

Class Punishment

I am wondering what the panel thinks about punishing an entire class for something one or two boys did wrong. As a Rebbi I have seen it work wonders, but sometimes feel guilty punishing boys who have done nothing wrong.

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I agree with you that you should “feel guilty” about punishing boys who have done nothing wrong. Do you realize how many wrong messages you are sending to your students? I think that, worst of all, you may lose all credibility in the class and, as a result, you will lose them as a Rebbe. Normal behavior demands that we adhere to *Avrohom Aveinu's tayna* “*ha'af titzpeh tzaddik im rosho*, will you obliterate the righteous with the wicked...., *cholela l'cho me'asos kadovor hazeh*. It would be sacrilege for You to do such a thing...*Hashofet kol ho'oretz lo ya'aseh mishpot?* Shall the Judge of the earth not do justice?”

Even though you might find that the students all behaved after the punishment, it is only for the moment and it is only because of their fear of what you might do, as you stated in the question, “it works wonders”. In the long run, they will have been taught only *krumkeit*, a distortion of our *Torah*, as *Hashem* is the only one able to judge and punish *tzadikim k'chut hasa'arah*, we should not dare show that we can think and/or act as the *Borei Olam*. As *Moshe Rabbeinu* exclaimed “*Ho'ish echod yechteh v'al kol ho'ayda tiktzof*, one person shall sin and You will be angry with the entire assembly?” I do not think that this question needs further deliberation.

A slightly different scenario can arise when you have the situation where a great majority of the class participates in rowdy behavior. There may be a small minority of students who were behaving properly and who will pay the price when the entire class is reprimanded and punished. In such a case, I would try as hard as possible to ascertain who should not be receiving the reprimand and punishment and try to exclude them, if at all humanly possible, even if much time and effort is needed to devote to that task. The students will see that you are trying to be as fair as possible. If you are still unable to ascertain who participated in the rowdiness, then the Rebbe should ask, on the honor system, that those who did not participate, should raise their hands and leave the class while the others are being punished. A reprimand, without a punishment, may be given and sometimes should be given, in the presence of all “*l'maan yishme'uh v'yirohu*” so that all will learn. However, it must be stressed that not all are guilty. Since leaving the class is done publicly, it is hoped that none of the actual participants in the *avloh* will have the *chutzpa* to lie publicly by also leaving the class. The Rebbe should explain that he is not a *malach* and the misdeed is of such a nature that it cannot be overlooked. The class should unanimously agree *l'ma'an hashalom*, that the Rebbe's course of action is the best way to go.

If the Rebbe cannot convince each individual in the entire class that this is the only way of handling the situation, then he should refrain from punishing them. They will then see

the seriousness with which the Rebbe is handling this offense and that he is trying to be fair. This is a lesson of utmost importance as *Hashem's* way of life is *Toras Emes*.

The uppermost goal in the Rebbe's action should be to maintain full credibility, fairness, honesty and transparency in the classroom. The entire class should acknowledge that the Rebbe has no course of action other than the one taken.