“All Grown Up and No Place to Go” – David Elkind

General Remarks:

David Elkind uses the methods of cognitive and social development, and I was under the impression that he accepted Jean Piaget’s theory about children’s development. In his book “All grown up and no place to go”, he discusses the biggest issues that teenagers of our generation face. Elkind believes that the changing world and society from modern to post-modern causes many issues and misconceptions, regarding the teenage years. The changing perception of adolescence is the main course he brings up. If during modern times, the adolescence was viewed as immature, and the knowledge was underestimated as well as their abilities. Post-modern era brought the recognition of their social sophistication, and the aspect of them being technological savvy. (p5) All of a sudden, “young people were required to confront life and its challenges with the maturity once only expected of fully grown”. (p7) Teenagers are being manipulated by media and commercial industries, that view them as “niche market” due to the fact that they are dealing with “emerging sexuality, the need for peer-group approval, and search for idols”. (p7)

David Elkind presents several issues that make life difficult for adolescence in our postmodern days:

- The transfer of the nuclear (do you mean central part of the family maybe nucleus?) family that had the ground rule of existence such as: father, mother, children, and parents that controlled everything that went on in their child’s world, living in a house that was walled off from the rest of society, and many of its’ influences, then into the permeable family (Elkind 1994) which was more open to outside influences, the structure had changed, many families had only one parent (father or mother). Many families had neither, and children were raised by relatives or foster families. Those changes don’t mean that permeable families will be less successful in raising children just having to deal with more challenges. It turns out that in our generation, many parents are turning to guidebooks and experts, that would tell them how to parent their children, and what techniques work best. Parents are less interested in child development and growth, which is the first step that they should really consider in order to develop a natural and more suitable way for each child. Elkind criticized those books, because they are not founded on the basis of established psychological research and theory, and they don’t always work – there is no instant recipe for successful relationships with our adolescence (though there are some basic guide lines that can put us on the right path – as will be mentioned later on).

- The need to deal with social changes and an identity crisis, brings adolescence to what is described by modern writers as: a period of storm and stress, of emotional turmoil and conflict (p15) Eric Erikson (from the modern era) was mentioned in describing the period of adolescence as one where the main task was to construct a sense of personal identity, which is difficult and complex (1950). Moving to the postmodern, are the social science depictions of adolescence, that have changed from the stereotypic depiction described by

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Bandura (1964 p.16): “The adolescence presumably is engaged in a struggle to emancipate himself from his parents. He therefore resists and rebels against any restrictions and control they impose upon his behavior… He transfers his dependency to the peer group, whose values are typically in conflict with those of his parents.”

However, many challenged Banduras’ opinion in the postmodern era. Elkind states, that emotional family ties are less intense today, thanks to the changes of the nuclear family. Parents are spending less time with their children, so emotional connections are not as tight as they used to be in the past. Adolescence is more sophisticated than ever before. Their thinking and observation of the world has changed, they can employ logical thinking. They are old enough to understand the lyrics of songs they listen to, and enjoy wordplay that allows them to practice their mental abilities, at the same time that it enables them to differentiate themselves from the adult world. (p29). Adolescents begin to appreciate symbolism created by others, such as they might find in lyrics to songs that ‘talk to them’ (songs the adults would most likely disapprove of).

- Young adults center their attention upon hypocrisy and deceitfulness of some adults, particularly those in public life. Many times they turn their critical spotlight upon their parents. (p33) Some of the criticism comes from an emotional source, not just their thoughts. Due to all the hormonal changes that teens go through, they are also exposed to the beginning of the attraction to others. Sometimes they might feel that this attraction which they call Love, cannot coexist with the love they feel, towards their parents. They believe love comes in given amounts, that do not increase or decrease – meaning: there is no way to share the love between the subject of their attraction AND their parents. The love towards their parents will be replaced by the love towards their subject of attraction.

- Adolescents also start observing the differences between the sexes. Their physical bodily changes make them wonder, if they are developing too fast, or perhaps too slow. Today many are exposed at a young age, to sexuality, and by the time they get to the middle of their teen years, are sexually active. They also develop mentally: boys are more competitive and achievement oriented, and measure themselves against an absolute standard. In contrast, girls are more socially focused and tend to evaluate themselves from the perspective of their empathy for others, and their interpersonal skills (Gillian, Ward, and Taylor 1988)(p31). Adolescents are able to think more self-consciously than before. They believe that everyone can see them, their clothes, acne etc., they literally walk with an invisible audience. (Good advice I once heard from a student of mine to parents: don’t do things that can humiliate your teen in public – which is has no rule or specific definition).

- The self-awareness that teens start feeling, especially when it comes to their peers and friends, might be experienced as the shock of disillusionment, romantically and socially by the motive of exclusion. During the teen years friendships are created and destroyed. Teens want to feel the sense of belonging. Peer groups become much more important than they were before. Young adolescents try to distance themselves from their childhood, and elements that represent childhood such as: parents and their dependence on their guidance. Because they are mentally more capable in reading the social map, and the world around them, they become more sensitive to the distinctions of social class,
religion, race and ethnic background, that did not trouble them when they were children. It is then, that they are faced with the reality of "Careful and cruel distinction" when they find themselves excluded. Exclusion is hurtful, because it forces us to acknowledge that other people do not see us in the way we see ourselves (p87). Teenagers can be manipulative not only towards their parents, but towards one another, and when a teen realizes he has been ‘played’, the shock of betrayal can lead him to develop a protection system of suspicion, and lack of trust in other people's motives, especially in the late teen years.

As if personal life is not hard enough, school poses an additional aspect that contributes to the stressful life, teenagers are living today. Many times, school is the stage where the teens spend the majority of their day time. It is where students meet with some of the conflicts we mentioned above, such as social acceptance. on the one hand, and a place where they will want to feel their individuality on the other hand. However, the way the school system is built and operated, is far from supplying the teens with what they need. It is where they should have the opportunity to devote their energies to the task of personal, social and occupational growth without pressure from the “real world” outside (p165). As Ernest Boyer (1983) wrote: “the one institution where it was all right to be young”. Schools turned to be a place that makes youthful vulnerability a handicap. The educational reforms, are mostly based on modern theories, that turn out to be useless and inaccurate, when dealing with todays’ youth, and the low academic scores proving that even in the academic spectrum, we are not doing so great. Schools grew to an enormous size, where the amount of students in each class exceeds the ability of one teacher to 'get to know' his students individually, and it makes it more difficult for young people to find meaningful relationships with mentors, a necessary condition for constructing a healthy sense of identity (p167). Some classes are organized according to the students’ level, which prevents weaker students from achieving higher goals, such as: Join AP classes do well, and go to college, in the future. Many of the curriculums that are used, are outdated, and can’t keep up with the progress of technology, as well as with the developmental changes in todays’ teens. Teachers of bigger classes, are occupied with keeping students calm and busy, rather than mentoring them. Large systems might take care of different behavioral problems (such as described by Barnacle 1982) but do not always take the time, to announce the punishment publicly, so that students will avoid such behavior, and also to satisfy their need to seek justice. An additional problem deals with what Dewey (1938) argued (p175), that education should prepare young people for the life they will lead, and that learning should be practical rather than abstract – that young people should learn through doing. During the modern era, his theory was abandoned, but it is effective and accurate today, more than ever. In todays’ educational system, the social and moral rules are considered irregular, and particularly while instruction and learning are regarded as progressive, universal, and regular. Not surprisingly, postmodern teenagers feel that school is not a place that caters to their need of limits, values, guidance, and mentoring. (p180) As we learned from the Maharal who believed that by setting up the classroom, to be as pleasant as possible will motivate children to learn. An unhappy learning experience sets up obstacles between the learner and the material to be learned. (Loew 1970a, Ch. 5, 29)
As we learned in unit 10, when Daniel Wilingham asked if teaching was an art or science? Science can contribute by suggesting ways in which children develop, think cognitively etc. but education does not have only one successful way as science would suggest, each student works in a way that is best for him. He suggested, comparing education to architecture, that has some ground rule that one must not ignore, but the designs and outcome are open and changeable, it is all put in the hands of the skillful and creative teacher, to create something new, functional, and enduring. (Is Teaching an Art or a Science?:wmv at: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wJrqM7Rx_FY&feature=plcp](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wJrqM7Rx_FY&feature=plcp))

All of the above situations create one massive problem, which is: Adolescence Stress which is probably one of the biggest factors that adolescents have to deal with – the ‘new morbidity’. Many teens turn to use substances such as drugs, alcohol and smoking, which gives them fast and temporary relief of the stress they feel. Studies found, that about half in the 15-24 year old age group car accidents in 1991 were alcohol related (p23). Another contributor to the new morbidity is teenage suicide. It appears that many “accidental” teenage deaths may also be, at least in part, suicidal. Another contributor to the new morbidity is teenage gun violence. The number of young people injured or maimed by guns, is far greater (second highest cause of death after car accidents) than any other kind of death, ranging from 30-67 incidents per day nationwide (Jenkins and Bell 1992) (p24).

David Elkind gives some advice that could help parents, as well as teachers, deal with their adolescents.

**What parents can do?**

1. Gain some knowledge about child development that will help them see the world from the adolescent’s point of view.
2. Be an Adult! Set limits, teach manners and morals. Even if the postmodern parent doesn’t spend as much time with his children, he must work on those values when he is with them. While recognizing the teenager’s need to be socialized and setting the limits with love and care, a parent must be careful to operate mainly on principles, rather than emotions. Parents should be unilateral, which is an important lesson for life for their children who are expected to obey the laws of society in the future, as well as present a mutual authority, that hands choices to children, and gives them the freedom to express themselves in positive ways. The most important thing is to use both unilateral and mutual authority, while being flexible!
3. A sense of humor can be a positive addition.

**What teachers can do?**

“Not being able to do everything does not mean you cannot do anything!”(p253)

1. Setting class rules, based on principles rather than on what annoys us, or our personal preferences. We can rule our own classroom and its environment.
2. Communicate love and excitement for the subject we teach.
3. Give personal words of encouragement so our students can build their sense of self identity.

Both teachers and parents can develop general strategies or guidelines, that can help their teens deal better with four major stressful situations.

Type A: Foreseeable and Avoidable Stressors

If we teach our children to foresee dangers, and recognize the ways to avoid them by calculating the few possible ways of action, hopefully choosing the most stress reducing options. Soon they will realize the possibilities they have, and learn to reduce the stress on their own.

Type B: Unforeseeable and Unavoidable Stressors

In case of unpredicted and unavoidable stressors, we should teach them use the right perspective, and see life as a whole. As quoted from William James (p259) “bad things happen to good people, be willing to have it so”. Acceptance of situations that are beyond of our control, will help us avoid worrying about them and moving on. I liked the quote of the Greek philosopher Epictetus who wrote (p259): “There is only one way to happiness, and that is to cease worrying about things that are beyond our will”. Our children need to feel it’s permissible to express their feelings and vent them out.

Type C: Foreseeable and Unavoidable Stressors

In most of the foreseeable and unavoidable cases, we can solve our problem only by doing our work. If we teach children good work habits, and taking charge of unavoidable situations. We need to set an example so our children will learn by our demonstration, the effects of positive work habits. Effective points that were suggested:

1. Do first the thing you wish to do last.
2. Plan your work ahead for each day and set specific goals.
3. Give each job and task our full attention and do it as if it was our last.

Type D: Unforeseeable and Avoidable Stressors

Although it seems impossible to deal with such situations, there is a way. These kinds of stressors are created by a spiritual conviction or a religious faith. The fact that we may be more secular than religious in our postmodern times, does not prevent many young adults from turning back to spirituality. It gives them a feeling that a moral and unselfish life is possible, despite the most extreme adversity, which without a doubt is important. We should validate those feelings and let our adolescents keep their faith in high values of humanity. (Elkind mentioned the modern social scientists had little use for religion. Freud called it an “illusion” and Marx called it the “opiate of proletariat”. The same ideas were expressed in Alexander Goodness’s article that we read in unit 2, which said that “the moderns saw traditional religion as antiquated, irrelevant and meaningless, today’s spiritualists experience religious liberalism as dry, unfeeling, and empty.” (Spiritual Awakening – Reclaiming Goodness)
Focus Question:

When we try to answer the questions of how to make Elkind’s suggestions useful in Jewish day schools, I thought it would be appropriate to start with what Rosenak (philosophy of Jewish Education) said "that we should ask ourselves when planning our teaching of religious topics, three questions: What? How? And Why?"

What is most important for our students to know?

How to accomplish the goals that will lead us to accomplishing the target we are aiming towards?

Why? Do we learn Torah because it’s important? Maybe, we should focus only on the halakhic aspect? Or perhaps just on stories? Today our teens grow up differently, they have a real choice to make. To all the questions Jewish Philosophers might ask he adds: I would add: Is this Jewish life, which is as the core of both the practice and the theory, conducted for the sake of Heaven? Or as some might prefer to state it: Does it all really make a difference?”

What should we teach? Everything we can!

How? In every possible way that speaks to our students!

Why? Because we never know what part of the knowledge will stay with them, and what impression it could make on their lives.

Religious training can only taught by self example. When teaching Jewish values it’s not enough to just read and explain text. The demonstration of Jewish ethics from the adults around our children. The teaching should incorporate formal learning as well as informal learning. The students should experience what they learn, and many times the Jewish day school is the only opportunity for them to experience those higher morals and values of Torah and יראת שמים. As the Maharal was quoted (in Sherwin 1982,175.): “In doing, one comes to understanding”. When my son was born we were planning on having his Brit early in the morning. It was the beginning of January less than a week after my students returned from their winter break. My husband and I both teach in the middle school and thought we had an opportunity to demonstrate the mitzvah of ברית מילה, and give our students the experience of a lifetime. B”h we were blessed that Rabbi Paysach Krohn understood how important this occasion was and made unbelievable efforts to be our sons’ Mohel. He gave the students a short vort about the meaning of the Brit, followed by a thorough explanation of each step we were about to take through the process of the Brit. By the time the Brit started the excitement in the air took over, and all the people who were present could feel something amazing was about to happen (We even had problematic students involved in taking pictures and keeping everyone on the edge of their seat and not beyond). My student girls got to see me wiping tears of happiness and excitement that I had the זכות to share this important momentous day with them, and with our family. When the Brit was finally over (and so was almost all of the first period) we all felt that we had received something special. When
those students who are now high school seniors see our son they all remember the fact that they were at his Brit, and still mention it to him.

Many of the Jewish day schools have smaller classes than in the public schools mentioned by Elkind, The teachers and administrators have a better chance to know the students individually, and also keep the adult motives of rules and limitations. Students in the adolescence stage love to adopt ideals such as helping the needy. Schools should give them opportunities to do חסד and community work, to give back to others. In Jewish day schools there are many opportunities to achieve that goal. As mentioned in CONVERSATIONS Issue 4 (Spring 2009/5769):

“The primacy of moral virtue and ethical integrity in personal, business, and professional life. A Modern Orthodox school will implement curricula that provide instruction in both mitzvot bein adam laMakom (laws that govern our relationship to God) and mitzvot bein adam leHaveiro (laws that govern interpersonal relationships) and nurture a school culture that values and promotes the ideal of hessed (such as community service or social action). It will not condone unethical behavior on the part of its staff and students and will condemn such behavior on the part of any member of the Jewish community.”

In the middle school where I teach, every grade has a few חסד projects the students are involved with. When the storm Sandy hit Long Island, our eighth graders who were supposed to do some חסד with Tomchei Shabbat in Brooklyn, changed their plans and with the help of one of the eighth graders and her parents, managed to go and help people in Long Beach. I know for a fact, that after they were exposed to the devastation they saw, many of them went back with their families to help some more. Sometimes, it’s enough to show them the way so they get the courage to walk through it, and repeat the act that gave them a sense of accomplishment.

I think that it is also important for teachers to be involved with what is happening in the world. When students express their thoughts, the teacher should remember that he is not representing his personal feelings, but also the Torah that he lives by. As Maharal said: A child’s question provides “teachable moments”. (Carol.K. Ingall, reforme and redemption: The Maharal of Prague and John Amos Comenius, Boston university, page 364) a teacher should know enough about almost anything so he could answer his students effectively.

Students should learn to appreciate the passing on of our tradition from generation to generation, as well as learning about the difficulties Jewish people had throughout history. How they kept believing and kept the tradition, or at least the parts they knew how to keep. Students should be aware of the existence of “multiple truths” just as it was acknowledged in Ashkenaz of Medieval times. (Ephraim Kanarfogel: “Torah Study and Truth in Medieval Ashkenazic Rabbinic Literature and Thought,” in Howard Kreisel (ed): Study and Knowledge in Jewish Thought (Beersheva, 2006), 101-109, passim.) They should be motivated in any possible way, and even if they feel that they don’t know enough, they should be encouraged to learn and expand their knowledge of Jewish beliefs and values. Students should learn דברים, from a young age (Midrash is an option that a teacher can choose to use cautiously) and later add on: מהנה, followed by הלכות, just for the exposure, so they know what they are and how they were formed. The halakha should be taught especially to adolescents that want to know about the laws of the Torah (even if just for the sake of knowing). As they progress to 8th grade and up) the halakha that is taught can be one that addresses conflicts and questions that deal with such topics as sexuality.
They shouldn’t be forced to, they should have a positive experience that will stay with them and perhaps encourage them to stick to the values they acquired.