



SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF

Erev Shabbos Parashas Emor 5783

Dear Parents,

When we achieve great things or R'L suffer significant setbacks, we tend to look at the one major, key factor that caused the turn of events. If our children behave and act in ways that are completely out of bounds and against our values, we tend to look for the main catalyst that caused the misbehavior.

“Rashi ... traces the source of this terrible sin to this individual’s mother, Shlomis bas Divri.”

We can learn from an incident in this week’s *Parsha*, that we may be searching in the wrong direction.

The *Parsha* concludes with the tragic incident of the individual who, angered at losing a court case, cursed Hashem and was punished with death by stoning. *Rashi*, quoting various Midrashim, based on the *pasuk*, traces the source of this terrible sin to this individual’s mother, *Shlomis bas Divri*. He describes her as a person who was overly talkative, greeting and inquiring about the welfare of men and women alike. Her lack of modesty eventually led to her illicit relationship with a *Mitzri*, that produced this son who cursed Hashem.

The *Rosh HaYeshiva*, *HaGaon Harav Chanoch Henach Leibowitz, zt'l*, questions what was so serious about what *Shlomis* did? The midrash does not say she dressed improperly or acted brazenly. She was friendly and outgoing. How did this cause such a disastrous, disgraceful result? Aren’t we supposed to be friendly and interested in the wellbeing of others?

There is a fine line between being friendly and modest to being an uninhibited and obtrusive busybody. When *Shlomis bas Divri* crossed this line, she unwittingly set in motion the ensuing disaster. It was not some major, dramatic act of impropriety, it was a small, seemingly minor misdeed or behavior.

So many parents struggle with children who are prone to test limits, misbehave, disrespect, disregard and ignore their parents’ rules, guidance and instructions. By the time the children reach mid-elementary years they are even harder to handle and parents may struggle to maintain control. By the time they reach the early teenage years, if they lack motivation and inspiration, they can all too easily slide into even worse patterns of behavior and get into serious trouble, R’L.

“Discipline does not begin when a child breaks something....”

Where did it all start? May I suggest, from small things when they were young. When two-year-olds hit their parents, when four-year-olds throw garbage on the floor and when six-year-olds totally ignore Ima’s call to supper, that should not be ignored. Discipline does not begin when a child breaks something, hurts someone or says a bad word. Guiding our children needs to begin at a very young age. We find it hard to do, because we rationalize that these little things can be ignored. Perhaps, but not for long.

To use an analogy from the recent past, the city of New York had a very serious issue with crime in the 1980’s. Entire neighborhoods were in danger of falling into the control of criminals and gangs. To address the issue, a policing approach, known as the Broken-Window Theory was conceived and implemented. The thinking behind it was simple. In an area that looks decrepit and uncared for, as in a neighborhood where broken windows are left in disrepair, lawlessness grows and festers very quickly. By repairing the windows and showing that someone cares and is concerned about the area, crime dropped precipitously.

What is the connection between reducing crime and fixing broken windows? It’s the focus on the small things, and attending to them before they become big things. An immaculately clean room will remain clean while a dirty room will only get dirtier. Humans function and behave in relation to their physical and emotional environment. One behaves differently in the White House than in a barn. A child living in a safe, secure environment where there are clear expectations and firm and consistent follow through will behave differently than a child growing up in an atmosphere that lacks those conditions.

“Humans function and behave in relation to their physical and emotional environment.”

The key to success in raising children is not in ingenious consequences for misbehavior and not in lavish rewards for good behavior. The foundation to raising well-balanced, wholesome and productive children is rooted in attending to the small fires before they grow. Setting a tone of respectful behavior and responsible conduct through not ignoring the small misbehaviors at any age, will go a long way to producing a child who is comfortable with routine, rules and authority. Addressing, correcting, encouraging with love and consistency is key. Our homes will not turn into battlegrounds, if we can only extinguish the sparks before they ignite into painful flare-ups. Our children will succeed, if we attend to the little things.

Best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos,

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