Letting go of your adult children

MORAL PERSPECTIVES

RABBI IRWIN GRONER

"What did we do wrong?" This plaintive question has been uttered by bewildered parents who are not able to comprehend or explain the irresponsible or injurious behavior of their grown children.

Many parents, when confronted by the fact that their adolescent or college-age children (or even beyond) have violated moral or legal standards, torment themselves with the feelings of guilt and personal responsibility for the transgressions of the younger generation.

In an ironic reversal of the Biblical judgment, contemporary society often visits the sins of the children upon their fathers and mothers.

As a Rabbi, I have been witness to the shame and self-punishment that parents undergo when they discover that a son or daughter is using narcotics, or has violated the law; or has engaged in some willfully perverse act that has brought havoc upon his or her life.

Since most parents try, as best they can, to provide proper training and direction for their young, it is an over simplification, when such tragic events occur, to place all blame upon the shoulders of the older generation.

What does one say to parents who have trouble with their children and cry out "What did we do that was wrong? Where did we fail?" There are, to be sure, many ways in which we do fail our children. We neglect to give them enough attention, to talk things over with them, to let them know firmly and lovingly where we stand, to express our convictions about our faith and about our values.

Yes, there are times when we do fail in giving them the proper example of conduct and practice. But, at the same time, there are numerous cases, perhaps the majority, in which parents do the right things, communicate faithfully, set fine examples, and still their children disappoint them. What about this?

The answer lies in two parts. First, young people are more influenced by their peers, by the media, by the moral confusion of our age than they are by their elders, at least so it seems to me.

There is such a thing as the "spirit of the times" which overwhelms any generation. That spirit of moral defiance, of self-indulgence and of instant gratification exercises a powerful and seductive force upon the impressionable hearts and minds of the young.

The second part of the answer lies with children themselves. Once you have done your best for your children, and they grow to maturity, you have to let them stand on their own feet.

Their mistakes are their own, and not yours. You have done what you could, you have talked your heart out, you have communicated your conscience and still they will not listen, at least not yet. It is up to them to choose what they will, but we cannot consider our children to be babies forever.

Parents who have tried their best (and most do) should not harbor guilt feelings. Our sons and daughters are people in their own right, and, if they reject what their parents have offered, this is their decision, upon which they will either rise or fall.

Always, we must give them the knowledge that we love them, that they can come to us with their problems, and we shall do what we can to help them. After this, we must hope for the best and accept what may, in some instances, be the unacceptable without tormenting ourselves on how and why we failed.

Rabbi Irwin Groner is with the Congregation Shaarey Zedek in Southfield. If you have a question or comment for him, call 953-2047, mail box number 1862, on a touch-tone phone.

Look for local Girl Scouts selling holiday wares

The Girl Scouts are coming.

No, it's not cookie time — yet. This time, they're selling holiday nuts and 1993 calendars in your community.

Four varieties of nuts are available: honey peanuts, peanut crunch, jumbo cashews and deluxe mixed nuts. Prices range from $4.50-$6.50.

Two calendars are available — a wall version and a pocket planner. Price is $2.

- Birmingham, West Bloomfield — Kathy Dildine, 544-8313.
- Farmington, Farmington Hills — Nancy Dittmar, 476-6268.
- Southfield — Connie Gant, 443-5701.
- Troy — Eileen Kelly, 547-4853.