



It's Wonderful To Be A Jew

Dear Parents,

When a person contemplates his own performance of a *Mitzva*, or adherence to *Halacha*, he might evaluate his action in one of two ways. He can laud his *Mesiras Nefesh* (self-sacrifice), his own self-control and how he struggled and succeeded, or he can take the attitude that this was enjoyable, perhaps downright fun and part of a happy life.

Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt'l points out this very duality in *Sefer Darash Moshe (Bereishis 31:14)*. He questions the response of *Yaakov's* wives *Rochel* and *Leah*, to *Yaakov's* proposal that they leave their father's house. *Yaakov* presents the factors justifying his proposal for all of them to leave. Then *Yaakov* informs them that *Hashem* came to him and instructed him to take his entire family, leave *Lavan's* house (after 20 years) and return to *Eretz Canaan*. *Yaakov's* wives responded affirmatively, justifying their response by stating "Are we not (considered) like strangers (in our father's house)?" Only as a seeming afterthought do they also agree because *Hashem* said to leave.

This is bewildering, points out *Rav Moshe - Yaakov* just said this was *Hashem's* command - and they respond they like the idea - but for their own reasons. They should have responded - "if *Hashem* said it, that's what we'll do!" *Rav Moshe* explains - **what *Rochel* and *Leah* were doing was minimizing the *Nisayon*, the trial, in following *Hashem's* command**, making it easier for them to adjust to the idea. They would of course follow what *Hashem* said - but they didn't want to make it overly difficult, discouraging, and heroic. By explaining it also makes sense to leave, they brought the potentially difficult act of leaving their father's house, the comfort of their childhood home, down to a manageable level, where they could wholeheartedly embrace the idea.

We see clearly, that **considering oneself a hero for keeping *Mitzvos* has significant drawbacks**. There are advantages to minimizing the difficulty in our mind's eye, and magnifying the enjoyment. We should keep *Shabbos* not just because we have great inner fortitude to do what's right no matter what, but rather we should also focus on the enjoyment, the delight of keeping *Shabbos*.

This has far reaching implications for how we raise and train our children. *Rav Moshe* further points out that 80, 90 years ago there were a number of Jews in America who, with great courage, clung tenaciously to *Shmiras Shabbos*. They shared with their children that despite the difficulty, they were strong and withstood the temptation. (*Oy, es iz shver tzu zein a Yid! - Oh, how difficult it is to be a Jew!*) What happened to the

children of these brave, pious souls? Many ran away from *Mitzvah* observance as fast as possible. They did not consider themselves on their parents' level. Therefore there was no way they could be as strong, so *Shabbos* disappeared from the family's future generations, R'L.

What if the emphasis in their childhood home had been on the beauty and enjoyment of *Shabbos* rather than the difficulty? What if they heard from the parents that it is so wonderful to be a Jew, and how lucky they are to be *Mitzvah* observant? The outcome would have probably been very different.

We face perhaps a similar predicament since *Simchas Torah*. Our children are absorbing the anxiety, tension and fear emanating from the ongoing situation in *Eretz Yisrael* and around the world. There's an added dimension of difficulty in maintaining our presence in a world where obviously visible Jews face the prospect of nastiness and even aggressive behavior from strangers and the media. We need to realize that beyond fear and anxiety, there may be, in a child's eye, a diminishing of the excitement and joy in being a Jew. **We want to be sensitive to the plight of those directly in danger in *Eretz Yisrael* while at the same time, maintain a level of *Simchas HaChaim*** that will ensure a fun and joyful environment for our children.

In general, we need to inculcate in our children a confidence in being a Torah Jew and appreciation to *Hashem* for blessing us with such a lifestyle. It is true that the ultimate reason we do *Mitzvos* is because *Hashem* said to do them. Many of us have chosen a life of greater spirituality at great self-sacrifice because we believe it is the right thing. We persevere despite hardships and pitfalls because to us the truth of the *Torah* has become a central rallying point in our lives. Our children, however, are not we. They may lack our fervor, our focus on sacrificing for truth. They are not yet there yet. As young children they need to feel that keeping *Halacha* is the most natural thing in the world, and that they would not trade a *Torah* lifestyle for all the treasures of the world.

With such an attitude embedded in their lives, they can proceed with deepening their intellectual and emotional connection to *Hashem* and His *Torah*, and proudly and happily bear the torch for a new generation of our people.

Best wishes for an enjoyable, delight-filled *Shabbos*,



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