2007 HHD SERMON

Parents want kids to succeed.

Kids view love as conditional. If I succeed, Mom and Dad will love me. If I fail, Mom and Dad will be disappointed in me.

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And so our kids have an intense fear of failure because to fail is to not be good, to not fulfill your potential – to waste your gifts. #9 – goodness is a high GPA.

#6 Failure has become a sin in the eyes of our kids and success has become a virtue. Everything is now judged on a scale of how this affects my future.

This all or nothing pursuit of success to please our parents, to fulfill our destiny of being a top student, causes otherwise good, honest and responsible students to compromise their values to get ahead. They learn to cheat, kiss up, form treaties, contest school decisions and act in ways that run counter to the school rules and guidelines…all to do that very honorable thing: to be a good student, to get good grades, so they can get into a good college. To get a good job and become a success which will have their parents proud of them and by definition be good kids.

The same strategies our teens use to stay afloat or get ahead in school we use in the work place. Both justify their actions. We do what is necessary because we are providing for our family and our children do what is necessary so that one day they will be in a position to provide for a family.

We think that this achievement, this level of success, will make us happy. But when did the pursuit of happiness come with a report card and a GPA? Who says happiness is an Ivy League school, a resume built from Nursery School, and a course load that allows no time to reflect and to think…only to react and produce.

All of this pressure to succeed, this constant pursuit of some external validation that you are good is really just a modified expression of materialism. Turning every valuable relationship into a curiosity – what can I get from this so that I can achieve that?

In students, it creates what David Elkins ferociously termed 25 years ago the hurried child. Only now the force that passes them along is not only on our being a parent who wants their child to be at the head of the class ahead of them. Now this hurried child is hurried along by something for less ____ and accountable. By the constant pressure of a society that says don't stop here – what's up _____ or ____ the ____ is more valuable.

And so our students, who know that success in the event is truly measured by success in the future, hurry through school, they hurry through life. They have things to do and places to be. Teach me what I need to know to prove to you that I know it so I can satisfy this requirement and move on to the next. Such pressure, which comes from a fear of not making it,a fear of failure, is so powerful that to waste time on now work-related ____ relates this is a sin. Students thus have to always ask the question how will this help me in my future.

This is dramatically different from the childhood of the past, when we might worry that our kids will never grow up, would linger in the past. But we never really worried about that. When we were kids, our parents used to tell us – slow down – what's your hurry don't grow up too soon. We tested them and challenged them, also part of adolescence. But we did take our time.

We spent our day playing in the park, getting into trouble, or just laying down doing nothing.

I can remember, as a child, lying on the grass watching the clouds roll by. I could stay at the clouds for hours, daydreaming and imagining what it would be like to touch one or sit on one.

Einstein ____ the theory or ____ by _____ thought experts. He would imagine a problem and test solutions to it in his mind.

Do our children ever have time to daydream anymore? And if we suggested it would they ask what the point was? To what end? To what purpose will they serve me later in life. I guess we could tell them daydreaming got Einstein the Nobel Prize therefore it could lead to something – but that would be to wholly miss the point.

Our children need this time to think, to capitulate, to do the very important work of childhood, which is to veg out, contemplate life, relieve boredom by entertaining themselves, discover and enjoy a general sense of peace and contentment, to discover themselves, who they are and who they want to be. _____ _____. "If kids are not taught to reflect on things as they weigh issues, actions and consequences." (p. 210) Plato, who I believe still ____ ____ ____ said an unexamined life is not worth living – but examining one's life takes time.

But, you say – the world has changed – your ____ are quaint but we live in the real world. If our children are not prepared for that – they will not succeed and if they don't succeed they will not be happy. We push them so hard because the times demand it. We want them to be happy.

But when do you want them to be happy – when they are adults? Why not now? Are you happier now with the demands of your life then you were when you were 15? Who

would not trade the demands and concerns, worries and fears of our adult lives for those of our teenage years? But would you trade them for the pressures of teenagers today? Are you kidding me! Have you seen the workload, classload, activities and schedules of today's teens?

Story about Boy and Rabbi

There has been a change in the conception of childhood and children have suffered a ___. Indeed childhood may be lost. As our children are ___ at a young age into the adult world, in every way their lives have become very difficult, ___ ____ - in short more like ours. No wonder they want to grow up so fast. They work just as hard, make less money, have less freedom and still have to ___ to their parts.

But this isn't the Jewish Way. Judaism is present world focuses. The reward for doing G-d's work is the quality of your life while you are here. The reward is not in what you will obtain in the future but in what you experience in the present. This ___, this instruction, this experience is the reward. There is nothing more. Indeed there is nothing greater.

Achieve, reform, succeed are not Jewish values. My child is a mensch has nothing to do with his GPA.

A person's worth cannot be measured by test scores or the diploma that hangs on the wall, nor the balance in their checkbook. Jewish values are honesty, integrity, reverence, respect for family and tradition. We value education but not as a means to an end, it is an end in itself. We study _____ for the sake of Heaven, not the reward. For how it impacts our soul and relationship with the Divine, the world around us. We study not to master our things but to ____ them.

Judaism is a sacred tradition. It says NO to obsessive _____ for grades as the ____ ____ of 'success' at the sacrifice of character and meaning and purpose. We were not given mind, soul, heart and ___ to "make it." We were given these gifts to sanctify life, to be Holy _____ ____ - you shall be Holy – not you shall be an "A" student – the two are not synonymous. We desire an "A" character, "A" people, not "A" grades. + #12

____ on GPA: not a high grade point average but a high goodness point average.

Not 1600 on the SAT, but 613 on the only test that truly matters – are you a good person – are you a mensch?

When we as parents pressure our kids to be outstanding while neglecting the very process by which outstanding children are formed we lack Holiness – we fail. Outstanding is not a report card – outstanding is a character. We, too, must not seek

external validation or ____ for what is an internal achievement. Madame Levine writes "outstanding children are those who have developed a "self" that is ___ __ capable, loving, creative, in control of self and moral.

FROM INDEX CARDS:

43 (11)
It's when a parent's love is conditional on achievement that children are at risk for serious emotional problems. Levine p. 30

12 (54)
Traditionally, Jews pray daily to be granted wisdom and discernment (AMIDAH), to learn in order to teach and to fulfill the moral imperatives of the tradition. In Judaism wisdom is a holy pursuit because the end of wisdom is the repair of the world, not to "make it." The acquisition of Jewish wisdom is to cultivate the heart, not to fatten the purse. HS – 117

58 (40)
Simon and Garfunkel: Slow down, you move too fast, you gotta make the moment last, just skipping down the cobblestone, looking for fun and feeling groovy, babda…feeling groovy.

46 (33)
STATS: UCLA and American Council on Education:
1960's and Early 70's American college freshmen – places the highest value on 'becoming an educated person' or 'developing a philosophy of life.' Beginning in the 1990's the majority of students now say 'making a lot of money' has become the most important reason to go to college. Outranking the above reasons are 'becoming an authority in my field, and 'helping others in difficulty.' This shift in values among college students takes place at the same time that rates of depression, suicide and other psych problems have risen dramatically among the same group. Levine p. 47

45 (57)
RITUAL: the single most important ritual a family can observe is having dinner together. Families who eat together five times or more a week have kids who are significantly less likely to use tobacco, alcohol, or marijuana, have higher grade-point averages, less depressive symptoms and fewer suicide attempts than families that eat together two or less times a week. It reinforces the idea that family members are interested and available. And recalibrates priorities. Levine p. 33