Are We Teaching Our Children How To Live?

by Stanley J. Weinberg

Jesus said: Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them....

-Matthew 19:14

In the ancient world the treatment of children was far too often deplorable as well as horrific. It was Jesus who taught us that children were to be treated with love and care.

Historically and up to the present, a significant percentage of children are neglected, abused, exploited, abandoned, and even murdered. Children, being helpless, dependent, and without agency are the most vulnerable population among us; and particularly the children of vulnerable and oppressed communities.

Children are a gift from the Lord.....
Psalm 127.3

Children indeed are a gift; but they are not our possession. They are on loan to us for a limited time and for a purpose. The mission of parents, and all others responsible for the care and education of children is to provide them with emotional support and guidance so that in time they can function independently and know how to take care of themselves and to relate well to the needs of others and to the needs of the world.

Children come to us with innate potential and predispositions, and it is our responsibility to discover our children and to help them discover and realize themselves as unique individuals. Scripture teaches us to live with humility; but all to often we demonstrate arrogance by not questioning our believe that we know beyond doubt what is in the best interest of our children. Far too often, parents and other social systems indoctrinate and manipulate children to conform to their needs, wishes, and believes, rather than support and guide them in realizing their unique identities. There is much literature on the damaging and even crippling effect this has on the psycho-social development.of children.

The following is a letter I wrote in 2018 to the editor of The New York Times in response to an article titled "The Last of the Tiger Parents." (The term "Tiger Parents" refers to parents who place undo pressure on their children to excel academically and in activities which enhance the likelihood of their being admitted to prestigious schools;

and ultimately for the purpose of securing prestigious and lucrative professions or occupations. Children of these parents are threatened with the withdrawal of emotional and financial support were they to choose subjects or careers that do not meet with their parent's approval. This term has unfortunately become unfairly associated with Asian parents, further contributing to their being stereotyped and discriminated against.)

To the Editor:

Re: "The Last of the Tiger Parents," by Ryan Park (Sunday Review, June 24):

Childhood should not be frightening and painful, and children shouldn't be frightened or hurt to learn.

Children want to learn and need and want the approval of parents and others responsible for their education and care. Achievement at any cost perpetuates a harsh attitude toward life.

Learning should be a rewarding and joyful experience in the service of living well in relation to others and the natural world.

It is also vitally important to teach children to lead an organized and disciplined life, budgeting finite and precious time well in accordance with their physical and mental health needs, which include educational and social-emotional needs.

Mr. Park's strategy of staying up late with his eldest daughter and serving popcorn so that study time can be extended is well intentioned but misguided. Children need reasonable, regular bedtimes, mealtimes, and reasonable and regular times to do their homework.

This is also a matter of values. Unwittingly, Mr. Park is still placing more value on studying than in the discipline necessary to maintain physical and mental well-being.

The father of the author of the article I responded to had used particularly harsh and punitive means of pressuring his son to be a high achiever. The author obviously believes that his methods are benign and loving. He overlooks the damaging effect

of using indulgence to manipulate his daughter to achieve the very same objectives that his father had for him

In my practice I have seen and continue to see individuals who are higly successful in their careers, but who have not learned to value and care for their physical, psycho-social, and spiritual needs. Success in work does not equate with success in life; and individualism does not equate with self-love or contribute to happiness. Learning how to live should be synonymous with learning how to love. And love has to be demonstrated by knowing how to meet our physical, psycho-social and our spiritual needs, which require relating well to the needs of others.

Demonstrating love requires knowledge, skill, and ongoing practice. It would be wise to question our motivation for having children and our readiness to assume the responsibilities required to fulfill our mission as parents. We need to consider our readiness to organize our lives accordingly so as to be available to our children in accordance with their needs. Parents also need to model a loving relationship by learning how to communicate well and resolve conflicts with each other and their children in ways that are reasonable, responsible and helpful.

Often at Christian wedding ceremonies, we hear readings from St. Paul on what love is and what it's not. We need to be demonstrating love and teaching our children how to love, if we are to teach them how to live.

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