

If It Doesn't Work, Don't Do It.

If you saw someone with a gash in their arm scratching it - you'd think they were completely crazy. Scratching a wound like that not only doesn't help, it makes it worse. There's a basic rule in life - if it doesn't work, don't do it!

Now you may be thinking that *I'm* crazy! Of course you shouldn't do things that don't work! Everyone knows that. Who would do things that don't work?

Well, the truth is we do it all the time.

- You do an exam or have a medical scan on Monday, the results are coming out 10 days later. Do you spend all week worrying about the results? How does that help? It doesn't make you feel good and doesn't affect the results. If it doesn't work, don't do it!
- You're late for work and the bus isn't coming, you're late for an event and you're stuck in traffic. Do you get very frustrated? Well, how does that help? It doesn't make you feel good and it doesn't bring the bus or get the traffic moving. If it doesn't work, don't do it!
- You make a mistake and then beat yourself up for it for a month (What's wrong me me, I'm such an idiot what do people think of me). How does that help? It doesn't help you grow and change or feel good about yourself. If it doesn't work, don't do it.

I spoke to a group of middle aged couples about relationships. I told them that in a relationship, if it doesn't work, don't do it. They looked at me as if I was crazy. Who would do something that doesn't work? "Well, do you ever argue?" "Everyone argues Rabbi!" "Okay. And how does that help the relationship? Does it create love, respect and emotional intimacy?" No. If it doesn't work, don't do it.

Now I know it is easier said than done. How do we not worry and get frustrated and stop beating ourselves up and putting down those we love? Great question. The first step is to at least identify and recognise your thought patterns and behaviours that aren't working. Then we can work on mindfulness, self control, positive thinking, gratitude and all the wonderful things that can transform our lives.

So, now let's take our situation. Your son is in Yeshivah. You're not happy about it.¹ He is really inspired and happy. He has good friends, he's working on himself to become a better person. He has kind, intelligent, empowered mentors who have great values and families. Based on rational evidence that he has questioned, argued against and clarified, he wants to keep kosher, wear tzitzit and honour Shabbat because he believes those are keys to living a healthier more spiritually in tune life. His new values are not harmful to him or others. He's not becoming a

¹ See separate essay "Addressing Your Concerns."

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murderer or drug addict. Now, assuming he hasn't become self-righteous, judgemental and fanatic,² how do you relate to your child and their life choices?

The first thing is open discussion, sharing your concerns, trying to understand each other's opinions, validating each other, working together to make it work. Then, there are two choices.

You could criticise, pressure, emotionally bribe, be passive aggressive, take it personally, nag, become judgmental, disown, try to enforce your values on them ... (Some people are so worried about their children being self righteous, judgemental and critical, that they themselves become those things).

or

You could unconditionally love, accept and support them even though this isn't the path you had hoped for them.

Now, if your goal is to nurture a close, happy and loving relationship with your children (and their children), one of these paths works and the other doesn't.

Your choice. Just remember

If it doesn't work, don't do it.

² Which is very rare for a well adjusted, emotionally balanced, intelligent kid who values their relationship with their family. If he has become like that, send him to me, I'll kick some sense into him.