

HONESTY

Last year, some of the ninth grade students in our high school made their way into an administrative office in advance of the final exams. This year, the secular studies principal has asked my opinion about installing a hidden video camera so that, if this happens again, we will know who is responsible. The idea of a hidden camera seems somehow 'not Torahdik' to me. I feel like, if we are going to do that, we have to inform the students about the camera. Others say that this is an opportunity to find the culprit and rectify the situation. What is the opinion of the panel from a chinuch point of view?

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We can't live in a world where "Big Brother" is watching you. We are not a police force nor are we "G-tz polizei". We have a job of *velimadetem es beneichem*, and we have a responsibility of *areivus*. Therefore we have to be *mochiach* one another if we are able. However, to use devious means, and a hidden camera certainly is devious, is not what *Hashem* is asking of us. That is probably why you say "The idea of a hidden camera seems somehow 'not Torahdik' to me". If a student is caught, are we prepared to spend the time, energy and expertise to rehabilitate him? Or is it sufficient to simply administer a severe punishment, with the hope that he learns his lesson once and for all? Let's not fool ourselves, punishment alone will not do the trick. If someone is caught by use of a camera, it will only show that we don't trust our students and therefore have to install these cameras. By showing that we mistrust them, they will learn to mistrust others.

We have cameras in our Seminary building, for security from the outside world. There was once a robbery in our building and a picture was taken of the perpetrator. The investigators accused a *bochur*, and, as it turned out, it was a false accusation. Can you imagine the damage that was done with that *bochur* and his parents? In the end, the actual perpetrator was found and charged. Every one of us knows stories of false accusations which cause much anguish.

You most certainly have to find a more secure place to keep the exams as it is said. That locks are made for honest people. Cameras might deter the students from taking the exams, but will certainly not teach them honesty. If exams can be taken, in a Yeshiva/Bais Yaakov setting, the *chilul Hashem* is beyond words. It shows that we have taught our students very little of what it means to be an *erliche Yid*. Let's put the blame where it belongs – the home, and partially the learning institution. These places are where the antidote for change must originate.

Therefore our concentration should be on *emes*, forthright behavior, *emunah* that *Hashem* gives everyone their personal due and not that of the next person, *yiras Shomayim*, *mentchlichkeit*, etc. *Emes*, with respect for individual property, must be inculcated early on in their lives. A simple, locked door and a hidden exam, should be enough of a deterrent for "lifnei iver lo siten nichshol" as we are commanded not to encourage the *yetzer hora*. We are willing to spend extra money for a security system. Why can't we spend that extra money for *mashgichim*, as requested by all of our *Gedolim*, to pre-empt this sort of behavior and who will impart the true Torah way of life to our students?

If this can happen in a *Torah* institution, and we all know that it does, those of us who are in administration, and the *baalebatim* as well, must have in place, the means and a curriculum to address these issues and work with the home to effect change. It can and will be eradicated if we are willing to give the time and resources necessary and not simply try to solve it with a mere punishment, even a severe one. We cannot simply hope that proper and honest behavior will be learned through osmosis while the students are being taught all of the subjects that are a part of the curriculum. It's not that it can't be learned in that way. On the contrary, it is the best way to acquire honesty. But we cannot rely on it alone. Honesty must be taught on a constant basis. First and foremost, it must be inculcated in an **honest home** and, additionally, in the formal setting of a school. It should be addressed according to age and social group. It also must be taught on an individual basis, when the *Rebbe/Mashgiach* finds tell-tale signs that might *chas veshalom*, lead to dishonest behavior. He should address it properly and in a timely fashion without embarrassment or any sort of put-down.

It seems to me that too much emphasis is placed on final exams and marks which lead students to become anxious, sometimes to the point of hysteria, to receive good marks. Such an emphasis plays a role in unfortunately leading some students down the wrong path. In general, not in all cases, we find that in a Yeshiva High School setting, the *limudei chol* department is perceived as unnecessary and unimportant. There is a form of a *bittul* among the students toward secular studies. "Why do we have to learn this stuff", "It's *bittul Torah* and a waste of time", etc. The students really don't understand the value of a good secular education. This kind of attitude lends itself to absolving their conscience for the action taken. In a girls' school, the atmosphere is such that "I won't get into a good seminary unless my marks are high". In my experience, I have found that there is some truth to that statement. I recall being called by a Seminary *Menahel* who asked me, believe it or not, why a particular applicant received a low mark in math, during the second term of Grade 10. I know that such questions are rare, but they do happen and help contribute to this hysteria with regard to marks, in order to be accepted.

I remember telling our Bais Yaakov high school students many times that they will not be wearing their report cards on their gowns on their way to the *chuppah*. But they do carry down the aisle their character, their *emes* and all of their wonderful *middos*, for the rest of their lives.