



## SENSE OVER SENTIMENT

*Erev Shabbos Parashas Bereishis 5783*

Dear Parents,

One of the most challenging aspects of parenting is dealing with our children's emotions. Trying to guide our children using logic and clear thinking frequently bumps up against the fierceness of their very strong feelings, feelings which are natural and often overwhelming for children. Being able to maintain clarity of vision and remaining true to one's values can be a daunting task.

***"Being able to maintain clarity of vision ... can be a daunting task."***

We are not the first ones to be confronted by such challenges. In this week's *Parasha*, in explaining *Hashem's* complaint against *Adam HaRishon* for eating from the *Eitz HaDaas*, the *Tree of Knowledge*, the Torah says (*Bereishis 3:17*) " – וּלְאָדָם אָמַר כִּי שָׁמַעְתָּ לְקוֹל אִשְׁתְּךָ – *To Adam he said "Because you listened to the voice of your wife..."* The *Midrash* brings the opinion of the *Rabbanan* (*Bereishis Rabbah 20:8*) that the "voice" of *Chava* that *Adam* listened to was her wailing and weeping.

Distraught and guilt-ridden by what she had done, *Chava* apparently was intent on getting *Adam* to join her in her sin of eating the forbidden fruit, and she expressed her feelings in a dramatic manner. Had the *Pasuk* said "*the words of your wife*" that would have indicated a logical persuasion using objective information and points of debate. The *Rabbanan* understood that was not *Chava's* approach, instead, she became intensely emotional.

Her tactic worked. *Adam* was convinced and he succumbed to her entreaties. If we would stop to think about who *Adam* was, this turn of events is undoubtedly remarkable. *Adam* was the most perfect being ever created, the direct handiwork of *Hashem*. *Hashem* endowed *Adam* with an incredibly powerful intellect, nearly 100% free of biases, prejudices and self-centeredness. *Adam* thought things through clearly and acted with great deliberation and in anticipation of potential outcomes of his actions. Nevertheless, this great man fell prey to an emotional appeal that defied logic and ran counter to what he knew to be the true and proper path of behavior.

What is true of the greatest of men, is most assuredly true of the rest of us. The takeaway for parents is certainly not to take our children's emotions lightly. They need to feel heard and to feel our love. However, we need to be aware that through real felt anger on the one hand or excited

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anticipation on the other, children can wear us down and cause us to lose our grip on what we know to be true and proper. For example, we have standards and values concerning whether or not our child should be undertaking a certain responsibility, or should not be participating in some questionable activity. When crunch time comes, we need to be able to withstand his or her persistent, 'broken record' blandishments and not be swayed by the dramatic emotion of the moment.

Is there anything to be done about it? There most certainly is. The challenge of emotions comes primarily from the element of surprise. We fail to fully anticipate the force of our children's reactions to an instruction or guideline they don't like and then we are ill-equipped to deal with the force of their reaction. We are afraid to alienate our child so we give in, back down and reverse course. Better preparation is the key to a successful outcome.

We must clarify in our own mind what are the core values we will absolutely insist our children adhere to. We need to decide beforehand at what age we will allow our child to go places on their own. We need to research their friends and have clarity as to who they should be spending time with and under what circumstances. We need to have a prepared response to the inevitable gift from a well-meaning grandparent, aunt or uncle that we feel is not appropriate for our child. The list is endless but we need to be prepared. It's also okay to tell your child you need time to think about a request or to determine what is an appropriate consequence for some misbehavior.

***"Our children need and deserve our love and our thought-out guidance."***

What we need to avoid is making decisions under the pressure of a moment of surprise. *Hashem* has endowed every parent with the intelligence and thinking ability to guide their children properly. It is up to each and every parent to make sure to access that intellect, especially at a point of an important decision. Learn to recognize when children are using the "emotion card" and be self-aware when making decisions, to be sure those decisions are thought through and not merely an emotional reaction.

Our children need and deserve our love and our thought-out guidance. We need to know when to put the right element into play.

Best wishes for a beautiful *Shabbos*,

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Principal