RABBI
SHIMON GRUEN

Torah Lessons for the home

PESACH

STANDARDS OF UNDERSTANDING

There's a piece we say in the *Hagadah* about a person's obligation to remember and talk about *Yetzias Mitzrayim*: "*Yachol me'rosh chodesh. Talmud lomar bayom hahu*, One would think the obligation starts from Rosh Chodesh, and the Possuk teaches us otherwise, just "this day", *Ee bayom hahu, yachol mib'od yom. Talmud lomar ba'avur zeh*, One would think it starts in the begining of this day, but the Pasuk teaches us "for this" - that we have to point at the Matzah and Maror, *Ba'avur zeh lo amarti elah besha'ah sheyesh matzah umaror munachim lefanecha*.", meaning when the Matzah and Maror are before us, the night of Pesach.

Harav Meilech Biderman Shlita brings a vort which the Bais Yisroel of Gur shared a just one year after the Holocaust. People think that the time to serve Hashem is when there's a renewal, a Rosh Chodesh, so to speak. But we are taught *bayom hahu* – we should work on *avodas Hashem* every day. And if you'll think that only *mib'od yom*, when things are light and cheerful as in daytime, we learn that even when we experience difficulties like *matzah and marror* – poor bread and bitter herbs – we must still serve Hashem as best as possible.

Serving Hashem and shalom bayis are closely related because when a couple lives in harmony, the *Shechinah* joins them. Just like the relationship with Hashem is constant, ongoing, day-to-day and not just on special rosh-chodesh-type times, our marriage relationship also has to be built on the day-to-day interactions. It's not enough to be an attentive husband or kind wife on special occasions. Shalom bayis is dependent on the quality of the consistent relationship, independent of what's going on, and how great the atmosphere or the occasion is.

There's another point worth adding, especially at this time of the year. The Bais Aharon says that women accomplish great things with their Shabbos preparations. But if they become tense and short-tempered, they lose it all. The yetzer hora knows what the potential is so he always makes sure to put a foot in the door.

If this is true for an ordinary Erev Shabbos, how much more so when it comes to the busy days before Pesach. It's important to be aware of this opportunity to accomplish as we prepare for Yom Tovand do whatever possible not to lose it. Don't think that shalom bayis is only for those opportune times like rosh chodesh. We have to focus on shalom bayis consistently, and especially during those *matzah and marror* times, times of difficulty, challenges and stress. In these days it's important that we be careful not to lose the *hashra'as haShechinah* and the great Hashpa'os that these days offer us.

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לע"נ מו"ה ר' מאיר ב"ר יעקב ע"ה עקשטיין

נלב"ע ח' ניסן תש"פ לפ"ק

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה

Question:

Dear Rabbi Gruen,

With Chol Hamo'ed coming, other families' extravagant trips and experiences create competition. I'd love to keep our trips simple, but my kids are growing up. They come home with ideas that I didn't grow up with and am uncomfortable with – both because of the standards, and even more because of the expenses and becoming accustomed to more lavishness. Is there a way to explain to kids that we do things with the family and we want to be happy with what we do – or will they not accept that because kids are kids, and it's hard to be happy with something starkly less than what classmates are bragging about?

I would appreciate your input. Have a kosheren yom tov.

Answer:

While this question pertains to Chol Hamo'ed, it really is a general *chinuch* question. Some people may say that we need to be realistic in regard to sticking to our principles because otherwise the children may come to resent it. And the truth is, kids are kids and it *is* hard to make them be happy with much less than others. Other people are very idealistic and feel that we can and should stick to what we believe in and that there's always a way to explain and pass on our ideals to our children. While you can initially choose one of those two options, when you are faced with resistance from your children, it can be a sign of some necessary recalculating before plowing on in the way you feel is correct.

Let's discuss the general question: Do you have to compete with every classmate? The short answer is that you don't have to. But there's another part to the answer and that is that it's important to consider your children's feelings. When children complain, we often tell them how ungrateful they are and that we grew up with much less. "If you won't be happy anyway, maybe we should just stay home and not go anywhere." That attitude, though, often doesn't do much more than convince the child that you totally didn't 'get it.' It's normal for children to complain and express what they're feeling.

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Children have to know that they cannot dictate what their parents do. If you tend to do exactly as your children ask, you're teaching them that they can dictate to you, which is wrong. Still, even when you tell your child that you won't be doing what he asked for, you shouldn't make them feel silly for having asked. Take the child seriously and figure out the balance of how to do what you feel is right while making your child feel understood.

For instance, you can explain that you don't take major *chol hamo'ed* trips like the neighbors but you're hoping to make another family outing a couple of weeks after yom tov. That may communicate to your child that *at the same time that they can't dictate what you should do*, you take their feelings into consideration. It's hard for a child to feel less than their neighbors and while he may not feel better during this conversation, he'll know that you care about him.

Also, don't make the child feel bad for wanting more. We sometimes expect children to understand the adult viewpoint. As adults, we understand that children should be happy with what they get. But it's normal for children to want more. That doesn't necessarily mean to give in more or tell him that he's right for wanting more. But understand the child before you try to be *mechanech*. Don't give him the feeling that he can't express himself.

If you're nice about the complaint and discuss it with the child, you already took care of most of the issue. Jealousy and unhappiness are emotions so if you tend to the feelings, you may accomplish more than taking them on a bigger trip. You don't want children to be deprived, but more than that, you want them to feel understood.

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Some people make the mistake of thinking that giving the child the big thing they asked for will solve the problem. Some people even try to provide the bigger trip before it's asked for in order to make their children happy. But most often it's not what you give, it's *how* you give it that matters.

Aside from the attitude and communication, there are sometimes small details that can really enhance the more simple ideas as well. You'd be surprised how you can take a simple trip to the park, have a nice picnic together and create a beautiful atmosphere. Maybe your children are frustrated that you usually leave very late or very early. Maybe you can meet up with another family to make the trip more exciting. Often, it's the little details that turn a small outing into a bigger deal. Going to a more major venue may not give them more if the atmosphere along the way isn't comfortable. Of course, this is a simplistic and idealistic breakdown, but there's usually something you can do to make what you're doing be more palatable.

You may decide to buy a new CD to listen to on the way or a special nosh for the trip. For $15, you already added a special dimension to your trip.

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Of course it's nice to talk to children about being happy with less. It's great to give them idealistic ideas, but not by minimizing their feelings. Talk about it at other opportunities. You can say a story by the Shabbos table about a person who was happy with less. You can even ask your children for examples about how we can emulate the hero of the story and get by with less. But making a child feel bad for having expressed the desire for more won't make him want any less. It will only make him feel like he has no one to talk to.

I want to share a general idea in *chinuch*. Sometimes a child asks for something inappropriate or incongruous with your family standards. There are two extremes people sometimes take. One is unsurety: "I have to think about it. I'll discuss it with Totty." The other is condescending: "You want *what*? I can't believe what you're saying! I would never think of wanting this!"

But there's a middle way which is much more effective. "I understand that you want to go to this place. You probably heard from your friends how much fun they had there. But Totty and I aren't okay with it. We can try to do something else that's also fun." This gives a child the feeling that you're confident and that they were understood. The child still has hope for having a great time. This helps children have respect for what you say.

With all that, you can and should talk to children about being confident and happy with who they are and what they do. Talk about not competing. Explain that you don't have to talk too much about what your family does and where you've been not to create competition for others. Those are all healthy messages. But more than anything, it's important to understand where the child is coming from.

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I want to mention a side point. I mentioned the child vs. adult brain. It's sometimes hard for adults who are 20 or 30 years older than the child to understand what's going on in the child's mind. Yet we expect them to realize where we're coming from and trust our experience. It doesn't make sense.

Someone told the father of a bar mitzvah boy that he wanted to get a gift the boy would really appreciate. The father suggested a wristwatch as a great gift. *We* want bar mitzvah boys to appreciate seforim. But this father knew his son and understood that he really wanted a watch. We expect children to appreciate what we have come to understand while forgetting that they're still children.

Someone told me a story about the time when the previous Boyaner Rebbe came to Eretz Yisroel. Many chassidim gathered at the airport to greet the rebbe. They were uplifted just from the anticipation. Among the chassidim was R' Nota Zehnwirth who was there with his young son. While waiting, R' Nota showed his son the planes taking off and landing. Someone asked him, "R' Nota, the Rebbe is coming and you're telling him about airplanes? Tell him about the rebbe!" R' Nota turned to the man and said, "He's still young. To him, the airplanes are exciting. If I relate to what's exciting to him now, then when he'll get older, he'll relate to what's really exciting."

I heard a similar story from Harav Moshe Feinstien, who was learning with his young son in the bungalow colony. When he noticed a pony ride passing by, R' Moshe told his son to take a break and go on the ride. There's something about big people relating to little people.

We want to teach our children to strive for more and reach higher standards as part of our chinuch and I'm sure R' Nota and R' Moshe did plenty of that. Yet, when children ask for things that are out of our bounds for whatever reason, rather than shutting them down, understand where they're coming from and relate to their level even if you don't plan on fulfilling that specific request and try to compensate in other ways to make them feel good.

Wishing you much Hatzlacha
and a joyous Yom Tov,

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

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TORAH LESSONS FOR THE HOME
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