

BENTCHING AND DAVENING WITH KAVANA

My two boys, aged nine and ten, are great kids. I noticed, however, that when they bentsch and daven, they move their lips without saying a word. Should I confront them? Should I look away?

Before the parent can ask this question, he should first judge how he and/or his wife *bentsch*, make a *brocho*, or *daven*. If these *tefilos* are said audibly, word for word, then there is certainly no reason why he should not expect his children to follow suit, and they probably will. If the boys are not *davening* properly, then the most important thing would be to most certainly address the issue in a non-confrontational manner. In a positive *derech*, I would explain that they are taking the time to *bensch* anyway, why not improve on its value and effectiveness by saying the words audibly, singing the *bensching*, or, you, the parent, should say some of the *tefilos* with them, whenever possible. On their honor, you could offer them some kind of incentive for every time they follow the *Shema*, *Shemona Esrai*, *Birkas HaMazon*, with their finger on the place, etc. Whatever tactic you use is very dependant on the personalities and temperaments of each of the boys as well as yours.

On the other hand, if the parent's own method of davening leaves something to be desired, the father must still ask his children to say these *tefilos* properly, because he is *mechuyov*, commanded by the Torah, to train them in all *mitzvos*. Training them in *mitzvos*, means doing it properly. But it might backfire, as this sort of training will not be the catalyst to encourage them to *bentsch* and *daven* properly because one learns by example and/or personal growth. The parent will then be perceived as a "don't do as I do, do as I say" *mechanech*. It is quite possible, hopefully, that they will, in the end, *bentsch* and *daven* properly, because of the examples given to them by their *Rebbeim* and/or peers. But it will not be because of the parent's *chinuch* as the children see that *davening* really does not mean that much to the parent, because he/she does not practice what he/she preaches.

To follow the example of one's parents and *Rebbeim* is paramount in our lives. As an illustration, it is told that prior to the knowledge of the perils of smoking, one of the Soloveitchik *Rebbeim* used to hold an unlit cigarette in his hand and, at times, would place this unlit cigarette in his mouth. He would never light it. When asked about this strange practice, he explained that he was trying to follow both his father and *Rebbe's* practice, one would smoke and the other would not. He therefore held the cigarette to be *yotze* one, and did not light it, to be *yotze* the other.

Following the parent or *Rebbe's* example certainly does not have to be taken to such an extreme. But if I were you, I would not confront the children in any *mitzvah* in which I myself am not *zohir*.