

CHUTZPAH IN THE CLASSROOM

I am teaching 12-13 yr olds for a few years. I've always believed in the policy that if your students love you, they automatically respect you. And indeed, I've found this to be true. I give my students all the love and attention they need, I try to make my lessons interesting, and they reciprocate, respect and discipline wise. One of the teachers repeated an incident which happened during class (no names of course). She'd been explaining that a person cannot survive for more than a few days without sleep when a student blurted out, " But you could". This teacher continued saying she'd stopped the class, given the girl a little speech on respect, and then resumed teaching. This got me thinking. Had this incident occurred in my classroom, I would've smiled at the girl, explained that it's a common misconception, and that's the reason we're learning it. I would definitely not have stopped and made a whole big deal. (the blurring out issue is not a problem, I encourage my students to voice their thoughts.) Another incident- 2 teachers wrote math examples on the board and started solving them. Both had students blurting out "but it's wrong." One reacted by telling the girl she'd been disrespectful, while the other one simply explained to the student why she was right. I would've reacted like the latter. One more point. The above mentioned teacher (who made a matzav) has more respect issues than I do. Being that the respect issue is mentioned so often in her class, it goes in one ear and out another of her students. Baruch Hashem, when I do rebuke my students once in a while, it's well received. My question: should I rethink my entire approach? Am I lax in my duties of chinuch when I fail to reproach a child for chutzpah, and more importantly, what are the parameters of chutzpah? I would truly appreciate a response.

Chazal tell us “*Ein odom lomed Torah elah mi'mokom shelibo chofetz*” one learns *Torah* only in a place one desires. Your classroom seems to personify that dictum. A big *Yasher Koach* to you. It is quite evident that that is the only way that a student will be *mekabel Torah* or for that matter any subject or *tochocho*. A student does not learn well in a situation where she is unhappy, uninterested, unmotivated, etc. Her motivation comes only from being satisfied and happy in the situation in which she finds herself – a *geshmake* situation..

However, your scenario, as wonderful as it is, presents a big problem when it comes to dealing with *chutzpa*. I do not know how *chutzpadik* your examples are as we did not hear the *nigun* of the students, only a third hand report. As written, I would do as you say that you would do. “I would definitely not have stopped and made a whole big deal “.However, if the *nigun* is truly *chutzpadik* in my opinion, it cannot be ignored.

Chutzpa is a horrible *mido* to which *Chazal* express “*az ponim l'gehenom*”. Chastising the student in class and embarrassing her, although she probably deserves it, will not change her *mido ro'oh* and your job is to encourage change. You should therefore tell the student, using a non-judgmental facial expression, that you would like to meet her after class. At that time, determine if the student is aware that her remarks were *chutzpadik*, explain the *ro'oh* that comes from *chutzpa* and help her find ways to eradicate it from her behavior. You might ask, what about *l'maan yishmu ve'yir'ou* – will the rest of the class assume that her behavior is permissible as she was not punished? But since they heard the *Mora* request a meeting after class, it must be obvious to them that the *Mora* is taking care of the situation privately and that *chutzpa* is unacceptable. One does not learn by being shouted at and/or embarrassed in front of others. If that is done, it is only the frustration of the *Mora* that is being addressed and not the major issue of *chutzpa* at hand.

Your specific question is whether or not to change your approach because perhaps your style elicits from the students a type of *chutzpa* that you describe. I contend that changing your style is absolutely not warranted as your way is the only way that a student learns well. However, *chutzpa* must be addressed privately until you feel the behavior has been eradicated from the student.

Chutzpah is an outgrowth of *gayva*. “I am better than you”. *Hashem* says that is not true. He created us all with equal importance. What could be worse than defying *HaKadosh Boruch Hu* so blatantly? The student must fully understand this and work on herself, with the help of the

Mora, in every way possible. If her remark does not fit this definition, then it is not *chutzpa*, it is simply a poor choice of words, or a show-off type of behavior and should be addressed as such. The Mora should continue being *mechanech* the children in a calm and pleasant manner and atmosphere – *Geshmak*.