Yisrael*.