

Equal Treatment of Kids

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

Chazal emphasize that parents should be careful to treat all their children equally. We see this idea recurring many times in the *Chumash*. When Yaakov gave his son Yosef the *ketonet passim* (striped coat) he inadvertently discriminated against his other children. He had no intention of insulting his sons. He certainly didn't foresee the jealousy that would ensue. He thought to give Yosef a gift since Yosef had been orphaned from his mother. Additionally, Yosef was one of his youngest children, and the oldest child of his beloved wife Rachel. Clearly Yaakov meant well. But this gift triggered a terrible tragedy with long lasting consequences. The enmity between the children of Rachel and Leah lingered on for centuries and manifested itself in the split between the Kingdom of Yehuda and the Kingdom of Yisrael. The effects of the sale of Yosef and the suffering it caused is still felt today.

The Sages state emphatically that one should never discriminate between children or make one feel that the other is getting special treatment. Even something small can trigger jealousy. One action may seem inconsequential to a parent, but it may engender terrible feelings. The Gemara quotes Rav who taught that a father or mother should never favor one child over the other. We see that because of a garment worth two coins that Yaakov gave Yosef, Yosef's brothers became jealous and sold him into slavery. It initiated events which later led to the enslavement of the Jewish people in Egypt for 210 years.

The Torah tells us that Yitzchak favored Esav while Rivka favored Yaakov. This also caused a split in the family and created enmity that continues to endure in the numerous confrontations between the Jews and non-Jews.

The Sages point out although Avraham did not want to discriminate between Yitzchak and Yishmael, he was forced to by Hashem. Hashem commanded him to listen to Sarah and send away Yishmael. Yet Avraham continued to reach out to Yishmael and kept up a strong relationship. He never cut off Yishmael and always remained his loving father. And we find that in the end of his life, Yishmael returned and repented.

There seems to be a tendency for parents to prefer their oldest and youngest child more than their middle children. In psychology this is called the Middle Child Syndrome. Many years ago, I had a friend who had a slew of boys one after the other. I remember that at every brit the father would say, "This boy is my first son." He wanted to create that same love and excitement he had for his first son for every one of his children.

Focusing on the middle child doesn't naturally happen. We have to do it consciously. There is also a tendency among parents to prefer daughters or sons. Freud posited that fathers prefer daughters and mothers prefer sons, although in some families it's the opposite. This is a very dangerous phenomenon. The Torah's view is that every person is created in Hashem's divine image. In our tradition there is not a single statement that men have more divinity than women.

Rav Soloveitchik explains that although according to *halacha* men have more Torah obligations than women, it is not an indication that they have more *kedusha*. In fact the Jewishness of a child is determined by its mother. The Torah relieved women from time

bound obligation because of their family obligations. Men and women have different roles and ways of expressing their divinity but they have an equal level of sanctity. It's wrong for parents to discriminate between boys and girls. All children are equally holy. Yet it doesn't mean they are all the same.

No two people are alike. The Sages say, "*Chanoch la'naar al pi darko*." Educate a child according to his way. Tailor your teaching to his individual personality, talents, and flaws. The key is to follow his or her unique path. Girls will be mothers one day while boys will be fathers. They need to be raised differently. They each have distinct roles, *mitzvot*, and challenges they will eventually face. Therefore, they must each be given their own focus. Boys are meant to get their education which leads to their goals as a man. Girls are meant to get their education which leads to their goals as a woman. Yet each should get the same concern, love, and attention.

It is important to make every child feel special. You can develop a routine when you allocate ten minutes of private time for each child. You can say *kriat shema* together or tell a story. Never discriminate in what you give, whether it's things, time, or attention. Every child should get equal love, attention, and concern. Never make the mistake of buying a gift for one and not for the others unless there's some special reason like a birthday or a prize. If you take one kid on a trip make sure to take everyone or give them each an equal chance. May we merit to raise our children in keeping with their individual path while following the guidance of Torah.

Torah: The Garment of Hashem

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

Shomo Hamelech says in Mishlei, "Don't love sleep lest you be impoverished." The Sages explain that there is nobody as poor as one who lacks understanding, as the gemara in Kiddushin says, "True poverty is poverty of Torah." The verse in Mishlei continues, "Open your eyes, be satisfied with bread." *Lechem*, bread, comes from the same root word as *milchama*, war. You must battle with yourself or your learning partner to come to the truth of

Torah. You must ask yourself, "Have I listened well. Have I understood every nuance and every question?" By working hard to understand Hashem's words one comes to tremble before His greatness and to love Him. Hashem primarily wants *yirah* (fear) because it is the prerequisite to spiritual growth. As it says in Tehilim, "The beginning of wisdom is fear of Hashem." In order to acquire *yirah* one must acquire *anavah* (humility). One cannot

perceive Hashem's exalted nature and greatness if one is full of self. One has to first be able to say, "I don't know," before one can say, "Tell me truth." Humility naturally leads us to *yirah* and *teshuva*. When we have a sense of how small we are and how great Hashem is we won't want any impediments to stand between us and the Almighty. It only takes little effort to open one's heart. People are so much closer than they think they are.

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In Devarim the Torah says, "Circumcise the uncircumcised layer of your heart and don't stiffen your neck any longer." The function of the neck is to connect the head with the body. We are meant to unify our mind and heart.

But the Torah refers to Bnei Yisrael as a stiff-necked people in a negative way. If we can loosen up and submit our will to Hashem, we will come to love Him. Then, the Torah says in Devarim, "Hashem will circumcise your heart and the hearts of your children to love Hashem." The command to love Hashem is repeated in the Torah 18 times, because it is our very life. Underneath it all we yearn for Him and want His closeness.

Hashem reveals Himself to creation through Torah and through it He gives life and continues to supervise the world. Hashem's garment is *anavah* and *yirah*. This is the garment that someone who studies Torah

dons. Likewise, the Torah is Hashem's garment. The same way a garment makes a person observable, honored, and defined, the Torah makes Hashem observable, honorable, and defined.

The Torah existed before creation. Hashem designed the world in which the principles of the Torah could be expressed. The word *ratzon* (will) is the same numerical value as the word *shemo* (name). Hashem's names are the means through which we can know His will. When we say the Torah consists of Hashem's divine names it means everything within it tells us how Hashem wants us to act, how He wants the world to be and how He wants us to interact with each other.

Hashem's humility is that He contracts, conceals, and creates borders for Himself so that he can be accessible to us. He takes His greatness and makes it smaller. Take for

example the *mitzvah* of *shatnez*. Hashem reduced His unknowable will by creating materials, namely wool and linen, which have specific spiritual sources through which Hashem's will flows. Wool is soft and absorbent and hints to *chesed*. Linen is strong and resilient and hints to *din*. Hashem reduces infinity to wool and linen, to milk and meat, and to *muttar* and *asur*. The more a person learns *Torah*, the more humble he becomes and the more aware he is of Hashem's greatness.

A person's *middot* should necessarily change as he learns. The word *middah* literally means a garment. Just as there are garments that cover the whole body like a coat, so *anavah* and *yirah* affect the essence of a person. May we merit to discern Hashem's greatness and awe as we search for Him through our study of Torah and actualizing its words.

Questions & Answers For Today's Jewish Woman – Class #2

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

Question:

I was raised in a home with very little shalom bayit (marital harmony), yet my parents have three successfully married daughters. Despite my childhood challenges I knew I wanted a home that would be supportive, loving and peaceful. I looked for a spouse who wanted the same thing, read books, prayed, and listened to lectures. Boruch Hashem I achieved what I wanted but something went "wrong" and I am facing challenges with my 19 year old son. I am so angry at my parents and am constantly thinking how unfair it is that they see gratification from their children and I may not see the fruits of my labor. I know I sound selfish and immature but I can't look past this. Please guide me.

Answer:

In Pirkei Avot it says, there are three things that take a person out of reality: envy, desire, and honor. The Maharal says envy removes a person from emotional reality, honor inhibits a person's grasp of intellectual reality, and desire corrupts a person's body.

Do you think that if your parents had no *nachat* from you and your siblings your son would be a little angel? Do you think that when he gets up in the morning he thinks, I really would like to be a *tzadik* today but I'll be a *rasha* just to show my mother that it doesn't matter that a person struggles with *shalom bayit* and tries to make a perfect home. Your reality is yours. Your parent's reality is theirs. Your reality would not be better if they didn't have *nachat* from you.

Rav Nachman Breslover used to say that one of the most important things you have to tell yourself is, "This is my story, that's his story. My story has nothing to do with his." In the very long and evocative tale of the seven beggars, each beggar had a different deformity. But each deformity had within it the seeds of *tikun* (rectification) for that specific beggar. Your parents' successes and failures have nothing to do with yours. Look at your story and try to see where you can find the beauty and challenge in it. That is where your ultimate *tikun* lies.